Post-Empire Imaginaries?

*Anglophone Literature, History, and the
Demise of Empires*

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Table of Contents

CONCEPTUALIZING EMPIRES, MAPPING EMPIRES

Introduction

How to Do Things with Empires

Barbara Buchenau and Virginia Richter

The Demise of Empire(s) and Post-Empire Imaginaries

ONE OF THE MOMENTOUS OUTCOMES of the First World War was the demise of empires. As historians contributing to the current commemoration of this first global conflict of the twentieth century do not fail to emphasize, the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural polities of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and the Austro-Hungarian double monarchy, powerful dominions over centuries, were swept away by the calamitous events of 1914–18.[1] From their ashes, new nation-states were formed that, albeit far from homogeneous themselves, were vastly different from those seemingly superannuated empires in their governmental structure, topographical dimension, and political style. The German *Kaiserreich*, of fairly recent formation (founded in 1871) but in some ways the self-styled inheritor of the venerable *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation*, equally crumbled and was replaced by a republic. The modern age of empires seemed at an end. Alternative forms of empire that avoided explicit recourses to imperialist ideology only confirmed that the era of capitalized Empires had ended.[2] The across-the-board development from empire to nation-state and its

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[1] See, for example, Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin, 2013): xxi, and David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013): xvi and 86.

[2] See Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014); as well as discussions of "anti-imperialist imperialism" in Frank Kelleter, "Transnationalism: The American

liberal, democracy-based forms of hegemony and domination was of course less uniform and inescapably teleological than it appeared to contemporaneous observers. As David Reynolds argued, for France and Great Britain the Great War proved to be an "imperial moment" in which their empires "lurched to their zenith,"[3] expanding their spheres of influence particularly in the Middle East and Africa. But, one could in turn object, the demise of the French and British empires was only postponed, and the sweeping historical movement from empire to nation-state finally completed in the decolonizing processes after the Second World War. Ever since, not only the political existence of empires but the very concept seems to have been in decline, the celebratory yearnings of public commentators like Robert D. Kaplan and critical defences of scholars like Niall Ferguson notwithstanding.[4]

As the contributors to this volume argue, the general idea of empire as well as the concrete histories, the cultural heritage, and the rules and rites of different empires continue to provide a rich symbolic repertoire for the present. In the face of persistent ethnic and religious conflicts, the enduring capacity of empires to pacify their different populations and to enable the internal exchange of goods, technologies, cultural practices, and ideas has recently been explored as a possible model for transnational polities such as the European Union (the public debates surrounding the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, for example, resonated strongly with considerations of post-imperial possibilities).[5] In many cases, empires developed great tolerance, the capacity

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Challenge," *Review of International American Studies* 2.3 (September 2007): 31. Classical discussions of US-American imperialism as well as anti-imperialism and their literary and cultural contexts can be found in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan & Donald E. Pease (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1993) and John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000). For a more recent discussion of the topic, see Carroll Smith–Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2010). As Frank Kelleter notes, "US imperialism" is notably different from "non-US histories and non-US manifestations of […] imperialism" (30) because the former evolved from an explicit and politically salient renunciation of "European-style colonialism and imperialism" (31).

[3] Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, 86.

[4] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the World* (London: Penguin, 2003); Robert D. Kaplan, "In Defense of Empire," *The Atlantic* (April 2014): 13–15.

[5] On the ambivalent status of the EU as a post-imperial entity whose "capacity for generating loyalty and attachment remained unclear," see Jane Burbank & Frederick

to integrate different cultures and religions, and even an exemplary cosmopolitan stance that fostered the flourishing of literature and the arts.[6] One of the keenest critics of the British Empire, Pankaj Mishra, referred to its Ottoman counterpart approvingly as "the most cosmopolitan state in the world" and "a vast, sophisticated political organism, capable of accommodating much ethnic and religious diversity and adjudicating disputes between different regions and communities."[7] Imperial metropolises became centres of learning and cultural refinement, but they were closely interlinked with, and fed by, the realm's provinces in their enormous cultural diversity.[8] The relative security within the borders of an empire enabled travel, and thus stimulated ethnographic observation and the communication between different groups.[9] On the negative side, however, this cultural diversity came at the price of the different populations' unequal participation in the commonwealth's material prosperity and political power, and often the downright oppression of religious or ethnic groups, accompanied by their cultural and racial assimilation and denigration.[10] Unequal civic participation is indeed one

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Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton NJ & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2010): 414.

[6] The heterogeneity and comparative tolerance at the heart of some empires, by no means all, is exemplarily discussed by Alfred Hiatt, Donna Landry, Elena Furlanetto, and Silke Stroh in this volume.

[7] Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Penguin, 2013): 62.

[8] Conjunctions and disjunctions between the empires, metropoles and urbane as well as rural cultures are discussed by the contributions of Cecile Sandten and Elsie Cloete.

[9] The essays by Donna Landry, Kerstin Knopf, Anne–Julia Zwierlein, and Eva–Maria Müller in this volume are concerned with the motif of travel within and between empires.

