

The Nineteenth-Century Context

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902)

Makana Nxele began to speak of visions in the spring of 1819. Nxele was Xhosa, a people living around the Great Fish River in southern Africa who were suffering from intrusions from neighboring peoples. Invaders included white settlers, including “Boers” of Dutch origin and Britons, who for years had encroached on Xhosa lands, seized their cattle, and disrupted their lives in myriad other ways. Nxele was a convert to Christianity who claimed to be a prophet and a younger son of Jesus Christ. He said that the Xhosa had to rise up, fight, and drive the whites out. People listened, and many joined up. In April, Nxele led an attack on a British outpost in Grahamstown. The British put down the uprising, captured Nxele, and imprisoned him on Robben Island, the same island on which South Africa’s apartheid regime would imprison Nelson Mandela in the 1960s. (Although Mandela survived Robben Island, Nxele did not: he drowned during an escape attempt in December 1819.)

In 1856 another Xhosa, a girl named Nongqawuse, preached a series of prophetic visions. Nongqawuse foretold that the morning sun would set and that the ancestors would arise and drive the whites into the sea, thus saving the Xhosa. First, though, the Xhosa had to prove their faith by destroying their crops and slaughtering all livestock; only if they did so would the prophecy come true, on the eighth day. Nongqawuse’s uncle Mhlakaza was among those who embraced her

vision, and he won over the Xhosa ruler, Sarhili. Like Mhlakaza before him, Sarhili destroyed his cattle and crops, and then persuaded a number of his advisers and subordinates to do the same. Others bought into Nongqawuse's vision, so desperate were they to rid themselves of the whites.

Whites were not the only problem: the Xhosa also felt pressure from the Zulu, a successful and expansionistic people to their east. Zulu success dated back to Dingiswayo, a king among the Nguni people who had transformed his society, doing away with traditional "bush schools" that required cohorts of boys of the same age – "age grades" – to sequester themselves from society, undergo education, and be circumcised. Instead of removing productive young men from society for an extended period, Dingiswayo organized age grades into military units, and these young men became full members of society through military service. This transformed the Nguni into a fighting force. Dingiswayo's successor, Shaka, made his Zulu clan dominant among the Nguni. Shaka Zulu put the Zulu on a permanent war footing, instituted more combat training and years-long segregation of men in military groups, and introduced the assegai, a short stabbing spear used as a sword at close quarters. Shaka also introduced new tactics, including the "cow horn" formation, combining a central group with swift-moving wings to attack an opponent's flanks and rear. Innovation translated into Zulu dominance over large areas of southeastern Africa and, when others adapted or adopted Zulu tactics, warfare became more destructive. The result was the Mfecane or "time of troubles," during which Shaka himself was assassinated, in 1828.

By the time of Shaka's successor, Dingane (r. 1828–1840), the Mfecane had spread widely, reaching the Xhosa people. Heeding Nongqawuse's visions, Xhosa slaughtered thousands of head of cattle and destroyed crops. Then came the eighth day. "Nothing happened. The sun did not set, no dead person came back to life, and not one of the things that had been predicted came to pass." Instead there was starvation, devastation, and death. By 1857 the Xhosa were no longer capable of putting up any resistance to expanding European colonization.

How could anyone have such faith, to the point of destroying all their crops and cattle? One can analyze such apocalyptic visions and those who believed them from anthropological, psychological, religious, gender, or other perspectives. The historical explanation is straightforward: the Xhosa were under intense pressure as a result of Zulu and European expansionism. The same was true of other indigenous peoples, from Khoi, San, Nama, and Herero in southwestern Africa, to Bantu-speaking peoples such as the Sotho, Ndebele, and Shona. A series of droughts coupled with population growth compounded such problems. The Xhosa were unable to compete, in particular in the face of European technological superiority.

As the experience of the Xhosa suggests, many actors and factors shaped global history in the nineteenth century, including local conflicts, movements of

people, competition for resources, climate, the environment, religious beliefs, and military tactics. As this chapter will emphasize, it was local concerns and actions that drove much change for much of the world and for most of the century. Europe remained for most people a distant peninsula on the western end of Eurasia. That Europe was not dominant is revealed in how its overseas efforts were motivated by the need to procure things that Europeans needed more of, such as land or goods that they could not make like fine silks; this meant that Europe was dependent on much of the rest of the world.

Growing free trade, the independence of most of Spain's and Portugal's American colonies, and the power of non-Europeans made a renewed wave of empire building seem unlikely. Then a series of developments, beginning in the 1850s, signaled that change was taking place. Parts of Europe and the United States were industrializing, and both world areas emerged stronger following the American Civil War and the unifications of Germany and of Italy. Failed reforms in the Ottoman empire, Russia's defeat in the 1853–1856 Crimean War, and the 1850–1864 Taiping Rebellion in China signaled the profound challenges these large land-based empires faced. Still, the renewed wave of overseas imperialism that soon followed was never a simple story of a more powerful Europe expanding outward in some well-planned colonial takeover, and we should not project back into the past the dominance that western Europe, the United States, and Russia exercised over much of the world by 1900. This power was neither inevitable, nor was it in any way complete.

New and Unlikely Empires

Around the mid-nineteenth century, another wave of European overseas empire building seemed improbable, for a number of reasons. The abolitionist movement had suggested a turning away from the subjugation of foreign peoples, and Enlightenment ideals of a shared humanity had spread widely throughout the Atlantic world. Britain outlawed the slave trade, beginning in 1807, imposed this on others through its naval supremacy, and outlawed slavery itself in 1833. France followed in 1848. In other places slavery was on the way out. When in 1860 the Dutch banned slavery in Batavia – the main European settlement and trading outpost in the Dutch East Indies – it already had diminished to near insignificance. Despite its continued profitability, the United States (1865), Cuba (1886), and Brazil (1888) also finally abolished slavery, although the Indian Ocean slave trade endured.

