This collection draws on a range of methodologies and approaches to explore the similarities, differences and overlaps between the contemporary debates on international development and humanitarian intervention and the historical artefacts and strategies of Empire.

The parallels between the language of nineteenth-century liberal imperialism and the humanitarian interventionism of the post-Cold War era are striking. The American military, both in Somalia in the early 1990s and in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, used ethnographic information compiled by British colonial administrators. Are these interconnections accidental curiosities or more elemental? The contributors to this book articulate the belief that these comparisons are analytically revealing. From the language of moral necessity and conviction, the design of specific aid packages, the devised forms of intervention and governmentality, through to the life-style, design and location of NGO encampments, the authors seek to account for the numerous and often striking parallels between contemporary international security, development and humanitarian intervention, and the logic of Empire.

This book will be of great interest to all those concerned with understanding the historical antecedents and wider implications of today's emergent liberal interventionism, and the various logics of international development.

Mark Duffield is Professor of Development Politics at the University of Bristol; Vernon Hewitt is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Bristol


EMPIRE, DEVELOPMENT
& COLONIALISM
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The Past in the Present

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Introduction

MARK DUFFIELD
& VERNON HEWITT

This collection of essays resulted, in the main, from a workshop held at the University of Bristol, in September 2007, entitled ‘Development and Colonialism: The Past in the Present’. It was instigated by the Department of Politics’ international development research group, and sought to explore interests in the similarities, and differences, between contemporary debates on socio-economic development, humanitarian intervention and aid, and the historical artefacts of European empire. It consciously sought to include historians and students of politics, and encouraged a broad eclecticism in terms of methodology and approach. Some of the papers presented here were given to a seminar series, which paralleled the workshop, having been generously funded by the Institute for Advanced Studies.

Comparing and contrasting differing historical periods with an apparently ‘unproblematic present’ is fraught with obvious risks. This is particularly true of comparisons involving colonialism and imperialism. The terms themselves are contested and difficult to contextualise, and historical periodisation is premised on the subjective interests of the student of politics and not necessarily the rigour of the historian. This difference in professional temperament was a noticeable feature of the workshop itself. Historians are far more cautious about embarking on macro-temporal comparisons, being concerned with specific, often singular, events reasoned within a narrow context. For them the apparent relevance of Empire to contemporary world politics is frequently rendered polemical, facile or tautologous, and is usually premised on a mistaken verisimilitude. The British may well have used the term ‘mad Mullah’ with reference to Somaliland, and articulated the need for British intervention by demonising Islamic clerics and defending ‘civilisation’ in ways that are strikingly familiar to a contemporary Western audience, but it does not follow that the causes or results of intervention there, or in Somalia, or Afghanistan, or Iraq, are the same or have the same consequence. Other striking comparisons come to light in the following chapters. Many commentators have noted the similarities between NGO activities and nineteenth-century missionaries, and have sought to compare a generation of young Western ‘volunteers’ with the background and interests of their predecessors. Does this reveal anything about the emergence, impact or consequence of contemporary activism and NGO behaviour? Their links to the international order, the Western state, or their own social background? Or are these parallels merely of interest?

Finally, is it more than a question of irony that, for the undertaking of Operation Restore Hope, the US used information on Somalia compiled at the time of its British
administration? Or, as Douglas Johnson discusses, that attempts to demarcate the Southern Sudan follow precedents laid down by the so-called Southern policy of the British? Or that, in its planning for the reconstruction of the Iraqi state, the US State Department utilises concepts and policies that would have been profoundly familiar to the British, active in much the same area after World War I, and driven (apparently) by much the same designs? More centrally, to what extent is current developmental aid and practice, involving social, cultural and economic ‘conditionalities’, premised on the same liberal project made manifest by nineteenth-century imperial and colonial strategies? If not, how and in what ways are they different?