[10] Frederick Cooper speaks of "strategies of incorporation and differentiation" that are at the core of empires, and he draws attention to "the conditional accommodation of 'different' people within a political hierarchy" that is always wedded to "a politics of invidious and immutable distinction" ("Empire Multiplied: A Review Essay," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46.2 [2004]: 268 and 272). Saliha Belmessous suggests that a "pursuit of assimilation" is central to British and French imperialism and she draws attention to Cooper's insistence that empires "pursue two opposing purposes at once: enforcing uniformity while maintaining difference in suspension." Belmessous, *Assimilation and Empire: Uniformity in French and British*

of the hallmarks of empire; another is the ability to absorb the cultural achievements of its different populations, and of earlier empires.[11]

The heritage of empire(s) is thus mixed, and the intellectual and creative responses to this repertoire of images, narratives, and practices range from categorical critique to nostalgic consumption.[12] It is one of the aims of this volume to offer a broad – if by necessity selective – panorama of historical cases, theoretical elaborations, literary engagements, and representations culled from various media. In this sense, the essays gathered together in the first part, "Conceptualizing Empires, Mapping Empires," attempt to show what can be done with empires, in other words, how this multifaceted notion can be envisaged in historical studies, how it is translated into topographical representations (Hiatt), how it can be deployed as a strategy of interpretation and education (Emig; Eva–Maria Müller), and how it enters current contro-versies in historiography, literary theory, and, perhaps not least, ideological position-takings (Dahlheim; Knopf). In this section, the analytical category most often employed is that of the *post-imperial*, a term used to address "debates about what Britain was, and who the British were, without [and after] empire."[13]

In the second part, "Different Imaginaries: Comparing Empires," the con-tributions deliberately transcend what is otherwise the focus of this collection, anglophone literatures and, in consequence, the British Empire (with some thought given to American-style empire). The British Empire (Pérez) is here juxtaposed with two important and, as it were, prototypical historical

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Colonies, 1541–1954 (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2013): 2, with reference to Cooper, "Empire Multiplied," 269.

[11] See Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 24. Unequal civic partici-pation is discussed by Karsten Levihn–Kutzler, Michael Meyer, and Jana Gohrisch; elements of assimilation and absorption are emphasized by Mayannah Dahlheim, Rainer Emig, and Eva M. Pérez.

[12] The essays by Judith Raiskin and Timo Müller engage in detail with different modes of nostalgically consuming the heritage of empires.

[13] Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, 'Race' and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 1. As Burkett argues, post–World War Two politics and public debates in Great Britain were char-acterized by a "process of distancing from the empire," of "forgetting of the empire" as well as of "denial" (112), strategies which enhanced a sense of national "stagnation or decay" while "trying to wipe the slate clean, to deny responsibility and eschew any sense of guilt for empire" (112).

formations, the Roman and the Ottoman Empires (Stroh; Landry and Furlanetto respectively). A more thorough engagement with the contemporary return of empire in the shape of US-American hemispheric and international interventionism and domination would also have been desirable, but a systematic comparative study of this and other empires – the Dutch colonial empire, China, or Japan – goes beyond the scope of this collection.[14] The juxtapositions and comparisons offered in this section are less concerned with issues of guilt, fatigue, or denial than with an imperial heritage that facilitated diversity, tolerance, and learning. To engage with the amicable aspects of empires, the authors introduce adjectives such as the 'post-imperial' and 'post-empire' into the debate about literature and history after the demise of empires: "The post-imperial is not a rival to the postcolonial but its comrade," as Donna Landry notes in her contribution (127). This 'comrade' can be said to lack a sense of rupture and revolution; it seeks to salvage what worked well under imperial rule. The post-empire, however, appears to relate to imperialism as the postmodern does to modernism: in the mode of a "complicitous critique," as Linda Hutcheon would have it.[15]

   The contributions in the third part, "(Post)Empire Imaginaries in Historical Media," expand on the notions of the post-imperial and post-empire, and they invite us to think more thoroughly of the post-empire as a sibling to the postmodern. Hutcheon has convincingly described the project of postmodern literature as one in which complicity and critique have become inseparable. For a critical reflection of the term 'post-empire' as it emerges from this volume, it is useful to return to Hutcheon's observation and to remember what she describes as

> a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: [postmodern] art forms (and [postmodern] theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic rereading of the art of the past. In implicitly contesting in this way such concepts as aesthetic originality and textual closure, postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world, a model

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[14] As Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper emphasize, no book on empire that is to be manageable in size can be exhaustive; even their magisterial study is "about some empires, not all" (*Empires in World History*, xi).

[15] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988): 23.

> that works from a position within and yet not totally within either, a model
> that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which it
> seeks to describe. (23)

A very similar back-and-forth movement is discussed in the third part of this book. In the imaginative and historical engagements with empire under investigation here, self-referentially paradoxical gestures abound. The contributors explore the permutations and translations of empire in different historical periods and media, from eighteenth-century panoramas (Zwierlein), through twentieth-century US-American travel advertisements (Raiskin), to the James Bond movies of the twenty-first century (Timo Müller). The empire critique voiced in the material examined is complicitous with the regimes it criticizes; it nearly always comes from a position within the imperial system. More often than not, its provisionality and paradoxical nature appears to be prefigured by the medium of expression itself.