Other signs suggested that overseas empire building had largely run its course. France lost almost all its foreign possessions at the end of the Seven Years War (1756–1763), and Britain relinquished 13 North American colonies two decades later. Independence for Haiti, across Central and South America, and in some other parts of the Caribbean followed in the first quarter of the nineteenth

century. Large, landed empires had more staying power, including the Ottoman empire (spanning southeastern Europe, southwest Asia, north Africa, and the Arabian peninsula), Russia's massive expanse, and to a much lesser extent India under the declining Mughals. Britain's 1793 Macartney Embassy revealed Qing China's strength. The British envoy George Macartney arrived in China hoping to open ports to trade, but the Qianlong Emperor rejected his requests, telling Macartney:

Strange and costly objects do not interest me ... Our dynasty's majestic virtue has penetrated unto every country under Heaven, and Kings of all nations have offered their costly tribute by land and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufactures.

China had little time for what it saw as a small, backward island people halfway around the world. Macartney left empty-handed.

Developments nevertheless signaled a potential renewal of overseas expansionism. With the French Revolution and the abolitionist impulse to eliminate slavery came a more activist, outward-looking mindset, and Europeans began to see themselves as uniquely positioned to civilize benighted peoples everywhere. Although most colonies in the Americas had achieved independence by the 1830s, colonists from the Americas to Australia and New Zealand had created huge "neo-Europes" where settlers dominated natives – those who had not succumbed to disease – and where flora and fauna imported from Europe flourished, displacing indigenous animals and plants. This, and intensifying British rule in India, began to revolutionize international relations, economics, and culture, initiating a reordering of the global balance of power. Europe and North America enjoyed tremendous advantages such as natural resources like coal, whose use spurred innovations like the steam engine. Europe benefited from rising populations; new types and varieties of crops and imported foodstuffs; growing trade and transportation; legal institutions that protected property; and comparatively independent financial institutions. Europeans also were good at warfare. The uniqueness of Europe was not its strong states or patriotic identities, but rather the convergence of these "with economic dynamism, well-honed weapons of war making, and fierce rivalries between medium-sized polities." Viewed this way, Qing, Ottoman, and Mughal success at imposing peace over large empires contributed to their decline. Even if Europeans could not match the commercial capabilities of the Indians, Ottomans, and Chinese, competition and war within Europe's multistate system meant growing competitiveness and expansionism by the mid-nineteenth century. By that point, Europeans were more expansionistic than ever before and more so than any other people at the time, with the exception of land-hungry, western-bound US colonists. On top

of it all, the growth of “civil society” in Europe lent its societies staying power. Then, in just two decades, from 1850 to 1870, world-changing events contributed to growing European advantage: war and revolt in China, a revolution in Japan, a civil war in the United States, and industrialization and national unification in Europe.

China’s Qing Dynasty

The Qing were a foreign, Manchu dynasty in power since 1644, controlling far-flung territories and peoples with their military and a large, educated bureaucracy infused with Confucian principles emphasizing civilized behavior, ritual, family, and loyalty. Like Ming emperors before them, Qing rulers believed that they were at the center of the world. China was the “Middle Kingdom,” fringed by peripheries including Korea, Japan, mainland southeast Asia, Mongolia, and other so-called barbarian lands at or beyond its borders. Success and isolationism discouraged innovation and invention. The imperial examination system, based on Confucian literature and values, fostered conservatism. Change occurred but always within a framework of tradition.

Mental inflexibility manifested itself in lackluster responses to internal and external threats. First was a massive domestic revolt, a result of growing population and rural poverty. Like Makala Nxele of the Xhosa, the failed Chinese civil servant and Christian convert Hong Xiuquan, who claimed to be the brother of Jesus of Nazareth, claimed bizarre religious visions and encouraged his followers to rebel against the Qing. Hong’s Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) was a massive uprising that cost millions of lives – 26 Chinese perished during the rebellion for each soldier who died in the contemporaneous American Civil War, the deadliest conflict in US history.

A second threat came from abroad as industrializing Europe pressured China to open its markets to trade. The Chinese remained uninterested in Western goods like cheap cotton textiles, which were inferior to domestic silks. Because they kept importing Chinese manufactures, European states faced yawning trade deficits. Britain’s solution was to sell opium from India to China, provoking opposition from Chinese officials. When a Cantonese governor seized a stockpile of opium in 1839, British forces attacked the Chinese. As a result of its insularity, China had no navy to counter Britain’s steamships. When a small British fleet sailed up the Yangtze River in 1842 and threatened China at the junction of the Yangtze and the Grand Canal, the Chinese sued for peace. The resulting treaty forced China to open up some of its markets.

Other conflicts over opium and trade followed between Britain and France on the one hand and China on the other. A second “opium war” (1856–1860) led to another defeat, and China never regained the upper hand. Chinese elites

viewed such events as minor setbacks. Qing rule survived, after all. But, whereas a century earlier China had been one of the world's great powers, the Qing limped into the late nineteenth century. By the century's end, Chinese leaders were depending on European advisers to direct government reforms and on foreign merchants to conduct trade. The tables had been turned: China, for centuries an imperial power, was now a victim of imperialism.

Japan: From Isolation to Industrialization

Reactions to Chinese decline and Western expansionism varied across east Asia. Japan, long peripheral to and influenced by the Middle Kingdom, took a path that could not have been more different. Like China, Japan had closed itself off to the outside world, but even more so, following a policy of isolationism begun under Toyotomi Hideyoshi (d. 1598) that intensified during the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1857). Tokugawa Japan expelled Christian missionaries, then all foreigners; prohibited overseas travel; and restricted trade, first to commerce only with the Portuguese, then only with the Dutch, and then only on a limited basis. Eventually Japanese restricted trade to exchanges with a handful of Dutch ships on one tiny island at Nagasaki, and then only once a year. Isolationism did not mean stagnation or backwardness: domestic trade, literature, art, and culture flourished. There also was political change: feudalism declined, replaced by a centralized dyarchy with an emperor who reigned and a shogun who ruled.