The basic premise of the workshop, and the main contribution made by this book, is to articulate the belief that these comparisons are not just anecdotal but analytically revealing. From the language of moral necessity and conviction, the design of specific aid packages, through to the devised forms of intervention and governmentality, and finally to the lifestyle, design and location of NGO encampments, the authors seek to account for the numerous, often striking parallels between contemporary issues of international security, humanitarian aid and international developmental assistance and the logic and form of Empire. Some are more sceptical than others, and some are more inclined to stress the risk of ‘misrepresenting’ the past and reducing the complex aetiologies of Empire to fit current positions or postures. Others note the dangers of distorting the present, and simplifying the ways that contemporary uses of Empire fit with ideas of sovereign states, multinational flows of capital and the forces of globalisation. Warnings against forced comparisons are well taken. Even at the height of the European empires, attempts to reduce their form and logic to economic necessity (if not the stark needs of capital) underplayed the role of political, cultural and liberal processes in compelling and justifying external intervention. They also, as often as not, downplayed their contemporary debates over the need for Imperial withdrawal and isolationism, as articulated in the 1840s, and then briefly in the post-1880 period. Yet others note that critics of Empire were ever buried within the Imperial project itself, often contesting not the ends but the means, to achieve the objectives of the civilising mission, both at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ – spatial nodes that Empire proved capable of transgressing and redefining.

Strong parallels exist between the arguments of the 1840s (‘what is Empire for?’) and current debates about the need for ‘Western’ or humanitarian intervention, the need for a social turn, and concern as to where the limits of liberty lie in a world order premised on anxieties over migration, terrorism, economic competition and social upheaval. Does intervention solve these or cause these? A majority of the contributors here conclude that an analytical understanding of these parallels raises serious, if not controversial, questions about the causes and the consequences that follow from current humanitarian and liberal interventionism, and that, in many startling ways, such interventionism represents the continuation of governance articulated and explored by European empires. While specific changes to the international system and the capacities of international organisations since World War II may have reconfigured some of these techniques, they remain embedded in the same assumptions and work towards very much the same outcomes. Intriguingly, such a close fit between the long nineteenth century and the relatively ‘short’ twentieth century condemns the emancipatory language of twenty-first-century development (such as empowerment, democracy and ‘improvement’) by stressing the controlling and coercive architecture of imperialism. In the language of post-development, such intervention creates the context in which it is justified and sustained. It is the problem posing as the solution.
However, by the same token, the close fit also reveals a more progressive light on aspects of European imperialism – which often strove to engineer a social turn premised on universal notions of citizenship and genuine commitment to improvement, despite pre-occupations of race, cultural hierarchy and security. The contradictions within the liberal project live on.

The Book

Several of the chapters in this book set out explicitly to compare and contrast nineteenth-century techniques of imperial and colonial governmentality with techniques and technologies of humanitarian intervention and development. Around the general conviction that colonialism is a direct relative of contemporary debates on development, others explore specific facets of the relationship within liberalism between freedom and security, universalism and ‘exceptionalism’ either through the works of specific liberal thinkers, such J.S. Mill, events such as slave revolts and forms of native administration, or contemporary theoretical turns inspired by post-structural and postcolonial studies.

Aspengren’s chapter on early twentieth-century Bombay examines in detail how colonial forms of governance shifted from minimalist, repressive control towards one that engaged with a vocabulary of social reform. Looking at issues such as housing for the working class, sanitation and education, Aspengren argues that colonial reform and social progress were intimately related to British ideas of Empire, and explores how the ‘turn to the social’ within liberalism saw no immediate contradictions between ‘human progress’ and restrictions on the political participation of Indians within the Raj. As with many contributors to this volume, Aspengren notes the universalism implicit within the ideas of social improvement, and in calls for extending the role of the state to provide relief from the vagaries of industrialised urban society. In seeking to establish the ‘minimum opportunity for the development of human personality’, British colonial policies both mirrored, and indeed, anticipated the social turn within the metropolis. Liberalism’s reformist and progressive agenda was not limited to Britain, but was ‘compelled’ through social activism to extend itself throughout the Empire, and indeed to wherever British power prevailed. Yet, the contradictions between empowerment and constraint, social improvement and representation, often provoked a return to coercive government, especially when the colonial authorities could not sustain the distinction between ‘devising and enacting’ social legislation and direct political participation. By the mid-1920s the social turn within the liberal conception of Empire was returning to a more repressive view of social order, but significantly the contradictions – and the dynamics they sustained – continued towards de-colonisation, resurfacing at critical moments in the Raj’s slow dissolution.