Finally, the essays brought together in the fourth and last section, "Contested Imaginaries, Perilous Belonging," focus on the dark side of post-empire communities, while pointing to a number of formal and aesthetic features that lie outside the by now standardized postcolonial formats of writing back, mimicry, and subversion. In the literary case studies analysed in this part, notions of exclusion and marginalization (Sandten), instances of precarious lives at the fringes of the polity (Levihn–Kutzler; Meyer), and speculative, simulating, as well as fantastical literary engagements with history (Cloete; Gohrisch) constitute the fugitive point. The texts studied in this section have all been published in the twenty-first century. Formal and aesthetic innovations include "transcultural, spatio-temporal palimpsest[s] of heterogenous traditions," as Michael Meyer has it (396). They resonate with Hutcheon's diagnosis of the complicitous critique, but they can be brought into even more productive conversation with narrative formats such as "speculative realism" and "historical fantasy" that Ramón Saldívar identifies as the hallmark of a contemporary "postrace aesthetics" that is promising to jump-start future social and political transformations.[16] Elsie Cloete, for instance, talks of a special kind of "speculative fiction" (352) that is able to produce "ambiguous dystopian" metropolitan spaces (353).

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[16] See Ramón Saldívar, "Speculative Realism and the Postrace Aesthetic in Contemporary American Fiction," in *A Companion to American Literary Studies*, ed. Caroline F. Levander & Robert S. Levine (London: Blackwell, 2011): 517–31.

As this brief survey of the array of arguments to be found in this book shows, empires as political entities may be a thing of the past, although this is in itself debatable; but as a concept, empire is alive and kicking, precisely in the sense of 'post-empire': standing to historical empires in a relation of historical succession and, simultaneously, of supplement and simulation. This means, secondly, that imaginaries of the (post-)empire proliferate. From a position of historical belatedness – after the demise of classical empires – authors, artists, producers of cultural goods (for example, in the tourist industry), but also industrial and military strategists can deploy the empire to their own ends. The British Raj, colonial Africa, 'Old Jamaica', *Kakanien* (the Austro-Hungarian Empire) can thus be conceived and marketed as a 'golden past', a time of tranquility, order, and elegance, now lost forever – as pre-war Austria, and Europe as a whole, are evoked in Stefan Zweig's memoirs *The World of Yesterday*, written in exile in Brazil (1942). In this nostalgic approach, empire is always irretrievably gone, always elsewhere and at some other time. The post-empire imaginary thus fulfils a condition of the Lacanian Imaginary: it functions as an image of totality which is placed in an irrecoverable position of alterity. In Lacan's conceptualization, this image steers the subject towards a misconception of his or her self, and in fact towards alienation from everyday reality:

> But the important point is that this form [the infant's reflection in the mirror] situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality.[17]

If this resolution does not work, if the subject remains fixated on the mirror image or, in our case, on an image of empire as an illusory vision of completeness, the process of identity-formation must remain unfinished. Without elaborating this further, the recourse to Lacan's seminal essay is informative for a view of the post-imperial imaginary that is problematic in a political sense. Nostalgia for the empire can, in fact, hold the subject – the individual

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[17] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Image as Formative of the Function of the I," in *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan ("Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," 1966; London: Tavistock, 1977): 2.

or the collective subject, a postcolonial polity – captive in a magic mirror maze of the past, obstructing political maturation and agency.[18]

And yet, the imaginary is also a dynamic space of creativity. Drawing on aesthetic and philosophical theories of the imaginary, Wolfgang Iser connects it with play, and posits it as one of the tributaries of (literary) creativity. Play is connected with a to-and-froing movement, with probing and trying out, and thus bears different connotations from the Lacanian subject's rather grim journey through the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. From the perspective of Iser's literary anthropology, the danger of the post-empire imaginary would, rather, be the hypertrophic proliferation of images which is controlled, as Iser argues, only by the formal strictures of the fictive:

> By opening up play spaces, the fictive puts pressure on the imaginary to provide form, at the same time itself becoming the medium for its emergence. The play spaces that arise from this boundary-crossing are relatively empty, which is why the fictive must activate the imaginary so that what is being targeted by intentionality can be occupied imaginatively.[19]

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[18] Research on nostalgia and empire is ample. In *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005) Paul Gilroy discusses postcolonial melancholia as an avoidance of "the painful obligations to work through the grim details of imperial and colonial history and to transform paralyzing guilt into a more productive shame that would be conducive to the building of a multicultural nationality that is no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to either strangers or otherness" (99). See also the concept of "imperialist nostalgia" in Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston MA: Beacon, 1989), further discussed by Judith Raiskin in this volume. Svetlana Boym's concepts of *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia and their significance in postcolonial forms of commemoration are discussed by Dennis Walder (see also Eva Pérez's contribution). Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[19] "Durch das Eröffnen von Spielräumen stellt das Fiktive Imaginäres unter Formzwang, wird aber gleichzeitig auch zum Medium für dessen Erscheinen. Die aus der Grenzüberschreitung entstehenden Spielräume sind vergleichsweise leer, weshalb das Fiktive Imaginäres aktivieren muß, damit das durch Intentionalität Angezielte vorstellungsmäßig besetzt werden kann"; Wolfgang Iser, *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektiven literarischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991): 393. This statement is absent from the English abridgement, which, however, can be profitably consulted for its handling of central concepts: *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993).

The imaginary, while offering a broad creative repertoire, remains inchoate if it is not reined in by the formal strictures of the fictive; in this conjunction resides, for Iser, the productive potential of literature. Once the restraining formal conventions and regulations of literature establish the repertoire for the successive reproductions that are so pivotal to the Imaginary, once literature thus brings forth *and* harnesses the Imaginary's discordant and playful dimensions, the Imaginary can serve quite consequential social functions.