Seeking coaling stations, access to markets, and provisioning of ships, French, Russian, US, and other sailing vessels approached Japan only to be rebuffed. In 1853 the US commodore Matthew Perry entered Edo Bay, near Edo (Tokyo), and obliged the Japanese to open trade under threat of the use of force. Like their Chinese counterparts, Japanese elites wanted to maintain control over their destiny, but by contrast a small group of powerful Japanese men chose to adopt Western techniques to strengthen the country, to learn from the West, not imitate it. This was *kaikoku joi*, “open the country to expel the barbarians.” Fearing that the shogun was not moving fast enough, they launched the 1868 Meiji Restoration, deposed the shogun, and “restored” the emperor to power; in reality, a small group of ministers were in control.

Japan embarked on a crash course of adaptation and industrialization. Whereas industrialization in the West was initially slow and driven by private investment and enterprise, in Japan it was largely state driven, and fast. The human toll was staggering. There were no worker protections. Industrialists prized children for their small size and servility, and silk factory owners enticed poor parents to send their daughters to them for the wages. Yet, measured by increases in productivity, economic growth, and heavy industrial production – of iron, steel,

electricity, and machinery – Japan’s industrialization was successful, confirmed by military victories over China in 1894–1895 and over Russia in 1904–1905.

Civil War in North America

At the moment Commodore Perry threatened to fire on Edo, and while the Qing battled Hong Xiquan’s Taiping Rebellion, across the Pacific readers thrilled to the story of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), a novel that humanized for white readers people living in their own country yet subjected to an inhumane fate. It addressed the central question of the nineteenth-century United States: would slavery survive?

The United States was born of contradictions. Its war of independence against Britain (1775–1783) was a fight for freedom, yet the republic that emerged enshrined bondage into its founding constitution. Victorious in a war against a colonial overlord, the United States turned around and played the game of colonial horse trading by buying the Louisiana territory from France in 1802, nearly doubling the country’s size. In 1823 the United States declared the Monroe Doctrine to warn European states not to meddle in the Americas, yet the United States itself intervened in Latin America, creating an informal empire. A result of a war against empire, the United States became a colonizing power in its own right, devouring land in a westward march, and defeating and expelling natives and taking their land, oftentimes replacing them with imported African slaves. Conquest westward continued with an aggressive and successful war against another former colony, Mexico, in 1847–1848. Ironically, success provoked catastrophe because the United States could not peacefully resolve whether newly acquired territories would be free or slave. The North’s victory in the Civil War not only proscribed slavery; it also produced a more centralized government, growing industrialism in the north, backwardness in an agricultural south, increased nationalism, and continued westward expansion.

Unification and Industrialization in Europe

The status quo was also upturned in mid-century Europe. There, the Revolutions of 1848 rocked the Continent, symbolized by the flight of Austrian first minister and arch-conservative Klemens von Metternich into exile. It was Metternich who had orchestrated the restoration of the pre-1789 *ancien régime* after Napoleon’s downfall in 1815. Even if conservatives ultimately regained power after the 1848 Revolutions, leaders more amenable to change had emerged by the 1850s. “March at the head of the ideas of your century, and they will sustain

you,” said Napoleon Bonaparte’s nephew, French emperor Napoleon III, “march against them and they will overthrow you.” Or, as Prussia’s conservative chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, put it: “If there has to be a revolution, we would rather make it than suffer it.” And change was happening: subjects were becoming citizens because of public education, growing literacy, the development of a public sphere, and the spread of political ideologies including liberalism and socialism. The percentage of the voting population increased slowly, although women remained disenfranchised.

Unlike China or the Ottoman empire, Europe was composed of an international system of competitive states. In a similar way to post-Civil War (re)union in the United States, Europe witnessed consolidation and change. Italy unified, making a young state of an “old” nation. Prussia unified Germany through a series of wars from 1864 to 1871, and Prussians dominated the new German empire. Prussia’s 1866 defeat of the Habsburgs sparked reforms creating the joint the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and its 1870–1871 defeat of France led to Napoleon III’s abdication and the inauguration of France’s Third Republic. The French worried about a large, unified, and industrializing Germany, and their loss of the provinces of Alsace–Lorraine to Germany after the war created bitterness. Many French men and women turned an eye toward overseas empire as compensation and as a source of prestige and power. Britain had escaped the Revolutions of 1848, underwent political reform, including the extension of the franchise, even if, as late as 1890, still only 16.3 percent of Britons could vote.

Of critical importance was Europe’s shift from slow, halting demographic growth to a period of rapid population increase. An agricultural revolution including new foods and rising productivity on old and newly cleared lands led to an attenuation of subsistence crises and better nutrition. A decline in some diseases and better sanitation led to lower mortality and longer life expectancy. England’s population almost quadrupled from 1800 to 1900, Germany’s more than doubled, while overall Europe grew from 205 to 414 million people, not counting 55 million emigrants who left between 1870 and 1914, emigrating mainly to Australia, the United States, Canada, and Argentina. Population pressures induced a search for territories for settlement.

The slave trade, the trade in sugar and other tropical products, and the export of manufactured goods led to an accumulation of wealth in Europe. Maritime trade was risky but highly profitable. Europeans also enjoyed a huge increase in “human capital.” Exploration and trade resulted in growing knowledge of ship-building, seafaring technology, and business techniques, as epitomized by the British East India Company (EIC) and the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC, United East India Company), new kinds of organizations that were better able to manage large amounts of risks.