Johnson’s chapter, focusing on the relationship between ‘ethnic’ territories and national development in the Sudan, looks at the continuities between British colonial practices in the Sudan under the Condominium, subsequent attempts to map ethnic boundaries onto territories within a sovereign state, and the current tenuous Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Sudan which, while allowing the non-Muslim South to hold a referendum by 2011, does not prevent the ‘national state’ redefining the Southern border in ways to exclude it from valuable resources – notably minerals and oil. Johnson argues that such a process is made possible by the legacies of separate, native administration that sought to shield the South from
Northern interests but actually lent itself to excluding the South from national development strategies. The apparent boundary, never as clearly defined or as ‘obvious’ as colonial practice implied, was politicised through British mediation over land rights and usage between competing tribal groups that changed ideas of provincial space by creating alliances between British administrators and local elites and subsequent nationalist parties after independence. Colonial expediency preserved a separate boundary that could nonetheless be manipulated at will. There is thus, for Johnson, an immediate parallel between Britain’s ‘southern policy’, the isolation of the South after independence, and the failure of nationalist development and the civil war. Yet ironically, the CPA seeks to reinstate such a boundary as part of the solution to the conflict.

David Williams and Tom Young, along with Vernon Hewitt and Paul Kelemen, all present comparisons between aspects of contemporary development theory and practice and specific imperial socio-economic and political policy. Williams and Young set out a compelling case for a ‘longue durée’ on the liberal project, mapping ideas of social progress articulated by late nineteenth-century empires onto the ideologies of international development encountered after World War II, despite the formal end of Empire and the emergence of international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These apparent differences mask enormous continuities. Here the language of the civilising mission is reconfigured into contemporary ideas on managing and imposing development and social change, ‘at a distance’ through conditionality and the role and intervention of outside agencies, professional bodies and non-state actors. The logic of social change here is derived from colonialism, which is in turn derived from the language of nineteenth-century paternalistic liberalism and the associated ideas of human progress. The British empire, like the contemporary ‘development business’, was global, contained a number of non-state actors as ‘experts’ and ‘advocates’, and was in itself de-centred, highly pluralistic and heterodox.

While, for Williams and Young, a progressive commitment towards social engineering was combined and in tension, with more conservative strategies of preservation (such as indirect rule), Hewitt argues that the inter-war crisis within the British Empire over finance and security led to a distinct move towards accepting the inevitability of social change in the colonies (through urbanisation, trade and migration) and a commitment to accommodate it, both as a way of shoring up British power and, as Williams and Young argue, articulating and defending the ‘moral purpose’ of having an Empire at all. The parallels between the British use of the term ‘good government’, its expansive trajectory away from issues of ‘shoe-string’ financial solvency towards creating institutions for local (and ultimately) national government, and the World Bank’s use of the term from 1997 onwards, are striking, despite the obvious change to the international context (both institutional and normative) marked by the end of Empire.

Key turns in the language of Empire, away from ‘native authorities’ and indirect rule towards concepts of good government, local development boards and an enhanced role for the state in education mark a distinct transformation in the ways that liberalism sought to reconcile the responsibilities of trusteeship in Africa with economic decline in the metropolis and growing international criticism of colonial policy. Kelemen, like Hewitt, stresses the importance of Fabian and socialist ideas that saw the ‘disintegrating effects of capitalism’ compel the reinvention of social and collectivist solutions, within Britain, and through the works of radical liberals and Labour Party officials, throughout the colonial Empire. Kelemen reveals how left-wing
and radical critiques on Empire were premised not on whether the Empire should be abandoned, but on how it should be governed, and how it could achieve its goals. Radical thinkers from within government, and increasingly within international organisations like the League of Nations, missionaries and, importantly, international research bodies (like the Rowntree Trust and the Rhodes Foundation), funded critical research that pointed out the failure of successive British governments to defend Africans from the erosion of their ‘traditional life’ and prepare them for the modern world.

Such critiques provided the context in which the inter-war debates on Empire focused on peasant economies, the tensions between peasants, settlers and traders, the role of the state, and the relationship between capitalism, democracy and colonial reform. The influences of Lord Hailey, Arthur Creech Jones and Margery Perham all worked within a tactical acceptance that the moral purpose of Empire was in ‘modernising’ and ‘transforming’ society towards a universal way of life. Failure to see the project through would undermine the security of the Empire, impoverish the peasants and generate regional (and global) instability. The imbrications between security, humanitarianism and order are again strikingly contemporary. What these closely related chapters reveal is not just the broad genealogy between the social turn within liberal Empire, ideas on ‘colonial’ development, and current interests on civil society, social capital and intervention in so-called developing (or ‘peripheral’) societies. They also reveal an almost identical sequencing of types of different governmentality within the periods themselves, from control ‘at a distance’, models of ‘self-reliance’ for what were deemed self-producing populations, and finally annexation and direct administration.