This is, at least, what literary scholars have been arguing more recently. Laura Bieger, Ramón Saldívar, and Johannes Voelz, for instance, hold that

> imaginaries provide communities with the glue that makes their members stick together. In their capacity of adjusting to changing social formations, these imaginaries not only give coherence to a collectivity but also enable and condition subjectivity. Imaginaries are thus strategically Janus-faced: they are generative processes that bring forth what does not yet have a social correlative, but they also have the power – indeed, it is their function – to fix, delimit, and reproduce collectively organized subjectivity.[20]

While Lacan's and Iser's theoretical approaches and Bieger, Saldívar and Voelz's more pragmatic notion of imaginaries are distinct, they point to three aspects that are important for our own conceptualization of the post-empire imaginary:[21] first, the act of displacement performed in the formative stage of the Lacanian Imaginary; second, the playfulness and, hence, transitoriness and improvisation of the creative act; and, third, its regulative impact on how readers and viewers see themselves and how they conceive of social and

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[20] Laura Bieger, Ramón Saldívar & Johannes Voelz, "The Imaginary and its Worlds: An Introduction," in *The Imaginary and Its Worlds: American Studies after the Transnational Turn* (Lebanon NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013): xi.

[21] Of course, critical literature on the imaginary is not covered exhaustively by these references. The aim of this introduction is to suggest a productive approach to (post-) empire, not to give a complete overview of theories of the imaginary in general. A few other approaches should, however, be mentioned. An influential departure has been made by Cornelius Castoriadis (whose concept of the 'radical imaginary' is used by Iser), in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1997). The imaginary is equally important in film theory: see Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982). Finally, the relationship between the imaginary and media has been explored by Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer, *Das Mediale und das Imaginäre: Dimensionen kulturanthropologischer Medientheorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999).

political interaction. Doing things with empires from a post-empire position thus means engaging with a figuration that is always in another place and another time, and that eludes any firm grasp; simultaneously, ideas of empires are performatively constructed in and through the various images and narratives proliferating around them; and, finally, they are invested in the strictures of both the future and the fictive – the limits of the shall-be arising from the repercussions of the might-have-been.

In a way, this is already true for historical empires. As Burbank and Cooper emphasize, to function politically over long stretches of time, empires were bound to develop flexible repertoires of rule:

> An imperial repertoire was neither a bag of tricks dipped into at random nor a preset formula for rule. Faced with challenges day by day, empires improvised; they also had their habits. What leaders could imagine and what they could carry off were shaped by past practices and constrained by context – both by other empires with their overlapping goals and by people in places empire-builders coveted. People on contested territories could resist, deflect, or twist in their own favour the encroachment of a more powerful polity. Recognizing imperial repertoires as flexible, constrained by geography and history but open to innovation, enables us to avoid the false dichotomies of continuity or change, contingency or determinism, and to look instead for actions and conditions that pushed elements into and out of empires' strategies.[22]

Empires are thus constituted interrelationally by different protagonists, the rulers, the ruled, and various go-betweens, who shape empire both as "a social and political strategy" and "as a frame of mind" when they draw on but modify previous sets of rules and regulations (Emig, 52). The notion of a repertoire is important here: the repertoire offers models of practices and styles, but allows for continuous change. This repertoire is constituted not so much through direct human interactions as through social practices. To enable transmission, the doings and stories of empire need to be documented and archived. It is the archive, in a concrete as well as a metaphorical sense that preserves the material and textual traces of empires, and makes them accessible after their demise. Both the repertoires and the archives of empires thus feed into the post-empire imaginary which ensure that empires, as Alfred Hiatt notes, "have a way of recurring […] as the mash of the ancestor accompanying, informing the contemporary interpreters of power" (19).

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[22] Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 3.

In sum, for the purposes of this volume we define the post-empire imaginary very broadly, as a repertoire of rules, gestures, and styles, and an archive of images, narratives, and affects derived from historical empires. As Ann Stoler has proposed on behalf of actual colonial archives, these are "sites of the expectant and conjured" and, as such, connected to "dreams of comforting futures and forebodings of future failures."[23] Archives are thus more than storage places for history; and the texts preserved, made accessible and, sometimes, hidden in them are not just documents bearing the unmediated imprint of empirical reality, but "active, generative substances with histories."[24] In our definition, the post-empire imaginary is conceived spatially, rooted in actual imperial topographies, as well as temporally, connected to the historical past on the one hand and an uncertain, frightening or comforting future on the other. Despite its rootedness in real space and history, the post-empire imaginary is also deeply invested in arbitrariness and in transparency. For the US-American writer Bret Easton Ellis, for instance, the "post-Empire" state of mind is all about "transparency" and a deep "contempt" for the human desire to be affiliated with and at home in a concrete imperial formation – in Ellis' case, US-American imperialism, but more importantly the decentred empire of the global entertainment industry that has been described by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.[25] The mesh of this kind of post-empire imaginary is so open that various, often incongruous, empires come into view and occupy the mind. The post-empire imaginary has a phantasmal dimension, connecting it to fear and desire, and consequently eliciting a creative response.

Like the archive, the post-empire imaginary is generative: in the processes of chronicling, putting away, and retrieving, stories come to proliferate – stories that more often than not are too marginal, too disconsolate, or too

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[23] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton NJ & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2009): 1.

[24] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 1.

