

## MacKenzie-ites without borders

Sebe, Berny

*License:*

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Sebe, B 2019, MacKenzie-ites without borders: or how a set of concepts, ideas and methods went global. in S Barczewski & M Farr (eds), *The MacKenzie Moment and Imperial History: Essays in Honour of John M. MacKenzie*. Palgrave Macmillan.

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

Checked for eligibility: 17/06/2019

**General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

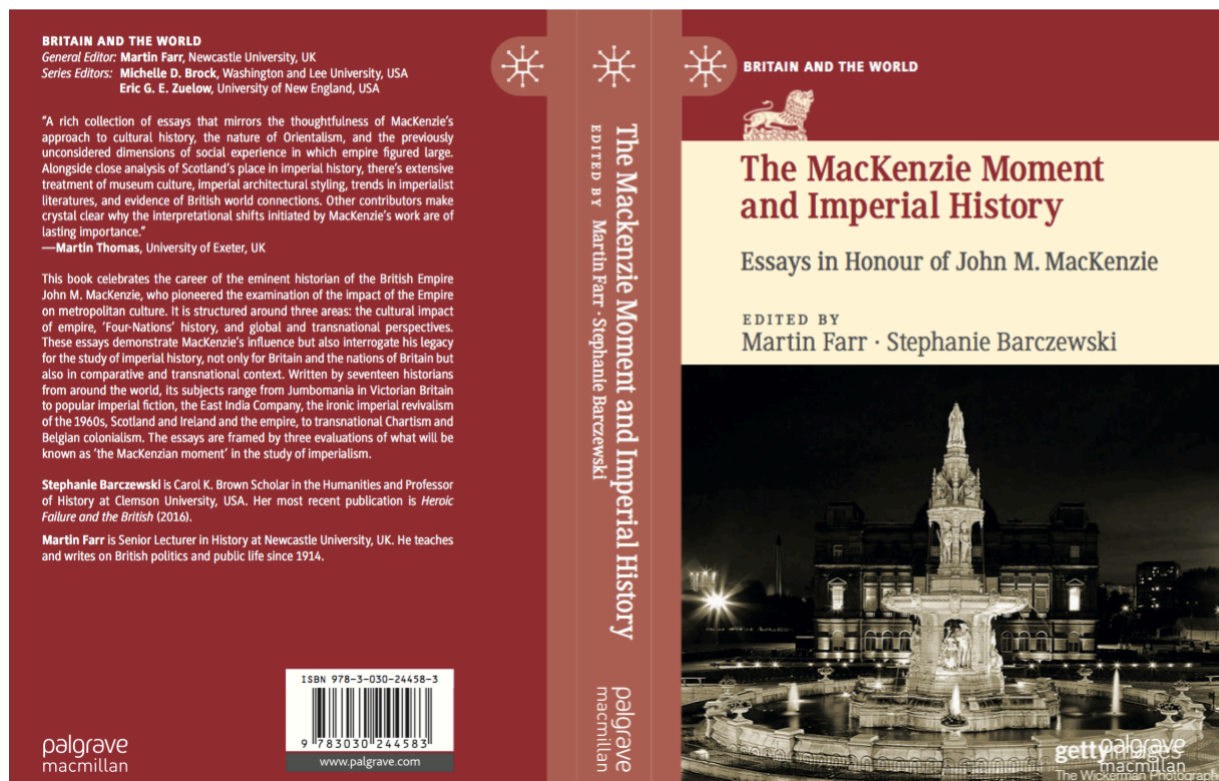
Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

**Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.



## *MacKenzie-ites without Borders: Or How a Set of Concepts, Ideas, and Methods Went Global*

Berny Sèbe

*Colonial territories were often scattered so far away from their metropole that they had a tendency to disappear beyond the horizon of the capital cities which were meant to be ruling them. A new French minister for the Colonies, Etienne Clémentel, reportedly exclaimed with astonishment upon taking charge of his ministerial functions in 1905: [Our] colonies ... I never knew we had so many!<sup>1</sup> Through successive phases of expansion, small islands or large chunks of territory had been added to what would become in the late nineteenth century the second largest empire in the world. And even the world's largest empire, on which famously the sun never set, was itself, many have argued, the result of luck much more than*

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Charles-Robert Ageron, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Gilbert Meynier, and Jacques Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale Volume II; 1914-1990* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), 7.

calculation, so much so that J. R. Seeley famously claimed that it seemed as if the British had ‘conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind’.<sup>2</sup>

It would not be too difficult to argue that the intellectual legacy of John MacKenzie followed a roughly similar pattern, with various salient concepts from his research reaching over the years the four corners of the academic world, and leaving their imprint on scholars writing and thinking in many languages -- except that, perhaps, this intellectual conquest did not take place ‘in a fit of absence of mind’. As the general editor of the Wiley-Blackwell *Encyclopaedia of Empire*, MacKenzie is well-versed in imperial strategies, and it seems as if his writings have wound their way over the years, soldiering on in some cases and conquering in others intellectual territory around the globe.<sup>3</sup> He has made a significant contribution to a vast international network of scholars and ideas who have sought to understand better the cultural dynamics sustaining and accompanying late modern imperial phenomena.