With specific reference to Africa, Williams and Young note that social transformation ‘at a distance’ defined imperial strategy prior to the formal acquisition of territory from the 1880s onwards, and then again during the 1980s under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Under the influence of market-based ‘solutions’ that, through international conditionality, disciplined state behaviour without physical coercion, Western agencies had no need for a formal presence. Yet as SAPs became subject to domestic and international controversy, the shift towards more overt interventionist strategies began, involving a variety of actors and agencies. This trend towards enhanced humanitarian intervention was accelerated in the wake of 9/11, just as, arguably enhanced concerns over European security sparked the shift towards formal annexation in the late nineteenth century. Just as Aspengren illustrated how the shift away from the ‘social’ back to the ‘coercive’ was a function of the wider anxieties within liberalism about order, several contributors to this volume reveal the extent to which shifts in the nature of governmentality – direct or ‘at a distance’ – are a function of the same concerns and fears playing out in the liberal imagination. Yet there is an additional irony here, noted by Keleman and many contributors in the context of contemporary development debates: so pervasive is the liberal project that it engulfs and often compromises criticisms and alternatives. Indeed, they become, if not well guarded, manifestations of the project itself.

Sheldon’s chapter presents a series of parallels between British colonial thinking on India and contemporary international development theories and strategies of intervention. Focusing on poverty and famine, Sheldon shows how the apparent natural ‘propensity’ for India to suffer from famine justified the very colonial presence that caused it. Looking at the emergence of colonial development theory in the context of orientalist and, initially, mercantilist ideas on European land and power, Sheldon underscores the links with classical political economy, the debates and contradictions...

Introduction
within liberalism over regulating markets and free trade, as well as revealing the extraordinary involvement between many key economic thinkers and British policy in India. Were the poor to be exposed to the vagaries of the market for their own good, or were they helpless in the face of British modernity because they lacked the necessary rationality to respond to market forces? Could they be provided with this rationality, or merely abandoned to their own devices? Would British intervention in the form of famine codes be adequate, or would it cause widespread distortions in economic activity? Sheldon notes how these debates echoed contemporary debates within neo-liberalism over the role between free markets and provisions for the poor, liberal and authoritarian government, and have obvious links with much so-called post-development thinking that sees ‘developmental’ intervention as the cause of contemporary poverty and not as a process capable of eliminating it.

Duffield’s chapter explores the parallels that can be drawn between the current discourse on fragile states and earlier colonial debates on native administration and the concept of indirect rule. Noting the recent shift within the language of intervention from ‘failed’ states to fragile states, Duffield argues that fragile-state discourse, like native administration, is based upon the principle of tailoring the mechanisms of government to suit existing social conditions. Whereas native administration was concerned with devolving administrative tasks according to the cultural development of the tribe, reconstructing fragile states requires a simplification of the tools of economic management. In both cases, the devolved responsibilities function as evolutionary stepping-stones; as the tribe or fragile-state incumbents master one task, more demanding responsibilities can be added. In both cases, the devolution of tasks operates as a developmental mechanism encouraging the institutional maturity and eventual self-government of the tribe or fragile state. At the same time, they are both securitised. Native administration attempted to mobilise the rural population against the forces of urban nationalism. Fragile states, on the other hand, are important sites within the West’s external sovereign frontier and the struggle against political instability and global terrorism.

Merefield sets up a series of theoretical perspectives through which to study a moment of crisis within the Victorian liberal empire, namely, the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865. He explores the tensions within liberalism as it sought to incorporate emancipated slaves into the liberal world of security, individual liberty and social mobility, and how utilitarian and liberal ideas of government perceived and debated the issues, especially the conduct of the Governor, Edward Eyre. Utilising concepts such as ‘surplus population’, and Foucault’s theories on governmentality and biopolitics, Merefield offers a critique of liberal strategies that promoted the abolition of slavery as progress, order and human development within the confines of a racial view that saw African society as backward and incapable of rational acts. The stress here is again on a series of contradictions, between the rational and violent body, between the small ex-slave free holding population, removed from the direct coercion of the plantation system, and plantation elites that needed cheap surplus labour to sustain the economic benefits of Empire for the metropolitan economy.