Most significantly, Europeans moved from agriculture into industry, mechanized production, and substituted fossil fuels for animal and natural power. This change was underway in England by the late eighteenth century, France and Belgium by 1830, German lands by the 1850s, northern Italy and parts of Russia toward the nineteenth century's end, and pockets elsewhere, such as northeastern Spain or around Vienna, the Habsburg capital. Accelerated industrialization at century's end emphasized steel, electricity, chemicals, communication, and transportation, boosting economic growth and the standard of living. The United States' Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, the same year that Egypt's French-built Suez Canal opened. London's Underground began operating in 1863, the New York and Paris metros around 1900. Other advances included the telegraph (1840s), submarine cables (1850s), the telephone (1870s), postal service, and refrigerated ships. "In the 1830s an exchange of letters between Britain and India could take two years; by 1870, with the opening of the Suez Canal, a letter could reach Bombay in only one month." Gold discoveries in California (1849) and Australia (1851) increased the money supply, fueling economic growth. Military technological advances included more accurate guns, breech-loading rifles, and automatic weapons. As early as the 1830s, British naval engineers adapted steam power to military uses and built large, ironclad ships equipped with powerful guns, capable both of ignoring winds and currents and of traveling faster than any sailing vessel. A good example is the British gunboat *Nemesis*, which in 1842 chugged up the Yangtze River to bring the First Opium War to a close by threatening China from within. Europe and the United States rapidly outpaced the rest of the world in terms of economic expansion, industrial output, population growth, and new technologies.

The Ottoman Empire

While Chinese elites grappled with reform, and while the Meiji Restoration propelled Japanese industrialization, Ottoman elites wrestled with how to counter a more dynamic and expansionistic Europe. After reaching a height of power and territorial control in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman empire had entered a period of stasis, even decline. By the early 1800s it faced growing problems in an age of industrialization, nationalism, and more rapid communications. Trade routes that Europeans had opened with the Americas and Asia bypassed the Ottomans' strategic position at the juncture of Europe, Asia, and north Africa. Cheap, mass-produced European manufactured goods undercut Ottoman access to markets. Although the Ottomans rivaled the Habsburgs in central Europe, Turkish naval decline dated back to defeat at the 1571 Battle of Lepanto. Competition between European states fostered efficiency, innovation, and invention; centralization in the Ottoman empire stifled them. Because the

Ottoman empire consisted of a Turkish center, non-Muslim peoples in south-eastern Europe, Kurds and Armenians in Asia Minor, and Arab populations in the Near (or Middle) East and north Africa, nationalism was a threat. Some territories achieved independence, including Greece (1830), and Romania and Serbia (by the 1860s). France seized Algeria in 1830. Many referred to the Turkish empire as the “sick man of Europe.”

Decline led to a variety of responses, although Ottoman leaders, like their Chinese counterparts in China, were caught in a double bind. When they borrowed from foreign countries to pay for reforms, they lost control over their finances. Whereas some elites thought the pace of reforms was too slow, others thought it was too fast. In 1839 Reshid Mustafa Pasha, top minister under Sultan Abdul Mejid (r. 1839–61) launched the Tanzimat, or “reorganization.” The reforms allowed for the greater involvement of non-Muslims in creating and implementing law, and showed that the Ottomans were serious about specific problems. However, the reforms were ineffective and were seen as too little too late by Christians in the empire, and as too much too fast by conservative opponents. The Ottomans also sent a number of educated people to Europe, especially to France because of its reputation as an advanced society. They returned not only with technical know-how but also Western-inspired ideas, and some argued that the most necessary reforms were political ones including limits on the sultan’s power, a constitution, and the creation of a parliament. A new, European-educated bureaucracy was ineffective because of its separation from the general population, and financing reforms led to massive indebtedness. Finally, the sultan, worried about challenges to his rule resulting from increased borrowing from Europe – intellectual and otherwise – turned away from reform.

In 1876 reformers succeeded in deposing the sultan and imposing a constitution on his successor, Abdul Hamid II. Within two years, however, Abdul Hamid II consolidated his position and suspended the constitution, ruling as an autocrat. The government declared bankruptcy in the late 1870s. Bulgaria gained its independence after Russia defeated the Ottomans in a war in 1878. The condition of the sick man of Europe worsened.

The Crimean War

The third great Eurasian empire of the 1800s – alongside Qing China and the Ottoman empire – was the Russian empire, whose lands extended from eastern Europe to China and across Siberia to Alaska, which Russia sold to the United States in 1867. Russia’s massive expanse resulted from its history of almost continuous expansion from its base in Muscovy. Russian princes had thrown off Mongol rule and then expanded, most notably under Peter the Great (1682–1725) and Catherine the Great (1762–1796).

Russia's defeat at the hands of France and Britain in the Crimean War (1853–1856) was a wake-up call. Britain and France, fighting thousands of miles from home, defeated Russia's armies on their home territory in the Crimea. This sparked Tsar Alexander II's "Great Reforms," which freed the empire's serfs and granted them full citizenship rights; created local political councils; fashioned a more independent judiciary; did away with much censorship of the press; and reformed the military along Western lines. Reforms did not touch the tsar's autocratic rule. Like their Ottoman counterparts, the Romanovs jealously guarded their authority and continued to reign and rule as absolute monarchs. By the 1870s, state-directed investment led to industrialization, including a huge transcontinental railway system. As a result, by 1900 Russia was one of the greatest industrial powers and could boast the world's largest army.

The Sepoy Uprising in India

Although they had been victorious in the Crimean War, Britons were scandalized by the large number of casualties. (As in the American Civil War, most soldiers had died not from battlefield wounds but from disease.) Then, just the year after the Crimean War ended, the British faced a major uprising in India, where the private chartered EIC had taken a dominant position vis-à-vis the failing Mughal rulers. The Indian Rebellion of 1857–1858, or "Sepoy Uprising," was not the first opposition the EIC had faced, for there had been small-scale revolts in the 1840s and 1850s. Although some consider the rebellion the "first Indian war of independence" – even though there was not a second one – in essence it was an anticolonial revolt.