Whilst it is in the very nature of academic research to be shared internationally and to give rise to networks and exchange processes at various levels, MacKenzie’s work is distinctive because of its sheer depth of influence upon many scholars, which was consolidated through more than a hundred volumes in the Manchester University Press series *Studies in Imperialism*, of which he was the general editor from its inception until 2013. Even his committed sparring partner, Bernard Porter, never questioned MacKenzie’s intellectual clout: in his rebuttal of some of the ideas discussed here, he coined the expression ‘MacKenzie-ites’ as an echo of ‘Saidist’, which was, he hastened to add, ‘MacKenzie’s mischievous neologism’.<sup>4</sup> This new concept, albeit not meant to be entirely complimentary, is nonetheless useful to refer to the galaxy of scholars who have been inspired by the hypotheses, methods, and findings pioneered by MacKenzie. This chapter intends to offer a whistle-stop tour of some of the territories where the MacKenzie tartan has been flying, opening new avenues to historical research about empires.

---

<sup>2</sup> John R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, new edn. (London: Macmillan, 1914), 10.

<sup>3</sup> John MacKenzie, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Empire* (2016), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9781118455074/homepage/EditorsContributors.html> [accessed 5 May 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded imperialists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), ix.

### *i. Empire and the 'Cultural Turn'*

Let us go back to Minister Clémentel and his naïve observation: if such a high-ranking official could ignore so grossly the basic facts about the colonies he was meant to administer, how could the general public be expected to engage with overseas ventures? Was it even worth exploring where the colonial experience could be located in national mind-sets which had been so openly Eurocentric for so many centuries and therefore could only feel compassion at best, disdain at worst, towards the rest of the world, which was seen as still waiting to be freed from backwardness by the 'civilising mission' and its assumption of cultural superiority? Or could it be that the European public simply did not care about overseas questions?

Indeed, for a long time the very idea that possessing colonies could have been a meaningful development for European metropolitan audiences seemed alien to historians. Colonial topics were to be left to the marginal and somewhat less prestigious historians of the periphery: 'colonial' or 'imperial' historians parked on the outskirts of national grand narratives. And when such historians did venture into the territories of metropolitan cultures of empire, they often tended to overlook relevant evidence – either because of methodological oversights that led to their neglecting key sources, as we shall see later, or because the hypothesis was not tested robustly enough. Thus, Charles-Robert Ageron in his influential and pioneering study entitled *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* asserted that lobbyists tried to promote popular support for the empire, but that ultimately their efforts failed: 'colonial France' was nowhere to be found in metropolitan consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Historians of other European countries also ignored the multiple colonial connections which radiated out of, and into, the metropolises they studied. In the end, it seemed as if the colonial experience never truly affected metropolitan audiences.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it took considerable time before historians could go through a process comparable to that of French minister Clémentel and discover that the imperial experience might have 'struck back', to quote Andrew Thompson's concept.<sup>6</sup> Apart from a few exceptions that were often dismissed as the result of colonial nostalgia, the cultural histories of ex-colonies, and those of the ex-

---

<sup>5</sup> Charles-Robert Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* (Paris: French University Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow: Routledge, 2005).

metropolises, seemed bound – or condemned – to run in parallel, without many opportunities for dialogue.<sup>7</sup> Then came, in 1984, a game-changing volume: *Propaganda and Empire*, precisely at a time when old assumptions about the irrelevance of imperial matters in European cultures were being increasingly challenged in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and some authors who, whilst not reaching Said's level of fame, were beginning to contribute to a greater consideration of the modalities of the encounter between western and non-western cultures in the context of European imperialism.<sup>8</sup> Whilst MacKenzie often vocally (but courteously) disagreed with Said's interpretation, as he showed in his determined response to *Orientalism*, *Propaganda and Empire* bridged the gap in our understanding of the cultural relationship between the centre and the 'periphery', complementing Said's literary approach with a more empirical one, and taking into account the many objects and cultural products, ranging from cigarette cards to plays, pantomimes and songs, that carried an imperial message.<sup>9</sup> Thinking about the empire 'at home' would never be exactly the same thereafter, and it created the MacKenzie hallmark, which was to put culture – not necessarily with a capital 'C' – at the heart of most of his projects. This aspect of human activity, which had been so neglected in the study of imperial relations, would become the common denominator that would generate the emergence of 'MacKenzie-ites' in many academic quarters.

John MacKenzie had already had a distinguished career as a historian of Africa, based on extensive fieldwork which had been rendered easier and more effective by his being based professionally for a few years in southern Africa.<sup>10</sup> Yet his work took an entirely new turn with *Propaganda and Empire*, the success

---

<sup>7</sup> In the French case, Raoul Girardet's excellent *L'idée coloniale en France* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1972) was often presented as merely the result of the author's attachment to, and nostalgia for, the French empire.