[25] Bret Easton Ellis, "Notes on Charlie Sheen and the End of Empire," *Newsweek / The Daily Beast* (15 March 2011), http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/03 /16/bret-easton-ellis-notes-on-charlie-sheen-and-the-end-of-empire.html (accessed 12 September 2014). For the concept of the "imperial formation," see *Imperial Formations*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan & Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007). and Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard UP, 2000).

seditious to be part of official historiography. As Stoler remarks, archives are inclusive, storing not only the authoritative and the important, but also "writerly practices of a different kind: those that chronicle failed projects, delusional imaginings, equivocal explanations of unanticipated outbursts of distrust directed toward a state apparatus on which European comforts would so precariously depend."[26] Failures, delusions, outbursts: the textual traces left by empire are formed by, and produce strong affects. They occasionally elude the strictures of the fictive, the dictates of the historiographical, and – of course – the policing apparatus of the imperial order.[27] The post-empire imaginary is linked to profusion and proliferation. Finally, we want to envisage the post-empire imaginary as open, in other words, the representations it engenders can be aligned with resistance as much as with affirmation, with postcolonial critique as much as with colonial nostalgia, with liberation as much as with assimilation.

Debating Empire

As Robert J.C. Young has pointed out, the terms 'empire', 'imperial', and 'imperialism' need to be distinguished.[28] 'Empire' denotes territorial possession, not necessarily restricted to the possession of colonies. According to Young, in the early modern period 'the British Empire' was used as a synonym for the United Kingdom, pointing to its independent sovereignty; from the eighteenth century onward, the term referred to the British Isles and their overseas dependencies.[29] However, the ideological meaning of 'empire' was not yet fully developed, as it still lacked the sense "that the empire as a whole

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[26] *Along the Archival Grain*, 21.

[27] These textual traces have much in common with postmodern historiographical metafiction – a genre that "both installs and then blurs the line between fiction and history," that thrives on "the simultaneous assertion and crossing of boundaries," and that "installs totalizing order only to contest it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality, and, often, fragmentation." Linda Hutcheon, "'The Pastime of Past Time': Fiction, History, Historiographical Metafiction," in *Postmodern Genres*, ed. Marjorie Perloff (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1989), repr. in *The Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. Michael J. Hoffman & Patrick D. Murphy (London: Leicester UP, 1996): 481, 482, and 485.

[28] Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001): 25.

[29] Young, *Postcolonialism*, 26.

constituted a political, economic and administrative machine whose problems could be discussed or criticized on the basis of its being a comprehensive unity."[30] 'Imperial', still resonating with the meaning of the Latin *imperium* (authority, connected to the power of a magistrate), was employed to mean "sovereign or transcendent, the ultimate seat of authority, or just as a synonym for 'magnificent'."[31] 'Imperialism', finally, is the most modern term. As Young points out, drawing on Hobsbawm, Baumgart, and Williams:

> The word has been used in English in two predominant meanings: it originally constituted a description of a political system of actual conquest and occupation, but increasingly from the beginning of the twentieth century it came to be used in its Marxist sense of a general system of economic domination […]. When people originally used the term 'imperialism' to describe a political system of domination in the first sense, it did not necessarily carry critical connotations; its later use to denote the new broader meaning of economic domination, by contrast, always implies a critical perspective. This shift really registers changing global attitudes to imperialism itself.[32]

All three terms oscillate between neutrally descriptive and negative meanings. It is perhaps a sign of the renewed critical interest in the concept of empire that in recent studies, a positive aspect has been added, emphasizing the generative and enduring quality of empires. For example, Burbank and Cooper stress the ability of imperial rule to contain conflict between different populations, to impose a sense of allegiance and affiliation while maintaining cultural diversity, to "set the context in which political transformations took place,"[33] and simply to last for a very long time. While the nation-state has been at the centre of political imagination only for the past hundred and fifty years or so, empires have formed in different regions since early history and they were often astonishingly resilient. China and Rome, the two paradigmatic cases studied by Burbank and Cooper, eventually controlled huge terri-

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[30] Young, *Postcolonialism*, 26.

[31] *Postcolonialism*, 26.

[32] *Postcolonialism*, 26. See also Winfried Baumgart, *Imperialism: The Idea and Reality of British and French Colonial Expansion, 1880–1914*, tr. by the author with Ben V. Mast (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987); Raymond Williams, "Imperialism," in Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; London: Fontana, 1983): 159–60.

[33] Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 11.

tories for several centuries, and in the process developed "effective solutions to the fundamental problem of how to govern and exploit diverse populations."[34] Consequently, the comparative study of empires is illuminative in a day and age when the nation-state is being progressively superseded by transnational structures of decision-making.

One of the features that make the concept of empire attractive today is its ability to reconcile, more or less equitably, the interests of different ethnic and social groups. However, as Burbank and Cooper stress, this kind of political mediation does not imply that the different populations of an empire were treated as equals in legal, political, and cultural terms; rather, empires "self-consciously maintaining the diversity of people they conquered and incorporated […], created contexts in which people formed settlers, slaves, and commercial agents."[35] This diversification made the administration of empires particularly effective; it also constitutes one of the main differences between the empire and the nation-state:

> Empires are large political units, expansionist or with a memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people. The nation-state, in contrast, is based on the idea of a single people in a single territory constituting itself as a unique political community. The nation-state proclaims the commonality of its people – even if the reality is more complicated – while the empire-state declares the non-equivalence of multiple populations. Both kinds of state are incorporative – they insist that people be ruled by their institutions – but the nation-state tends to homogenize those inside its borders and exclude those who do not belong, while the empire reaches outwards and draws, usually coercively, peoples whose difference is made explicit under its rule. The concept of empire presumes that different peoples within the polity will be governed differently.[36]

Since the nation-state draws a strict line between its 'proper' citizens and those who belong only partly, or not at all, it has failed as a guarantor of civil and human rights, as Hannah Arendt elaborated in *The Origins of Totali-*

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[34] *Empires in World History*, 23. A counter-example to these enduring realms is, of course, the Mediterranean–Asian empire conquered by Alexander the Great which did not long survive its founder. Evidently, the governmental structures implemented by Alexander were far less viable than those of Rome and China.