In 1857 regiments of Indian soldiers serving under British control, called "sepoys," received new rifles that fired bullets wrapped in paper cartridges waxed with animal fat to protect them from moisture. During loading, when instructed to tear the paper off with their teeth, Hindu sepoys refused because they feared the grease was beef fat; Muslims declined because they had heard that it was made from pork fat. Although the British changed the procedures for packing and opening cartridges, the damage had been done. In May, a number of units revolted, killed their British officers, and declared the restoration of Mughal rule. About a fourth of India's territories joined in. Fighters overpowered the British garrison at Cawnpore, taking 60 soldiers, 180 civilians, and 375 women and children. They killed all the men – though many had surrendered – and, after holding Cawnpore for two weeks, they murdered all the women and children. When news of the massacre reached British authorities in India and then Britain itself, the reaction was overwhelming, stoking fears, especially a deep-seated dread of Indian violence against white women. Using superior communications and quick transportation, the British assembled and used a large force to

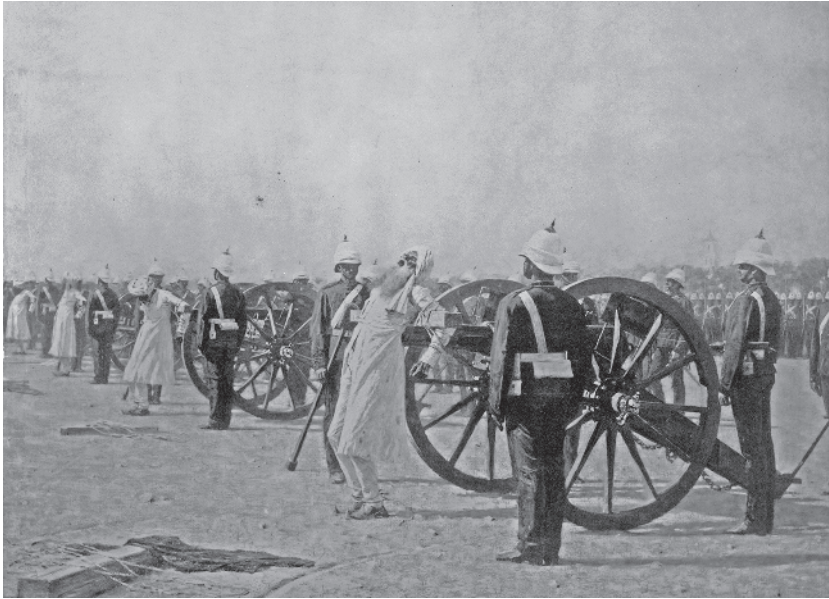


Figure 1.1 Black and white reproduction of Vasily Vereshchagin, *Blowing from Guns in British India* (1880s). Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1857_%22Blowing_from_Guns_in_British_India%22.jpg.

crush the rebellion, which they accomplished by the spring of 1858. The British summarily executed many rebels, even tying some to cannons and blowing them to pieces (Figure 1.1). Others were caught, tried, and hanged.

The Sepoy Uprising resulted in more intensive British rule. The EIC lost its India monopoly and the state took over, installing Viscount Canning as the first viceroy responsible to the British government, inaugurating the British Raj (from the Urdu word *rāj*, or “rule”). In 1877 Queen Victoria became empress of India. There followed infrastructure investment in railways, land reorganization, and cash crop production of tea, opium, and coffee for export. Officials imposed a more uniform set of laws across the entire colony and more direct means of gathering taxes instead of depending upon traditional regional tax administrators. The administration remained small in terms of the number of Europeans: as late as 1900, the British colonial service consisted of 4,000 British bureaucrats supported by 250,000 Indian civil servants. But it kept growing.

Although the rebellion’s outcome would suggest that colonial control was about military power, raw materials, administration, and infrastructure, its consequences reveal that colonial rule was also about knowledge, culture, and control over information. Events like Cawnpore led many Anglo-Indians, and people in Britain itself, to lose their respect for Indian culture, and India became for them

something to westernize and change. British officials established a civil service examination, which exposed Indians to Western administrative ideas. Because the colonial administration did not discriminate against Indians on the basis of caste or skin color, this brought Indians together into a common setting. Islam and Hinduism engaged with Christianity, reshaping their presence in people's lives. As the British navigated Hindu and Muslim legal systems and classified "traditional" laws to systematize their administration, "traditions" became fixed. As the British codified the legal system, caste became more rigid. The British also took action to stop certain practices, most notoriously *sati*, where a widow would immolate herself in her husband's funeral pyre; in Bengal alone, this occurred 7,941 times between 1813 and 1825. British authorities forbade *sati* as early as 1829, but it took years to enforce a partially effective ban. Because *sati* was a sign of upper-caste status, as caste became more rigid the practice even spread. In sum, knowledge and culture were fundamental to the apparatus of power.

India became the "crown jewel" of the British empire, a formidable resource that exercised an outsized influence on British foreign and colonial policy and induced strategic colonial expansion to protect it. India was a huge market for British exports. EIC rule had undermined domestic manufacturing and driven people from cities to the countryside. By supplanting traditional authorities, the Raj decreased demand by local rulers for manufactured goods for patronage purposes, undermining domestic demand and making India reliant on imported manufactured goods, in particular textiles. A growing rural population made India a source of raw materials like tea and of manpower. Even after the mutiny, when the number of British troops increased to lower the ratio of Indian to British troops, the Indian Army remained overwhelmingly manned by indigenous soldiers: by 1881, there were 125,000 Indians to only 69,600 British. Many in Britain, which was a naval power, thought that India's large army – and its ability to increase its size almost without limit – allowed Britain to compete with land powers like Russia and Germany. Indian soldiers became crucial to the British empire elsewhere and were regularly dispatched across the world. Best of all, the colony was self-financing because the military, administration, and infrastructure were paid for by taxes on Indians. It did not cost the British taxpayer a penny.