<sup>8</sup> On authors who predated or accompanied the rise of Said's ideas, see Daniel M. Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> John M. MacKenzie, 'Analysing "Echoes of Empire" in Contemporary Context: The Personal Odyssey of an Imperial Historian', in Kalypso Nicolaidis, Berny Sèbe and Gabrielle Maas eds., *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 189-206.

of which would lead its publisher to launch an entire series dedicated to this theme. *Studies in Imperialism* is in some ways a long-term sequel to *Propaganda and Empire*. Having reached its hundredth title a few years ago, and with many more in the pipeline, it is in itself a testament to the compelling power of the view that ‘imperialism as a cultural phenomenon had as significant an effect on the dominant as on the subordinate societies’, as the series’ opening statement argues. Whilst many scholars, like the author of this chapter, were attracted to the concept of ‘imperialism and popular culture’ (the title of an edited volume by John MacKenzie, in the same series), others could find equally insightful leads into the regional and environmental dynamics of imperial expansion.<sup>11</sup> Many contributors to the series have been inspired by his ideas and methodologies, and it has been a remarkably effective intellectual shop window to conceptualise the link between metropolitan cultures and overseas expansion, from an unprecedented variety of perspectives. With many libraries outside the United Kingdom subscribing to the series, it has offered since the mid-1980s a platform to engage with some of John MacKenzie’s intellectual positions. It has developed the concept of ‘popular imperialism’ into various and complementary directions, ranging from the literary world to its more practical aspects, some of which might have remained totally unsuspected had the series not existed – such as the interplay between air travel and imperial feelings, or the multiple role played by specific commodities in the colonial encounter.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, a vast range of issues, ranging from empire and

---

<sup>11</sup> John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); and John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); *Empires of Nature and the Nature of Empires* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); and John M. MacKenzie with Nigel R. Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Gordon Pirie, *Cultures and Caricatures of British Imperial Aviation: Passengers, Pilots, Publicity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); and Gordon T. Stewart, *Jute and Empire: The Calcutta Jute Wallahs and the Landscapes of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

sexuality to missionary activity, from gender to the world of publicity, have been explored, creating the first ever cultural panorama of the cultural consequences of the imperial experience.<sup>13</sup>

This new take on the British imperial mind-set contributed to and accompanied a movement that gave renewed vigour to the study of the imperial past. The benefit of interdisciplinary dialogues between historians, literary scholars, and specialists in cultural studies, along with better communication between historians of the modern and contemporary phases of worldwide European expansion, permitted the blossoming of a novel approach, loosely termed the 'New Imperial History'. By placing the cultural experience of empire centre stage, and exploring it critically either empirically or in association with theoretical frameworks borrowed from feminism or post-colonialism, this approach deepened our understanding of the cultural side-effects of colonialism not only among the colonized, but also for the colonizing cultures themselves.<sup>14</sup> With the British Empire attracting the lion's share of historical and scholarly interest, not only as a result of the dynamism of research in the English-speaking world, but also because of its unique position as the most enduring and most extensive empire of the modern period, it could only be a matter of time before other empires would go through their own 'imperial turn', which would create what I call here a movement of 'MacKenzie-ites without borders': scholars who adapted MacKenzie's hypotheses and methods to other national case-studies, therefore extending what Stuart Ward has called the 'MacKenziean moment' to other fields and other countries, often shoving aside national academic traditions in the process.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> For a reflection on the *Studies in Imperialism* series, see Andrew S. Thompson, ed., *Writing Imperial Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For a general survey of the multiple disciplinary insights of the 'new imperial history', see Stephen Howe, ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Ward, 'The MacKenziean Moment in Retrospect (or How One Hundred Volumes Bloomed)', in Andrew S. Thompson, ed., *Writing Imperial Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 29-48.

## *ii. Exporting the 'Cultural Turn'*

A quick glance at non-Anglophone bibliographies reveals promptly that many of John MacKenzie's seminal works, above all *Propaganda and Empire* and *Popular Imperialism and the Military* (1992), have received sustained levels of attention beyond the English-speaking world.<sup>16</sup> Scholars around the world have been compelled by the intellectual novelty and broad methodological scope, of the approach to metropolitan cultures of empire pioneered in these volumes. That approach was based on solid empirical evidence (which very often included material that had been ignored in traditional 'histories from above'); contextualised with encyclopaedic knowledge; and utilised to create connections and generate new meaning between phenomena which had not hitherto been connected – especially the development of the mass-media in the metropolises, which coincided with overseas expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century. This line of interpretation has inspired many scholars abroad, and especially in continental Europe, to explore new archives in their own countries, as they search for traces of the imperial past in documents that had been neglected. Very often, the cultural palimpsest offered by contemporary cultures was there, ready to be unearthed and deciphered, but it had long remained neglected: the 'colonial layer' had been hastily buried in the wake of decolonisation, especially in cases where violent 'ends of empire' that left painful memories. With this new approach, a vast amount of material which had been lying below the archival radar of historians became worthy of interest: postcards, songs, posters, children's literature, promotional material for touristic destinations, novels, private correspondence, and collectables found their way into the corridors of history-writing, allowing for a stimulating new episode in the long process of the archaeology of knowledge, to borrow a Foucauldian concept.