Drawing again on J. S. Mill, Merefield is interested in looking at the limits to freedom within a liberal ideology that sees the tutelage of more progressive social systems and bodies over less developed ones as justifying, during crisis and emergency, coercive action to compel (and defend) a liberal way of life. Moreover, these crises are endemic to the project itself and not, as the liberal imagination presents them, sporadic and exceptional. In conclusion, Merefield draws parallels with contemporary debates over immigration policy, international development strategies and the conduct of foreign
policy, especially with reference to international development and intervention. While overt racial hierarchies (between irrational Africans and rational Europeans) have been eroded, they have been replaced by hierarchies of different ‘zones’ or types of states that experience these same contradictions. There is an obvious point here between Duffield’s discussion on fragile states as an ‘indefinite’ holding ground for ‘different’ societies not yet able to prove their right to be included ‘within the frontier’, and Merefield’s portrayal of the emancipated body of the slave.

Time and time again, in different contexts and made with differing degrees of emphasis, contributors to this book point to the basic flaw – running throughout the liberal project – as constituting the assertion, and then denial, of universal emancipation. This is a basic preoccupation of many post-structural and postmodern accounts of colonialism, humanitarian intervention, and development. Agencies and structures associated with extending liberty frequently (inevitably?) define it within the context of security and the fear of the other, or support illiberal outcomes. In his chapter entitled “Conflict-Sensitive” Aid and Making Liberal Peace’, Nadarajah also considers the paradoxical outcomes that result from well-meaning interventions into civil wars and areas of instability. With reference to Sri Lanka, and in particular the post-2002 ceasefire period, Nadarajah looks at how the laudable attempts by West-led donor states to shape their involvement in conflictual situations, involving so-called ‘conflict-sensitivity’ codes of practice, end up following a logic that drives the source of conflict itself. Associating current donor activity with the wider literature on the ‘liberal peace’, and the claimed links between poverty and conflict, Nadarajah argues that donors bring their own subjective views of the causes of the conflict to the fore, seek to facilitate the local outcomes they favour, and ultimately support state-based sovereignty as the preferred solution. In doing so, donors disregard the contribution that the modern state, or the specific configuration of the state itself, makes to the genesis and continuation of conflict. Nadarajah echoes Ayesha Jalal’s keen observation that the causes of conflict in so-called third world or ‘peripheral’ states are not so much ethnicity and violent social pluralism, but the logic of the Westphalian state itself, imposed by a global liberal project and now supported by voluntary advocates of the liberal peace. International aid and development is thus a key tool of governmentality in the periphery, despite the argument that it is serving to bring about or sustain the conflicts used to justify its presence.

Patricia Noxolo’s chapter looks at the ways in which NGOs have become increasingly involved in networks that define and practise humanitarian aid and development as an aspect of securitisation, working alongside states and other international structures, to effectively ‘contain’ displaced people in spatially defined territories exterior to the metropolis. How are these trends to be critiqued, and how best to comprehend the view of NGOs themselves? Like Merefield, Noxolo utilises Foucault’s ideas on governmentality, especially his emphasis on the importance of historicising discourses through time, but in a very novel way associates them with the works of Wilson Harris, a literary critic and writer concerned with the emancipation of slavery and the unique hybridity of Caribbean culture. Noxolo is concerned to show how the politics of emancipation sought to deny the agency of former slaves by seeking to represent (and control) them, and reflected emergent racial anxieties and fears of ‘real’ liberty in seeking to control their bodies. There are striking parallels between Noxolo’s and Merefield’s chapters. Methodologically, Noxolo defends such an apparently free association across time and space on the grounds that it casts light on the rise and function of NGOs, but more radically on the contemporary re-shaping of the notions of ‘universal’ freedom and how it is to be achieved. Like Merefield, Noxolo is
interested in the limits to liberty within the liberal project itself, and like Duffield, these limits are reached at the sovereign frontier in zones of ‘fragile’ states where communities are in need of guidance and control.