Diversity in Africa

There were no counterparts in Africa to the Qing, Ottomans, and Romanovs; instead local rulers were in control. One major state was Egypt. Ostensibly part of the Ottoman empire, Egypt was largely self-ruling, in part because of growing Turkish weakness and Egyptian rulers' efforts to increase their autonomy. From 1803 to 1849, an innovative and assertive leader, Muhammad Ali, born of

Albanian parents in Ottoman Macedonia, served as viceroy. Ali was intent on modernizing Egypt, to bring it kicking and screaming into the nineteenth century. He restructured the army along European lines, reformed Egypt's higher education system, and developed cotton agriculture to meet growing European demand resulting from industrialization.

Muhammad Ali's successors extended Egyptian rule, moving southward up the Nile to take control of and to expand the Sudanese slave trade and ivory trade. Muhammad Ali's third son, Ismail Pasha (ruled 1863–1879), expanded cotton cultivation to take advantage of the interruption of US exports during that country's civil war. He sent a mercenary force up the Nile into Sudan to take more land, reaching as far as Lake Victoria. Egypt reformed with the assistance of European credit, armaments, and advisers, including explorer Samuel Baker who in 1869 occupied Egypt's "Equatorial Province" and his replacement after 1873, General Charles "Chinese" Gordon, whose nickname dated to his role in the Second Opium War. The 1869 opening of the Suez Canal turned Egypt into a nodal point for trade and communications between Europe and Asia. Continued modernization efforts directed toward the economy, the military, and schooling led to a massive debt increase, especially as cotton prices dropped after the American Civil War.

During the same era, jihads wracked parts of west Africa. Umar Tal (al-hajj Umar) began preaching in the Senegal River area in the early 1850s, after having visited Mecca and joined the Tijaniyya reformist brotherhood. When locals of the traditional Qadiriyya brotherhood largely rejected him, he launched a jihad along the upper Senegal and upper Niger rivers, before being killed by his own people, the Fulani, in 1864.

East Africa was marked by Portuguese decline and Arab-Swahili ascendance. The Portuguese had been active on east Africa's periphery since the 1500s, trading for ivory and slaves, but by the late 1700s their influence had waned. Portugal's attempts to move further inland and to link its Angolan and Mozambiquan territories had failed because of powerful indigenous resistance. Portugal had thus remained more focused on its possessions in the Americas (Brazil) and in the Far East. Nonetheless, Portuguese trade had spurred the development of interior commercial centers along key east African trade routes. From the late eighteenth century, a mix of Arabs and indigenous east African Swahili speakers flourished along the coast. Arab-Swahili merchants controlled and developed trade into the interior, exploiting and adapting to indigenous African commercial realities, while building major trading centers in the process.

Nyamwezi was one crucial east African trade center, which developed in support of goods transportation. Because Angola to the west was so affected by the slave trade, when interior peoples traded goods to the coasts, they tended to look eastward. Nyamwezi also benefited from trade from further north, especially from the densely populated kingdoms around Lake Victoria. Buganda was one such small but wealthy and centralized state in east Africa's interlacustrine region. When

British explorers first arrived there in 1862, they were astonished by the power of the Kabaka or “leader” of the Buganda kingdom, Mutesa I (ruled 1856–1884).

Thus, unlike the Portuguese, Arab–Swahili traders exerted control well into the interior. Sultan Seyyid Said, based at Muscat, Oman, exploited east African trade routes to their fullest, increasing the volume and value of shipments by increasing the number of porters and providing more credit for purchases. Seyyid Said developed two large interior trade centers at Tabor and Ujiji, and in 1840 moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar. After he died in 1856, however, his successors were unable to fend off British influence, which was growing in the Indian Ocean.

In the absence of any large, organized power, why was Europe’s presence in Africa limited to coastal trading posts? First, local African rulers were powerful. Georg Schweinfurth’s travelogue *The Heart of Africa* (1874), for instance, described the incredible riches and power of King Munza of the Mangbetu in north-central Africa. Well-established African traders kept Europeans out. Legitimate trade had grown after Britain banned the slave trade, and Europeans wanted to trade for resources, something reflected in the names they gave places like Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast), the Gold Coast, and the Oil Rivers in what became Nigeria, along which valuable palm oil was traded to the coast. Europeans wished to get at the sources of such goods, but African middlemen outsmarted them, relegating them to the coast, as described in one 1861 French account: “I have heard the negroes called stupid, but my experience shows them to be anything but that. They are very shrewd traders indeed; and no captain or merchant who is a new hand on the coast will escape being victimized by their cunning in driving a bargain.” Topography was also important. Most of the continent rises up sharply from the coasts, and waterfalls and steep rises kept European boats from traveling inland. Disease was another factor. “During the whole of the nineteenth century, the most important problem for Europeans in West Africa was simply that of keeping alive.” During a voyage to Niger sponsored by the British government in 1841–1842, 44 of the 159 who went died from disease within the first two months, and 55 died in all before the ship returned to England.