Whilst the success of social history in general, and in particular 'history from below', made more acceptable the extension of legitimate historical evidence to ephemera and other cultural products which had been traditionally deemed less prestigious, in many cases the export of such practices had to overcome local resistance due to the implicit challenges to established schools of thought that such an approach posed. This was especially the case when the emphasis on cultural production, embodied in particular through the

---

<sup>16</sup> John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).



'cultural turn' in English-speaking academia, was portrayed as akin to an alien assault on national historiographies, potentially forcing a redefinition of academic subjects, methods, and canons.

Because of the worldwide reach of the English language as the contemporary *lingua franca*, most of MacKenzie's research has made its global impact via its original versions, the diffusion of which has been spread over a remarkably long time. (*Propaganda and Empire* remains in print.) This global impact was magnified by translated contributions to books published in other languages, as well as many keynote lectures around the globe that helped spread some of the ideas outlined in the original English-language books.<sup>17</sup> Some of the latter led to long-lasting contributions: for instance, a keynote lecture to a colloquium in Buenos Aires led to a Spanish-language book chapter that called for the re-establishment of the study of empire among cultural critics, social scientists, and local historians in Latin America.<sup>18</sup> Thus John MacKenzie's ideas contributed to significant historiographical developments, exporting the 'cultural turn' to other latitudes (quite literally) and inspiring its importation into local intellectual movements.

Indeed, the unwavering interest that the British Empire has attracted among historians around the world – which is understandable given its size and longevity – has been a key factor in the spread of ideas from the *Studies in Imperialism* series. For instance, in German context, *Studies in Imperialism* has become

---

<sup>17</sup> A few examples are 'Musées et impérialisme: appropriations, science et espace public bourgeois', in Fabrice Bensimon and Armelle Enders, eds., *Le Siècle Britannique: Variations sur une suprématie globale au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Sorbonne, 2012); 'Museen in Europa', in Pim den Boer, Heinz Duchhardt, George Krels, and Wolfgang Schmale, eds., *Europäische Erinnerungsorte 3: Europa und die Welt* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2012), 187-194; 'Le esposizioni imperiali in Gran Bretagna', in Sandrine Lemaire, Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boetsch, and Eric Deroo, *Zoo Umani: Dalla Venere ottentotta ai reality show* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2003), 107-117; 'Les expositions impériales en Grande-Bretagne' in Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch, Eric Deroo, and Sandrine Lemaire, eds., *Zoos Humains: de la Vénus hottentote aux reality shows* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2002), 193-202.

<sup>18</sup> John M. MacKenzie, 'Imperios del viaje: Guías de viaje británicas e imperialismo cultural en los siglos XIX y XX' in Ricardo Salvatore, ed., *Culturas Imperiales: Experiencia y representación en América, Asia y Africa* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2005), 213-41.

a natural 'go to' source for scholars of the British Empire.<sup>19</sup> In France, renewed interest in colonialism as a topic for competitive examinations in history and English studies has also attracted attention towards both MacKenzie and his series, which serve as the entry point to the complex dynamics of the British Empire. Yet, the most significant aspect of the impact and diffusion of this body of work materialized through the adaptation of its methods and hypotheses to other imperial case-studies, especially in western Europe. In particular, four aspects of MacKenzie's research have attracted the attention of scholars around the world: the concept of 'popular imperialism'; the cross-fertilizing value of historical work integrating a variety of sources to highlight the multiple dimensions of cultural and political 'propaganda'; the importance of the natural environment to understand imperial processes; and finally his sustained dialogues with other scholars, which have often received widespread publicity. We will see each of these in turn in the following pages.

The notion that the imperial experience could pervade the culture of a colonizing power to the extent that it affects its 'mind-set' is probably the concept which has grasped the imagination of the largest number of scholars out of the United Kingdom. In France, long-term resistance to post-colonial studies and its emphasis on cultural phenomena did not prevent the development of historical research that clearly echoed MacKenzie's ideas and methods.<sup>20</sup> The first volume edited by the collective of historians that would later become the ACHAC group (*Association Connaissance de l'Histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine*, or Association for the Knowledge of the History of Contemporary Africa) was published in 1993.<sup>21</sup> It paved the way for a series of edited volumes that would kick-start a heated debate about the place and meaning of the

---

<sup>19</sup> See for instance Almut Steinbach, *Sprachpolitik im Britischen Empire. Herrschaftssprache und Integration in Ceylon und den Föderierten Malaiischen Staaten* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2009), 16.