Comparison between Empire and development across a whole range of actors and agencies and narratives points consistently to convergence around a similar political agenda, or indeed, in Biccum’s chapter, the wholesale continuity of history, despite recent and sustained attempts to posit a ‘rupture’ with the past and reconfigure current strategies of power and development as ‘new’, let alone successful. Lisa Smirl offers an intriguing comparison between colonial life and the spatial geography of the ‘colonial’ administrator, and the role and experiences of NGO workers deployed in current disaster relief and humanitarian intervention. Making extensive use of the current ‘spatial turn’ within the social sciences, Smirl takes issue with ‘the perceived ethical neutrality of post-disaster intervention’ and points out the similarities between such intervention and the spatial and material practices of colonialism. She concentrates on the construction and reorganisation of space within the humanitarian imaginary. In particular, and touching on issues raised by other writers, she focuses on the mobility of NGO workers from Northern global networks within the disaster area, their separation from the ‘native’ quarters, and the containment of the indigenous population itself. Architectural designs reflect status and power between NGO workers and their organisations, and between the local inhabitants and the volunteers. Again, the implications of such comparisons, between, in this case, specifically Anglo-Indian colonial experiences and humanitarian intervention, are to emphasise the limited or bounded nature of such international intervention and, through this, the proliferation of identities and images of the ‘other’ – people outside the compounds and hotels, people who are empowered but also victimised.

Uma Kothari utilises a similar methodology to Smirl, focusing on the spatiality of colonial and postcolonial power and discourse. Comparing the performative and discursive imaginary of former British colonial service officers alongside the contemporary developmental ‘professional’. Kothari explores the continuities – and discontinuities – between colonial practice and developmental interventions. This leads her to the conclusion that, despite decolonisation, such interventions represent not so much an epochal break with Empire, but a reconfiguration of many of the same ideas, in the same spaces, reinforced by many of the same rituals with the same peoples. Kothari looks at the social class behind colonial recruitment and the contemporary international voluntary community, but she is keen to explore how memories, images and experiences are interpreted through what she refers to as ‘culturally located’ knowledge, especially defined by the ‘production, acquisition, subordination and settlement of space’ (Kothari, citing Said). The productions and performances of colonial civil servants in ‘distant’ and ‘exotic’ spaces constructed not just such a cultural territory that needed to be governed, but a ‘homeland’ – an ex-pat nationalism – which constituted Britishness.

In contrast to NGOs and international experts, this underlying dynamic between ‘foreign’ space and nationalism is underplayed, although not necessarily absent. Loyalties to the institutions themselves (the World Bank, the UK Department for International Development or smaller organisations) – or to a globalising ‘West’ – are less compelling and more generally weaker. Moreover, Kothari notes that voluntary organisations need not so much a ‘country expert’ as a generalist administrator, and that the short-term intensity of most aid interventions detracts from a strong sense of ‘belonging’ or ‘knowing’ the country, a prominent feature of so many ex-pat tropes. Nonetheless, commonalities remain – a shared ‘cultural knowledge’ that draws on
colonial images of nobless oblige and adventure, and a shared class basis of a middle professional class ‘bored’ with materiality. Like Smirl, Kothari notes the enclavish nature of spatial practices associated with development projects and humanitarian intervention, and the colonial compound and the bungalow. She concludes that many of the cultural experiences associated with the performance and practice of the voluntary aid worker have ‘travelled over colonial space’ and have been merely re-worked in the postcolonial period, ‘belying epochal historical periodisations that conjure up a clear disjuncture between colonial and development eras’.

The image of a historical disjunction or rupture lies at the heart of April Biccum’s chapter, which eschews a specific comparison between Imperialism and development, and explicitly sets out to theorise Empire as a form of politics, central to the nineteenth century, but also of continued relevance to the politics of developmental practice in the early twenty-first century. Biccum thus sets out to theorise ‘historical continuity’ rather than the discontinuities represented by decolonisation, the emergence of an international system of sovereign states, and the concept of universal rights. Colonial history and Empire become not so much marginal to an understanding of contemporary politics and development, as central. Their apparent marginality is the product of an attempt, through a shift in vocabulary, to represent ‘contemporary’ humanitarian intervention, poverty reduction, the use of civil society as something ‘new’, something qualitatively different from the imperial past. This representation of ‘contemporaneity’ is, however, in crisis within academic disciplines such as International Relations and Development Studies. How to reclaim Empire in such a way that if critiques current development thinking (the ‘failed state’, ‘poverty-as-degeneracy’) without re-narrating Empire as the solution to the crisis itself? In surveying the contributions that post-structural and postcolonial studies can make in resolving this crisis, Biccum also notes that there are other theorists, notably neoliberal conservatives such as Niall Ferguson, Samuel Huntington and Adam Roberts, who are narrating their own historical continuities with Empire and the liberal project. For Biccum, not only ‘is development not distinct from Empire, it bears significant threads of continuity which are masked by a complex shift in vocabulary and the persistent narration of historical rupture’.