“Europe” and Overseas Empire

We know now, of course, that European overseas empire ultimately reshaped much of the world. But it is debatable whether in the 1800s a “Europe” even existed that could extend its influence outward, and to what degree European states were coherent unities capable of “projecting” themselves. As a historical example, consider the Spanish empire. Many know that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella financed explorations and then conquistadors like Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, leading to discoveries, conquests, and riches in the Americas. After a few hundred conquistadors captured the Philippines, Spain

ruled a globe-spanning empire, transforming American silver and gold into power in Europe. Spain's clout reached a zenith under Charles V, who inherited Habsburg lands in Austria and Burgundy from his father and Castile, Aragon, Sicily, Naples, and the Spanish American empire from his mother. Even if European hegemony proved elusive, and if during the early 1800s Spain's many American colonies gained their independence, Spain continued as a global, albeit declining, imperial power through the nineteenth century. This only ended with Spain's defeat in the 1898 Spanish–American War, when the United States took control of the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

The problem with this story is that there was no “Spanish” empire. Rather than this history being a story of a European nation-state (Spain) projecting itself outward to the world, it was in truth an international endeavor. Christopher Columbus, for instance, was from Genoa. Ferdinand Magellan was from Portugal. Friar Junípero Serra, a founder of San Diego, was born in 1713 in Majorca, then part of the Crown of Aragon. Key individuals pursued their own interests, not those of the “Spanish” crown. Cortés was disobeying orders when he left for Mexico in 1519, and later he, like conquistadors elsewhere, relied on local allies. For the 1521 siege of Tenochtitlan that brought down the Aztec empire, Cortés's force of 86 horsemen, 118 musketeers and crossbowmen, 700 foot soldiers, and 400 sailors fought alongside some 50,000 Tlaxcalans and 75,000 other indigenous soldiers. Famous sixteenth-century “Spanish” victories in Europe such as the Battle of Pavia (1525) or the Battle of Lepanto (1571) were won by international coalitions including not only Castilians but sometimes Germans, English, Italians, Hungarians, and others. Once up and running, the empire benefited non-Spanish interests. Between 1500 and 1600 approximately 150,000 kilograms of gold and 7.4 million kilograms of silver arrived in Spain from the Americas, but non-Spanish ships and crews transported much of it, and it made its way to Italian, French, and other bankers from whom Charles V had borrowed vast sums in his bid for European hegemony. “What use is it,” one Castilian writer wrote in the 1650s, “to bring over so many millions worth of merchandise, silver and gold in the galleons, at so much cost and risk, if it comes only for the French and Genoese?”

What is more, “Spain” did not even exist as a nation-state in the 1500s. Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile united most of the Iberian peninsula under their joint rule, but they and their successors ruled not a nation-state called Spain but a mosaic of kingdoms including Galicia, Asturias, Navarre, Leon, Castile, Aragon, Valencia, Granada, and others. This is reflected in modern-day Spain's many languages, which include Catalan, Basque, Galician, and Castilian (Spanish), among others. Emperor Charles V was not the king of Spain but rather the duke of Burgundy, king of Aragon and Castile, king of Naples and Sicily, archduke of Austria, and Holy Roman Emperor, among other titles. The term “king of Spain” did not come into regular use until the 1800s.

Analogous situations obtained elsewhere in Europe well into the nineteenth century. French was not the first language of most people in France until the end of the nineteenth century. Germany's and Italy's unifications were not complete until 1871. Following Italian unification, Massimo d'Azeglio famously said, "Italy is made. It remains to make Italians." Overseas expansion actually helped consolidate European nation-states, and thus, as Europeans expanded and reshaped the world beyond, so did the rest of the world reshape Europe.

Europe's overseas colonies

All this said, European states did claim significant possessions overseas by the early nineteenth century. Even if maritime empire building seemed to some a thing of the past, many Europeans maintained their superiority and were more than willing to rule over people who, as Joseph Conrad states in this chapter's epigraph, were of a "different complexion" or had "slightly flatter noses" than themselves. The Caribbean remained very much a European sea, with Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Spain controlling numerous profitable sugar-growing islands, the most important being Cuba. Britain ruled over British Honduras in Central America, and there was Dutch Guiana, French Guiana, and British Guiana in northern South America. The British EIC ruled much of India, and Irish, Scottish, and English settlers (convicts or otherwise) continued to take land in New Zealand and Australia. In the latter, a decline in the Aboriginal population similar to the vast sixteenth-century depopulation in the Americas occurred after first contact with Europeans in the late eighteenth century. The Dutch had controlled coastal points in the Dutch East Indies for centuries by the nineteenth century, and the VOC dominated the area's trade. Spain claimed the Philippines, and the Portuguese remained active in Brazil and on the African and east Asian coasts. During Napoleon III's reign, France expanded in Algeria, and also in Senegal where the country had a longstanding foothold and where Governor Louis Faidherbe's forces moved up along the Senegal River. Faidherbe's success made his *tirailleurs sénégalais* – French-officered Senegalese troops – famous, a byword for all west African colonial troops. The French also conquered territories between 1858 and 1862 in southern Vietnam (Cochinchina) – in the Mekong Delta area and in north Vietnam – as they sought access to mythically vast Chinese markets.

As Makala Nxele's and Nongqawuse's stories showed, there was a major European presence in southern Africa. This dated back to the 1652 establishment of a Dutch outpost at the Cape of Good Hope as a way station from Europe to the East Indies for the VOC. Despite VOC intentions, Dutch settlers spread out, inviting conflict with Khoi, Xhosa, and others. In 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the British took control of the Cape Colony, seeing it as strategic for India. In the 1830s many Dutch settlers – now called "Boers" – departed the Cape to escape from British control. British abolitionism struck Boers as oppressive and

ridiculous, as to them Europeans were obviously superior to Africans. Thousands moved inland in what came to be called “the Great Trek,” provoking conflict with native Africans in a violent struggle for land and resources.

Boer and later British successes seizing land in southern Africa underscores the technological advantages Europeans possessed. A pattern emerged from the Mfecane and the Great Trek that dominated the years after the 1830s: both Africans and Boers sought land to accommodate growing numbers of people. In the end, the Boers, being technologically more advanced, defeated the Africans. Conflicts on or beyond the Cape Colony frontier were always over land, and the outcome of each encounter left Africans with further losses, less able to maintain herds, grow crops, collect fuel for fires, or build infrastructure.