<sup>20</sup> As discussed in Nicholas Bancel, Florence Bernault, Pascal Blanchard, Ahmed Boubeker, Achille Mbembe, and Françoise Vergès, eds., *Ruptures postcoloniales* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2010), and exemplified by works such as Jean-Loup Amselle, *L'Occident décroché: enquête sur les postcolonialismes* (Paris: Stock, 2008); and Jean-François Bayart, *Les études postcoloniales un carnaval académique*, (Paris: Karthala, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Laurent Gervereau, eds., *Images et Colonies* (Paris: BDIC/Achac, 1993).

colonial past in metropolitan France, and which would culminate in a volume of almost eight hundred pages, published by the National Centre for Scientific Research.<sup>22</sup> One of the regular contributors to the group's activities has stated to the author that the idea behind this initiative was to produce a French equivalent to MacKenzie's work, at a juncture when France's colonial past was still very much in the background and needed to be brought to wider public attention, especially because of its potential political implications.<sup>23</sup> There had been a few isolated attempts to take into account the metropolitan impact of the colonial experience, but these remained the exception rather than the rule. Working from a pro-colonial perspective, Raoul Girardet had tried to identify in the early 1970s the impact of the 'colonial idea' upon the French public, which at the time was caught between the colonial hangover and the beginnings of the 'cultural turn'.<sup>24</sup> Yet, the impact of colonialism remained unexplored territory in the subsequent two decades, until ACHAC re-opened the case, this time from a radically different standpoint and inspiring a considerable amount of new research in French.<sup>25</sup> Such initiatives were also echoed in the English-speaking academic world, where the long-term impact and legacy of the colonial experience on French metropolitan culture became a subject of sustained enquiry, replicating for the other side of the Channel some of the methods applied by MacKenzie and his 'MacKenzie-ites' to the British case.<sup>26</sup> Commenting upon Chafer and Sackur's 2002 attempt to bring about this methodological transfer, Anthony Kirk-Greene observed that their volume

---

<sup>22</sup> Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, and Nicolas Bancel, *Culture coloniale en France: de la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris: CNRS, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Conversation between the author and Sandrine Lemaire, 20 January 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972).

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of the French-speaking historiography of 'French popular imperialism', see Berny Sèbe, 'Exalting imperial *grandeur*: the French empire and its metropolitan public', in John MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 19-56.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance, among the early attempts, Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *Promoting the Imperial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and Martin Evans, ed., *Empire and Culture: The French Experience, 1830-1940* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

on the promotion of the imperial idea in France presented 'first-class material to set beside John MacKenzie's brilliant British study *Propaganda and Empire* (1984)'.<sup>27</sup> The genealogy could not be clearer.

Whilst France proved to be the terrain where MacKenzie's ideas could be tried and adapted most readily because of several structural similarities (not least the size, longevity, and international significance of its colonial empire), it was not the only example. The dynamics of Belgian imperialism and its reception by the public north of the Ardennes have become much clearer thanks to the exploration of new material, resulting once again from an increased awareness of non-conventional sources which were previously neglected. The cultural mechanics that ultimately led the kingdom to rule a colony eighty times the size of its metropole have been unearthed by an avowed MacKenzie-ite.<sup>28</sup>

In Southern Europe, too, new approaches have emerged, taking on board some of the teachings of the *Studies in Imperialism* series. Whilst the reticence of the Italian academic establishment to adopt the findings and methods pioneered by cultural studies might have delayed the blossoming of an overt 'MacKenzie-ite' movement across the Alps, the importance of a socio-cultural approach to our understanding of the colonial influence of imperialism on Italian culture has filtered into the historiography, as part of research into either colonial cultures or Fascism and propaganda, which was particularly relevant since *l'Italia d'oltremare* was a key staple of the nationalist discourse in the interwar years.<sup>29</sup> Giuseppe Finaldi has pioneered an interpretation of colonialism as providing 'possible solutions to a succession of obstinate

---

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Kirk-Greene, review of Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *Promoting the Colonial Idea* and Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa*, *African Affairs* 103 (2004), 500-1.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew G. Stanard, *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism* (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> See for instance, in English, Paolo Bertella Farnetti and Cecilia Dau Novelli, eds., *Colonialism and National Identity* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015) and, by the same editors, *Images of Colonialism and Decolonisation in the Italian Media* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), or Guido Abbattista, 'Humans on Display: Reflecting on National Identity and the Enduring Practice of Living Human Exhibitions' in Guido Abbattista, ed., *Moving Bodies Displaying Nations. National Cultures, Race and Gender in World Expositions. Nineteenth to Twenty-First Century* (Trieste: EUT, 2014). Similar efforts appear to have been made in the Italian-speaking historiography, with works such as Guido Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra. Esposizioni etniche e invenzioni esotiche in Italia (1880-1940)* (Trieste, Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2013). On Fascism and propaganda, see Valeria Deplano, *L'Africa in casa: propaganda e cultura coloniale nell'Italia fascista* (Milano: Mondadori Education, 2015). With thanks to Giuseppe Finaldi for his advice on the subject.