[35] *Empires in World History*, 2.

[36] *Empires in World History*, 8.

tarianism and elsewhere. In the states that emerged out of the bankrupt estate of empires after the First World War, minorities obtained a status outside normal legal protection which made them particularly vulnerable to the impending political disasters.[37] Indisputably, despite pervasive antisemitism Jews fared better under the Habsburg monarchy than in the various states that succeeded it (and, needless to say, than in the states that issued from the defunct German *Kaiserreich*: the Weimar republic, and, then, Nazi Germany). It is this ability to maintain diversity while, to a degree, protecting minorities even in the face of the cultural hegemony exercised by the empire's dominant nation (or, in the case of Austria–Hungary, nations) that has recently led historians to the positive reassessment of particular empires. Christopher Clark, for instance, regards the notorious Habsburg bureaucracy not as "an apparatus of repression, but a vibrant entity commanding strong attachments, a broker among manifold social, economic and cultural interests."[38]

Similarly, the British Empire has found its defenders. In a series of widely read books and articles, Niall Ferguson has not only argued that, whether we like it or not, "the imperial legacy has shaped the modern world so profoundly that we almost take it for granted."[39] In fact, Ferguson suggests that the British Empire not only made the modern world, but made it a better place. The positive imperial legacy accordingly includes liberal capitalism, parliamentary democracy, the British education system and other civil institutions, and, not least, the English language. All things considered, the British Empire is, despite its shortcomings, nothing to be ashamed of:

> Of course no one would claim that the record of the British Empire was unblemished. On the contrary, I have tried to show how often it failed to live up to its own ideal of individual liberty, particularly in the early era of enslavement, transportation and the 'ethnic cleansing' of indigenous peoples. Yet the nineteenth-century Empire undeniably pioneered free trade, free capital movements and, with the abolition of slavery, free labour. It invested immense sums in developing a global network of modern communications. It

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[37] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973): 270–74. For a concise summary of Arendt's position, see Roger Berkowitz, "Hannah Arendt on Human Rights," in *Handbook of Human Rights*, ed. Thomas Cushman (London & New York: Routledge, 2012): 59–67.

[38] Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 71.

[39] Ferguson, *Empire*, 365. The controversy sparked by Ferguson's advocacy of the British Empire is discussed in Mayannah Dahlheim's contribution to this collection.

spread and enforced the rule of law over vast areas. Though it fought many small wars, the Empire maintained a global peace unmatched before or since.[40]

One's assessment of imperial glories such as liberal capitalism, free trade, and anglocentric education depends, obviously, on one's general attitude towards these matters,[41] and on a person's presumptive position – as descendant of the perpetrators or the victims – toward the British Empire's small wars and small acts of oppression which were, in truth, the effects of the systematic inequality of empire. If the nation-state fails to protect those of its members who are not considered full citizens, empires are predicated, as Burbank and Cooper have argued, on the declared "non-equivalence of multiple populations."[42] This implies, and perhaps necessitates, a differential valuation – in effect, the systematic devaluation and denigration of some groups, which in turn provokes counter-reactions. Rabindranath Tagore, for example, links the rise of Indian nationalism in his youth to the continuing experience of humiliation at the hands of the colonial masters, based on a racially underpinned division between a culturally and morally superior West and an inferior East:

> There was yet another movement started about this time in my country which was called National. It was not fully political, but it began to give voice to the mind of our people trying to assert their own personality. It was a voice of indignation at the humiliation constantly heaped upon us by people who were not oriental, and who had, especially at the time, the habit of sharply dividing the human world into the good and the bad according to what was similar to their life and what was different.[43]

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[40] Ferguson, *Empire*, 366.

[41] Lenin, naturally, would have disagreed with Ferguson's verdict. For the revolutionary Marxist, it was precisely the conjunction between imperialism and capitalism that made both powerful, but pernicious: "Monopolies, oligarchy, the striving for domination instead of the striving for liberty, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by an extremely small group of the richest or most powerful nations – all these have given birth to those distinctive characteristics of imperialism which compel us to define it as parasitic or decaying capitalism." Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (*Империализм как высшая стадия капитализма*, 1916; tr. London: Penguin, 2010): 158.

[42] Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 8; see above.

[43] Rabindranath Tagore, "Autobiographical," in *The Essential Tagore*, ed. Fakrul Alam & Radha Chakravarty (Cambridge M A & London: Belknap Press/Harvard U P, 2011): 40.

The much-cited brokering and negotiating of empire was always accompanied – indeed, made possible – by apparatuses of surveillance, police and military control, uneven jurisdiction, and downright violence, as well as incentives extended to privileged groups. One of the most disillusioning moments even to anglophile Indians was the massacre of Amritsar, the killing of hundreds of unarmed protesters by Gurkha riflemen under the command of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer (1919). The belittling of this incident by the colonial authorities, and the inadequate penalization of General Dyer by the British Parliament,[44] significantly strengthened the Indian independence movement led by Gandhi. The Amritsar massacre is in many ways symptomatic of the workings of empire, particularly the complex collaboration and task sharing between local auxiliaries, colonial magistrates, and the authorities in the imperial metropolis. However, General Dyer's overreaction is also indicative of a psychological stance that Robert Young has referred to as the "nervous condition" of imperial rule.[45] This is perhaps one of the central paradoxes of empires: that these heterogeneous polities were so stable, while existing in a constant state of tension, a barely suppressed awareness of their own precariousness.