Specification Liberal Colonialism

So how and in what ways can the continuities and discontinuities debated here be summed up? Is there a collective vision or theory within these chapters that convincingly links liberal interventionism through Empire with contemporary forms of humanitarian aid and development? Colonialism and development do not, at first sight, sit together easily or lend themselves to comparison. For many, they are antithetical. Colonialism, for example, usually suggests violent annexation, racial dictatorship and gross exploitation (Patel and McMichael 2004; Sylvester 2004). These markers of excess are precisely what development, with its emphasis on voluntarism, empowerment and betterment, measures itself against and uses to establish its claim to difference and authenticity. The colonial project, however, was broader than its founding violence and maintenance through martial law. While often overlooked, and more evident in the British and Dutch empires than elsewhere (Furnivall 1948; Arendt [1951]; Mehta 1999), it also had an educative or liberal face. Indeed, in terms of colonialism’s overall maintenance and most cogent forms of public defence, it was inseparable from essentially liberal, indeed, developmental forms of justification. From
this perspective, colonialism involved a ‘dual mandate’ in which the rational development of a colony’s economy and natural resources was synonymous with the social and political progress of its people (Lugard [1922]). If a colonial past is recognisable within a developmental present, and vice versa, what is being compared is this specifically liberal form of colonial governance.

As a design of power, liberalism is notoriously difficult to isolate and pin down (Jahn 2007). It usually reveals itself in the form of a response to the problems it encounters. It is as if, without such difficulties, liberalism would have no real existence. Liberalism constantly dissolves, for example, into problems of poverty, ignorance and social breakdown. These conditions, however, are not, strictly speaking, external to it. Liberalism itself has chosen them, given them meaning and called them forth. Did colonised or Third World peoples, for example, know they were ‘backward’ or ‘underdeveloped’ until they were told so by those offering help and solutions? Rather than backwardness or underdevelopment being a separate, pre-existing condition, it is constitutive of liberalism itself. Attempting to excavate a liberal colonialism from the rubble of decolonisation is important for several reasons. While the racial and hegemonic aspects of colonialism are now routinely rejected, its liberal alter ego lives on unchallenged and continues to uncritically shape our experience of the world. Colonialism and development are different but, at the same time, they both share a liberal problematic of security. Since the dawn of modernity, rather than states and armies, liberalism’s object of security has been individuals, groups and people – indeed, life itself (Dean 1999; Abulaafia 2008). It is concerned with the uncertainty, unpredictability and mobility that are synonymous with, and inseparable from, the urge to live.

Isolating a liberal colonialism should not be confused with attempts to rehabilitate the colonial project (for example, Ferguson 2003). Without question, the bedrock of colonialism was a racially defined right to govern through the endless decisionism of emergency rule (Hussain 2003). Liberal colonialism is understood as inseparable from, and existing in a formative relationship with, a racialised state of exception. It lives in the shadow of rule through emergency and the exercise of arbitrary personal power. While often criticising its violence and short-sightedness (Seeley [1883]; Hobson [1902]; Morel 1920), liberal colonialism was dependent upon the expansionary logic of emergency to establish its own conditions of existence. Consequently, it does not provide a critique of imperial conquest. On the contrary, accepting that capacities and abilities are unequally shared, for liberal colonialism this is an inevitable, if unfortunate, outcome. However, given its concern for the human condition of the conquered race, and its interest in fostering change, liberal colonialism both qualified and limited the imperial state of exception while simultaneously justifying it. Through its empathy with the difficulties faced by the incomplete-life encountered, and the power this knowledge conferred, liberal colonialism claimed to govern more humanely and voluntaristically, and thus more effectively, than its militarised and exterminatory alternative (Cromer 1913; Morel 1920; Lugard [1922] 1965; MacMichael 1923).

Development as a Regulatory Technology of Security

Liberal colonialism and development are similar yet different. They share a liberal problematic of security that takes life at its referent object. At the same time, however, the former was ‘internal’ to the colonial state, while the latter, in its present configuration, is internationalised and acts ‘externally’ on populations living within states.