problems that faced Italy's elites in their quest to build an ordered, viable and stable society on their terms'.<sup>30</sup> Nicola Labanca refers in his bibliography to MacKenzie's work on propaganda, which he deems of 'excellent quality', as a valuable source for understanding the discourses that legitimized a form of consensus around the imperial project.<sup>31</sup> More broadly, the study *On the Iberian peninsula, the study of imperial phenomena* has long limited itself to the early modern period, with scant interest in contemporary issues. But things are changing there too, partly thanks to the impact of British historiography. In a recent book chapter which opens with a reference to MacKenzie's concept of 'popular imperialism', Ferrán Achilés Cardona argues that late-nineteenth-century Spain, in spite of its scarce resources and correspondingly limited success in the colonial 'steeple-chase', did have a 'colonial vocation'. Although it was nowhere near the scale of British 'popular imperialism', Cardona argues, it still existed. He also observes that this phenomenon has remained mostly unnoticed, lamenting that 'in fact, the absence of the Spanish case in studies about imperialism is almost universal, in particular when it comes to Africa'.<sup>32</sup> Cardona embodies a new generation of Spanish scholars committed to taking on board some of the advances pioneered in the Manchester series. His study of the Spanish 'Africanist pedagogy' engages at length with other European case-studies, highlighting how influential MacKenzie's work and the 'Anglo-Saxon ambit' has been to the 're-writing of national histories to analyse the role of the empire in the ways of living and imagining the nation'.<sup>33</sup> And his case is not an isolated one. Writing in a Portuguese journal, but from a Spanish perspective, David Parra Monserrat opens his analysis of 'an Africanist discourse of Spanish-Arab brotherhood' in Spain from 1939 to 1956 with

---

<sup>30</sup> Giuseppe Finaldi, "The Peasants Did Not Think of Africa": Empire and the Italian State's Pursuit of Legitimacy, 1871-1945', in John MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 223.

<sup>31</sup> Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Ferran Achilés Cardona, '¿Ni imperio ni imperialismo? El imaginario nacional español y el imperialismo africanista en la España de la Restauración (c. 1880-c. 1909)', in Ferran Achilés Cardona, Ismael Saz, and Marta García Carrión, eds., *Nación y nacionalización. Una perspectiva europea comparada* (Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2013), 201-24.

<sup>33</sup> Ferran Achilés Cardona, *La narrativa del africanismo franquista: génesis y prácticas socio-educativas*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Valencia (Spain), 7.

extensive references to the study of 'practices and discourses' which contributed to developing narratives that equated national discourse with imperialist pursuits.<sup>34</sup>

One of the central tenets of the concept of 'popular imperialism' is that a vast array of propaganda material succeeded in embedding awareness of, and possibly attachment to, empire. Coinciding with an historiographical moment when the 'manufacture' of popular support and national identity was brought to the fore, MacKenzie's emphasis on propaganda has made his research relevant to many projects.<sup>35</sup> In France, Gilles Teulié's study of the representations of the Afrikaner people in Britain and France, against the backdrop of the Anglo-Boer War, relies on the analysis of complex propaganda networks, a method which owes a great debt to *Propaganda and Empire*.<sup>36</sup> In Spain, the author of a study of propaganda in democracies refers extensively to MacKenzie's theories relating to the mechanisms of the control of public opinion in the United Kingdom.<sup>37</sup> In the Netherlands, although Vincent Kuitenbrouwer has argued that 'there has been no serious attempt by Dutch historians to join the debate about the cultural aspects of the British Empire', a fact that came in stark contrast with the Dutch historiographical tradition of integrating classic interpretive models of British imperialism, his own recent work has demonstrated that the idea of 'popular imperialism' has made some inroads in the Netherlands.<sup>38</sup> Kuitenbrouwer has extensively used

---

<sup>34</sup> David Parra Monserrat, 'Africanismo e arabismo no relato histórico escolar: Espanha, 1939-1956', *História. Revista da FLUP. Porto*, fourth series, 6 (2016), 89-101.

<sup>35</sup> As exemplified by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) or Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Gilles Teulié, *Les Afrikaners et la Guerre anglo-boer (1899-1902)* (Montpellier: Université de Montpellier III Paul Valéry, 2000); and personal testimony of the author (20 February 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Hugo García Fernández, 'De Masterman a Orwell: el debate británico sobre la propaganda en democracia, 1914-1945', *Rubrica Contemporánea* 5 (2016).

<http://www.raco.cat/index.php/rubrica/article/viewFile/316667/406765> [Accessed 10 November 2018].

<sup>38</sup> Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, *War of Words: Dutch Pro-Boer Propaganda and the South African War (1899-1902)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 19. Martin Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst. Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 1996) also

MacKenzie's totalising concept of 'propaganda' for his own work on the manufacturing of Dutch public opinion against the backdrop of the South African war. This seems to be part of a growing trend, since new work about popular imperialism in the Netherlands has started to emerge in recent years, often in the form of doctoral research.<sup>39</sup>

Anticipating the growing trend towards environmental histories of empire, MacKenzie's research about empire and the natural environment (and especially the arch-imperial activity of hunting) has produced a widespread international echo as well. Examining hunting, imperialism, and conservation as part of a wider attempt to contextualise the development of environmental history, Fabien Locher and Grégory Quenet have argued that the linkages between them have subsequently generated important developments, most notably renewed interest in game and its colonial and postcolonial management.<sup>40</sup> Bernhard Ghissibl has also benefited from what he terms the 'intellectual hospitality' of MacKenzie, whose work has contributed to the development of Ghissibl's environmental history of German imperialism.<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, MacKenzie's international reputation has also been enhanced by the sustained intellectual debates in which he has been involved in throughout his career. He has engaged critically with Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, offering the benefit of his empirical approach as a corrective to the predominantly literary, theoretical, and moral perspective adopted in postcolonial studies.<sup>42</sup> Voicing some of the concerns raised by Said's essentialization of all western cultural production, MacKenzie's discussion has  

---

seems to fall within the historiographical MacKenzie-ite tradition, even if he refers to MacKenzie's work only occasionally.