The establishment of independent settlements became a source of Boer pride. In 1852 Boers founded the independent state of Transvaal, and in 1854 the Orange Free State. The British extended a protectorate over what was called Bechuanaland to the north of the Cape Colony, and the Briton Cecil Rhodes worked to establish a colony even further north, in what became Rhodesia. The discovery of diamonds in 1867 at Kimberly, bordering on Orange Free State, heightened interest in the region. In 1877 the British invaded and occupied Transvaal.

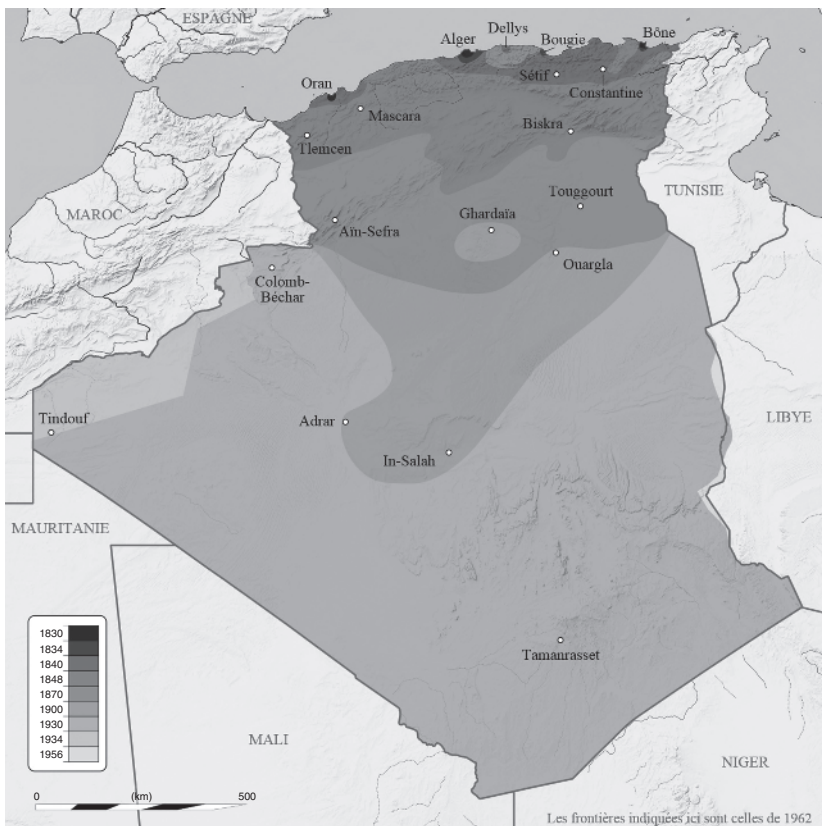
The question of control

Europeans rarely exercised complete authority over the lands they claimed, and for long their control was limited to sea routes, coastal areas, key communications points, and trading posts. The Spanish Philippines and French Algeria are illustrative examples.

Despite neatly colored maps showing the Philippines as “Spanish” from the 1500s, Spain never fully controlled them. The Spanish first learned of the islands from Magellan’s 1519 circumnavigation of the globe, but approached them only in 1565, establishing control over an area near present-day Manila. By 1600 Spain occupied coastal regions of the central and northern islands, and its control grew haltingly; it never controlled the Philippines’ second largest island, Mindanao, in the south. Moreover, it took months, sometimes years for messages to be carried back and forth across the world’s oceans, leading one Spanish viceroy to remark that, “If death came from Madrid, we should all live to a very old age.”

One often reads in history texts that France conquered Algeria in 1830, or that by the time of the 1954–1962 French–Algerian War the colony had been French “for more than a hundred years.” Neither is true. French forces attacked Algiers in May 1830. The kingdom’s monarch, Charles X, hoped it would boost his flagging popularity. (It did not. He lost the throne in the July Revolution the same year.) By the year’s end France had negotiated a protectorate over Algeria’s coast, leaving interior regions beyond its reach, including vast and sparsely populated

desert areas to the south. Beginning in 1834, the Arab Muslim leader Abd el-Kader then rebelled against the French; he did not surrender until 1847. By that point France had extended its control further inland out of perceived military necessity. It then absorbed Algeria by creating the three *départements* of Oran, Alger, and Constantine and having European settlers there send representatives to the capital, Paris. Still, sporadic armed resistance continued into the 1860s, and when France tried to extend its presence further, Cheikh Mohamed El-Mokrani led a revolt in 1871 that garnered the support of perhaps a third or more of the indigenous population. Mokrani lost his life, and France prevailed by 1872. In short, France's claims remained tenuous many decades after its initial attack on Algiers, and the country would not exercise control over Algeria's vast south until well into the twentieth century (Map 1.1).



Map 1.1 Real control? The French occupation of Algeria, 1830–1956. *Source:* Sémhur, Wikimedia Commons, https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fitxer:French_Algeria_evolution_1830-1962_map-fr.svg.

Conclusion

Through most of the 1800s, Europe's overseas expansion was halting and its control over new colonial territories limited. Power remained largely in indigenous hands, and local actors continued to drive most developments. Nonetheless, substantive changes had occurred by the late 1870s. In Europe and the United States, industrialization had accelerated, and the size and power of the state had grown. One state on the forefront, Britain, applied growing strength to a more intensified colonialism in India after suppressing a rebellion there. Russia's Great Reforms, the failure of the Tanzimat, and China's Taiping Rebellion revealed faltering empires. Even if the renewed era of overseas empire building that followed was never a story of inexorable European expansion – Japan's success showed this – by the late 1870s, several European states were positioned to maneuver globally, and they had the capital, tools, and motivations to do so.

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