As Pankaj Mishra has argued, it was the shared experience "of being subjugated by the people of the West that they had long considered upstarts, if not barbarians" that fuelled the colonized peoples' fantasies "of national freedom, racial dignity, or simple vengefulness" in the wake of Western defeats, from the Japanese victory over Russia in 1904 to the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001.[46] From the point of view of postcolonial historians and critics, the former metropolitan centres of empire by now have lost not only their political power but also their moral reputation and, contrary to Ferguson's claim, their discursive dominance:

> The West is no longer the source of good as well as bad things, deep in material benefits but shallow in spiritual matters; it has to be rejected *in toto*. This conviction had been building up over decades among many Muslims. Two destructive world wars and the Great Depression had revealed serious structural flaws in the Western models of politics and economy. Decolonization further undermined the political powers of Western countries; and desperate

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[44] Dyer was censored and forced to retire by the House of Commons, but lauded by the House of Lords.

[45] Young, *Postcolonialism*, 296.

[46] Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire*, 3.

attempts to regain it – in Suez in 1956, and in Algeria and Vietnam – de-stroyed any fragments of remaining political and moral authority.[47]

In this sense, the agenda of "provincializing Europe"[48] – and with it, putting empire to rest –would seem to be making good progress. Perhaps, after all, the continued viability of empire asserted by scholars as different as Burbank and Cooper, Clark, and Ferguson can only be sustained with regard to com-parative studies of empires' past, but not as a model for the future. And yet the comparative study of empires past is facing formidable challenges: it needs to face squarely the current fascination with the tolerant and productive sides of empires; "the entrenched positions within the clamorous debates of empire" have to be taken into account (Dahlheim, 45); and a critical vocabu-lary must be developed for the study of empires that today thrive without the political system of conquest and occupation that was once called imperialism.

As the essays gathered in this volume indicate, the conjunction of empires (past, present, future) and imaginaries – in the threefold sense of displace-ment, playful improvisation, and socially (re)productive regulation – is extremely powerful; and it sells. Jeanne Morefield has argued that the return of empires without straightforward systemic forms of imperialism since 11 September 2001 is noticeable in at least three ways:[49] historiographical acts of "forgetting" (14) and "memorial unbinding" (15), she says, purge history from "the violence of the past" (16). In addition, "acts of deflection" (16–17) in political speech, but also the entertainment industry move "the illiberal practices of the liberal imperial state […] just outside of our peripheral vision" (17). Finally, "backward looking and nostalgic" (17) responses to the end of the modern age of empires in the fields of history and literature recon-cile, forget, and thus redeem the violations of the imperial past, while also "imagining" (18) a present and a future in which the "uncomfortable contradictions" (19) might be able to disappear. In the light of Morefield's rather pessimistic observations, it remains to be seen whether transnational organizations such as the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the African Union (AU) will be able to adapt the strengths of former empires while remedying their faults.

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[47] Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire*, 263.

[48] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; Princeton NJ & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2008).

[49] Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, page references are in the main text.

Nevertheless, Morefield's categories of revolving empires might be too restrictive for the arguments unfolding here. The contributions to this volume agree that empires cannot truly end. Visions, stories, and maps of empires past "mutate, reverberate, echo and are recycled" to the present day (Emig, 65), even if there seems to be a temporary "compulsion, at the turn of the century, to reassess Britain's imperial role" (Pérez, 237). While the "nineteenth-century determination to aggrandize the British Empire" looks strange today, it has not been superseded by late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century exposures of "the workings of British imperial discourse" as Kerstin Knopf shows (69–70). The heroes of empire might still be the same, but they are integrated into "divergent discourses of alterity" (Stroh, 184). They now share public attention with hybrid imperial repertoires and re-enactments such as the "Ottoman utopia" studied by Elena Furlanetto in which "the yearning for the lost Ottoman Empire [is synthesized] with a sustained fascination for American culture and narratives" (159). Another approach to blended repertoires of empires is discussed by Cecile Sandten, who indicates that narrative acts of unbinding and re-synthesizing reveal "the intertwined and enmeshed quality of postcolonial histories of oppression, exclusion, and dispossession" across the globe (346).

Our contributors indicate that the deflections mentioned by Morefield can occur in the form of "educational inculcation in the ideology of Empire" (Eva–Maria Müller, 109) or in the revisionist engagements with the violence of the plantation economy, when the concept of human agency fails to move away from a faith in "the capacity of the liberal subject to act" (Gohrisch, 415). Travel advertisements in US-American magazines, for instance, employ the repertoire of "current neo-colonial military, political, and economic relations" even as they participate in a "'post-imperialist imperialism'" that allows travellers to "simultaneously critique and fetishize European colonial history" (Raiskin, 270, 272, 271). This kind of co-presence is by no means a feature of recent times. Anne–Julia Zwierlein explores the archive of the eighteenth-century visual panorama and its "travellers in reverse" who move from the Empire's periphery to its centre, finding a "fascinating simultaneity of hegemonic narratives and 'postcolonial' counter-narratives" propelling much older intersections of literature, history, and empire (255, 263). The art of deflection, then, might be understood to be pivotal to the way in which literature and the media work within empire and well after its official demise. Karsten Levihn–Kutzler speaks of "a 'landscape' of commodified literary culture" that rewards forms of "proleptic imagination" (377, 382).