<sup>39</sup> See for instance Matthijs Kuipers, *Fragmented Empire: Popular Imperialism in the Netherlands around the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, PhD Thesis, European University in Florence (2018). With thanks to Vincent Kuitenbrouwer for his input into the Dutch-speaking historiographical scene.

<sup>40</sup> Fabien Locher and Grégory Quenet, 'L'histoire environnementale : origines, enjeux et perspectives d'un nouveau chantier', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 56 (2009), 7-38.

<sup>41</sup> Bernhard Ghissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> First through an article, John MacKenzie, 'Edward Said and the Historians', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18 (1994), 9-25, and then through a full-length volume, John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

attracted widespread attention as a key contribution to the debate surrounding the circumstances and modalities of the production of western discourse about the 'Orient'.<sup>43</sup> A fitting example of the cosmopolitan echo of MacKenzie's response is offered by a Spanish-language article produced by a Moroccan scholar, who articulates his own position in dialogue with MacKenzie's engagement with Orientalism.<sup>44</sup> The other major dialogue in which MacKenzie was involved emerged in the mid-2000s, in the wake of the release of Bernard Porter's *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (2004). Their exchanges have consistently ranked among the top ten most-read items of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, and have been regularly mentioned in discussions about historiographical developments related to the prevalence of cultural phenomena associated with imperial conquest.<sup>45</sup> MacKenzie's efforts to introduce 'new approaches to culture [...] in the colonial context', as the late Chris Bayly once put it, gave rise to one of the most heated historiographical debates of the early 2000s, with worldwide echoes and resonance.<sup>46</sup>

### *iii. Some Comparisons*

---

<sup>43</sup> See for instance Cristina Almarcegui, 'El legado de Edward Said. Orientalismo y literatura comparada', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 769-770 (2014), 179-188.

<sup>44</sup> Ismail El Outmani, 'Oriente como discurso en el discurso de Occidente', *Especulo. Revista de estudios literarios*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

<http://webs.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero34/oriente.html> [Accessed 20 November 2017].

<sup>45</sup> Bernard Porter, 'Further Thoughts on Imperial Absent-Mindedness', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008), 101-117; and John M. MacKenzie, "'Comfort" and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008), 659-668; and see for instance Achilés Cardona, '¿Ni imperio ni imperialismo?', 203.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Bayly, 'Review: John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*', *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996), 361. For a discussion of MacKenzie's involvement in historiographical debates see Cherry Leonardi, 'The Power of Culture and the Cultures of Power: John MacKenzie and the Study of Imperialism', in Andrew S. Thompson, ed., *Writing Imperial Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 57-62.



An historian who leaves a theory attached to their name can be more than satisfied with their legacy. John MacKenzie has far exceeded this threshold: as we have seen, his ideas have appealed far beyond English-speaking academia. Yet, the global trajectory of his intellect is still in progress. Dwelling upon his Anglo-Scottish roots, he has been able to develop a subtle understanding of the internal dynamics underlying British imperial expansion, paying particular attention to the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom.<sup>47</sup> The 'four nations' theory is bound to produce vigorous offshoots, in particular at a time when the nature of the United Kingdom is so much under scrutiny.

By examining four 'national' strands within what had generally been perceived as a homogeneous pattern of 'British' imperialism, MacKenzie has shown the pertinence of comparative approaches, at both the micro and macro levels, that is infra-national and transnational. Although his focus is the British Empire, we have seen that the intellectual framework which he developed in *Propaganda and Empire* (1984) and its sequels received a global reception, with many historians of former European imperial powers testing the concept of 'popular imperialism' in non-British contexts. As this unearthing of hitherto-ignored evidence was taking place, it became more and more evident that the colonial experience had contributed to shape national identities, especially since the age of the so-called New Imperialism in the late nineteenth century coincided with the development of nation-states around Europe. With *European Empires and the People* (2009), John MacKenzie deployed for the first time the concept of 'popular imperialism' in a comparative framework, bringing in the cases of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy alongside that of Britain. The volume consolidated the spread of MacKenzie-ite theories, by demonstrating the applicability of some of the frameworks developed for the British Empire to non-British European contexts and offering at the same time an unprecedented comparative framework to reflect on 'imperial mind-sets' across Europe. France, to be sure, had long seemed the natural candidate to apply MacKenzie's theories about popular imperialism outside of British context, but the volume is notable for its inclusion of case-studies which had

---

<sup>47</sup> See for instance John MacKenzie, 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire', *History Compass* 6 (2008), 1244-1263.

been previously neglected.<sup>48</sup> For instance, the connection between Italy's entry into modernity and its colonial experience has long been overlooked.<sup>49</sup> Giuseppe Finaldi's contribution to *European Empires and the People* demonstrates that although it was relatively short-lived, the country's colonial ventures remain highly meaningful as they unfolded in the wake of political unification and were instrumental in the 'long and arduous process of turning peasants into Italians'.<sup>50</sup> As for Germany, as it had been stripped of its colonies after the Great War, until recently it did not seem worth exploring its colonial past. Bernhard Ghissibl, however, proves otherwise.<sup>51</sup> The relevance of smaller continental countries to understand European imperialisms appears clearly as well. These examples could take the form of long-standing imperial traditions experiencing a revival under a different guise in the late nineteenth century, as was the case in the Netherlands, or the highly personalized project of the 'Congo Free State', used in Belgium as a way of 'learning to love Leopold'.<sup>52</sup> *European Empires and the People* shows that it makes sense to talk about 'popular responses to imperialism' in the case of these countries too.

The volume has opened new avenues of research and new avenues for John MacKenzie's ideas to spread. A case in point is that of Spain. Although the trans-Atlantic dimension of early modern Spanish

---

<sup>48</sup> Berny Sèbe, 'Exalting Imperial Grandeur: The French Empire and its Metropolitan Public', in John MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 19-56.

<sup>49</sup> The review article by John A. Davis, 'Remapping Italy's Path to the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Modern History* 66 (1994), 291-320, takes such a 'metro-centric' approach.

<sup>50</sup> Finaldi, "The peasants did not think of Africa", 225.

<sup>51</sup> Bernhard Ghissibl, 'Imagination and Beyond: Cultures and Geographies of Imperialism in Germany, 1848-1918', in John MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 158-194.

<sup>52</sup> Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, 'Songs of an Imperial Underdog: Imperialism and Popular Culture in the Netherlands, 1870-1960', in John MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 90-123; and Matthew Stanard, 'Learning to Love Leopold: Belgian Popular Imperialism, 1830-1960', in John MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 124-157.

history had been explored by historians such as J. H. Elliott, historians of modern Spain never really connected with the 'second' Spanish empire.<sup>53</sup> Although the latter was certainly less impressive than its first iteration, which might explain why it was neglected as an element of Iberian modernity in the twentieth century, it remained meaningful to make sense of contemporary Spain, if only because the loss of all remaining colonies in the wake of the Spanish-American War of 1898 sent shockwaves through the metropole that turned it into a national trauma, and also because Spanish Morocco (conquered as late as in 1912) made Francisco Franco's *coup d'état* not only possible but also, ultimately, successful.<sup>54</sup> Spanish-speaking historiography is increasingly addressing this question, in part under the influence of MacKenzie's ideas and hypotheses, the reach of which has been dramatically extended as a result of his efforts to transnationalize them.<sup>55</sup> This example alone demonstrates that *European Empires and the People* asked questions that are meaningful beyond the six case studies it initially considered. Indeed, Spain and Portugal feature in the analytical framework of the follow-on volume, co-edited by the author and Matthew Stanard and entitled *Decolonising Europe? Popular Responses to the End of Empire*, which extends MacKenzie's ideas regarding popular reception to the decolonisation and post-colonial periods across Europe.

In examining the multiple echoes around the world of John MacKenzie's multi-faceted work on the cultural and environmental consequences of empire, this chapter has offered glimpses into the processes that led his ideas to shape new approaches to the colonial experience. In so doing, it has also touched upon why such a radical re-appraisal (which broke away from so many traditional Eurocentric interpretations and created hitherto neglected connections between metropolises and peripheries) proved to be remarkably popular among

---

<sup>53</sup> See John H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain: 1469–1716*, new edn. (London: Penguin, 2002); and, for example, Raymond Carr, ed., *Spain: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> As identified by Tomás García Figueras, *La acción de España en torno al 98 (1860-1912), De la crisis de la política africana (1898) al protectorado de Marruecos (1912)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1966), and more recently by Sebastian Balfour, *The End of the Spanish Empire, 1898-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> Ferran Achilés Cardona, '¿Ni imperio ni imperialismo?', 203.

historians. This was particularly true of the new generations emerging in the late 1990s and beyond, not only in Britain but also in the rest of the worldwide scholarly community, spinning off into intellectual territories that led to the emergence of what I call here 'MacKenzie-ites without borders'.

The success of MacKenzie's ideas reflected broader social and political changes that enhanced the relevance of 'histories from below'. In particular, the timeliness of his analysis allowed him to partake in wider intellectual developments, such as the increasing popularity of cultural history, benefiting from more flexible methodological approaches that made it possible to engage with a number of sources which had always been available, but had not been deemed worth engaging with in previous decades. The 'cultural turn' offered a fresh departure after the overwhelming domination of diplomatic and administrative histories, and MacKenzie's work features prominently in this effort to reach a more comprehensive understanding of complex human phenomena such as imperialism. To say that it re-energized the discipline as a whole is probably an under-statement. More prosaically, the worldwide reach of his ideas and concepts, spanning more than thirty years of scholarly work, was demonstrated vividly on the occasion of the symposium he convened in Old Bank House in the summer of 2009, with scholars coming from Australia, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United States to discuss popular reactions to, and engagement with, the colonial experience. That this symposium led to *European Empires and the People*, a book that expanded further the applicability of his theories, which stands as a testament to MacKenzie's intellectual inspiration and endurance and to the global reach of his ideas.