Would it be possible to find a lame kind of redemption in nostalgia, as Morefield suggests? The essays assembled here propose that the activity of looking backward is never free of hopes for a redemptive function of fictional and non-fictional engagements. More importantly, however, the following studies argue that these turns to history, its archives and repertoires, are almost always forward looking. The most popular and widely known example of this future orientation, the James Bond movie series, is discussed by Timo Müller, who notes that the Bond films "dramatize and assuage post-imperial anxieties" (308). James Bond's cinematic longevity, of course, also ensures that these movies bridge the historical gap between the demise of the British Empire and the rise of post-imperialist forms of imperial control and especially the kind of empire that has recently been revived with a capital E. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri deploy the term Empire not in reference to concrete geopolitical entities, but as a metaphor for the disembodied circulation of power in the era of globalization. In Hardt and Negri's view,

> Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm with its open, expanding frontiers. (xii)

This rhizomatic avatar carries the seeds of its own destruction, as it is precisely its multiplicity, decentering, and deterritorialization that are amenable to the creative forces of the 'multitude':

> The kinds of movement of individuals, groups and populations that we find today in Empire, however, cannot be completely subjugated to the laws of capitalist accumulation – at every moment they overflow and shatter the bounds of measure. The movements of the multitude designate new spaces, and its journeys establish new residences. Autonomous movement is what defines the place proper of the multitude. Increasingly less will passports or legal documents be able to regulate our movements across borders. A new geography is established by the multitude as the productive flows of bodies define new rivers and ports. The cities of the earth will become at once great deposits of cooperating humanity and locomotives of circulation, temporary residences and networks of the mass distribution of living humanity.[50]

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[50] Hardt & Negri, *Empire*, 397. For an incisive critique of *Empire*, see Chantal Mouffe, who has commented: "Far from empowering us, it contributes to reinforcing the current incapacity to think and act politically." Mouffe, *On the Political* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005): 107–15, here 107. See also Cooper, "Empire Multi-

Both the unrestricted flow of commodities, people, and power in the era of Empire and its utopian version in the era of the multitude are, in fact, the very contrary of the sophisticated structures of domination and negotiation in historical empires. Hardt and Negri's vision of a radically mobilized and un-regulated multitude is also counter-intuitive to today's ever-tightening system of global surveillance, as manifested in the documents released by Edward Snowden: we are becoming more disciplined and controlled by legal documents and electronic systems, not less. However, what is interesting about this ultra-left manifesto in the context of this volume is the fact that Empire now is thought of from the point of view of its demise: Empire presupposes its own dissolution in a post-empire, oceanic non-state. Enhancing the redemptive aspirations of the post-empire imaginaries constituted with reference to empires past, Hardt and Negri envision an end that is utopian and communitarian; nostalgia is no longer directed at an irrecoverable 'time of yesterday', but towards an unattainable millennium. The predicted outcome does not seem very likely. But Hardt and Negri's utopian redeployment of the term adds yet another facet to the rich archive of the post-empire imaginary.

In the entertainment industry and celebrity culture that loves to dwell on empires past, a new 'post-Empire' state of mind begins to change the rules of living in the present rather than the past, according to Bret Easton Ellis. Ellis spots parodistic acts of public self-deprecation and self-defamation conjoined with Empire critique in a whole array of declining celebrities such as the *Two an a Half Men* actor Charlie Sheen (who gluttonously delves into his own drug-abuse and, in turn, his abuse by the entertainment industry), Robert De Niro (who used his acceptance speech of the Cecil B. DeMille Award for lifetime achievement in 2011 to joke about the ostensible deportation of non-American journalists, actors, and immigrant waiters from US soil), and Keith Richards (who shows "a rare healthy post-Empire geezer transparency" in his memoir *Life*, published in 2010).[51] The millennium envisioned by these post-empire agents and texts is one of transparency, continuous present time, and rather raw self-expression, as Ellis notes. Here, empires and their "postcolo-

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plied," 250–54. Cooper calls Hardt & Negri's book "a manifesto for revolutionaries who want no part of action and take no responsibility" (254).

[51] Ellis, "Notes on Charlie Sheen and the End of Empire."

nial remains" do not strike and write back.[52] This post-postmodern view of generalized Empire simply sidesteps what Andrew Thompson has described as "an increasingly sterile debate between 'postcolonialists' (who maintain that [empire] was prevalent and pervasive) and their critics (who are convinced that its influence has been grossly exaggerated)."[53] Hardt and Negri's Empire and Ellis' tongue-in-cheek post-Empire may be facets of a new archive too far removed from the samples of post-empire imaginaries under investigation in this volume. And yet they invite readers to ask what would happen if agents of domination became interchangeable, empires were equal (rather than good or bad), and disenfranchisement was understood to be pervasive. In these dystopian contexts form and structure – the strictures of the fictive and the historiographic, their repertoires, and their archives – might have something new to offer in response to changing obligations.

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[52] Robert J.C. Young, "Postcolonial Remains," *New Literary History* 43 (Winter 2012): 19–42; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (London: Routledge, 1989); Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (2005; London: Routledge, 2014).

[53] Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 9.

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