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Empires, for imperialists, have always been realms of fantasy. The outer regions where empires are created and controlled is a fantastical world where larger-than-life events take place, where great victories may be achieved and where fortunes and reputations can be made. Such exotic territories promote the exercise of the standard imperial fantasies of world government, of the allegedly superior attributes of the imperial people, of intellectual and religious ideas as well as technologies that sanctify and enable at the same time, all supplemented by the comforting notion that the violence through which empires are created is justified by the cargoes of good things that are delivered with them. Imperialists always imagine that they are creating order out of chaos, peace out of strife, a peace permitting the export of what they conceive to be more advanced administrative, legal, constitutional, religious and intellectual concepts. The brutalities of empires are thus but passing moments permitting the distribution of their benefits. All of this can be seen as holding true of all empires in many historical periods.

However, there were certain distinctive characteristics associated with the fantasies of nineteenth-century empires. These included the desire to sweep up the natural phenomena of the world (including its human varieties) into global taxonomies, classifying and ordering in a scientific embrace both facilitated and symbolized by the military and technological advances achieved by the imperial people. Moreover, this fantasy of universal knowledge could be reproduced and dispersed through the printed word and new forms of image-construction (such as photography and the emerging capacity to print such visual representations of the world). All this was accompanied by the fantasy of freedom of travel and movement, of information and communications, enhanced by the power of steam and the electro-magnetic miracle of the telegraph. These were bent to the end of incorporating the peoples of the imperial metropolis to its objectives. The elite had to be convinced that empire was an appropriate objective for the state; politicians had to be brought on side; while the generality of the populace had to be convinced of the benefits of an imperial policy, easier perhaps in the case of the 'empire of settlement' than in the 'empire of rule' where settlement was unlikely to take place. Yet in many respects imperial territories in Africa (and also Asia) could be depicted as more exotic, more filled with heroic potential and adventure than colonies rendered almost familiar by white settlement.

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Heroes inhabit such worlds of fantasy and this book reveals the ways in which this was true in both the British and the French empires. The projection of heroic reputations became a key component of the policies of incorporation of social classes and policy makers. Heroes were thus crucial in the formation of opinion, in the repeated renewal and confirmation of those imperial fantasies, a phenomenon which can certainly be better understood through such a comparative study. Both the British and the French were swept up in similar processes (and to this we can probably add other European societies implicated in imperial projects at the time). Through this comparative study, Berny Sèbe brings a number of fresh insights to bear – and perhaps offers guidelines for future studies, not least in different countries. Through analysing the similarities and differences of the formation and presentation of British and French heroes, he is able to delineate more clearly the manner in which heroes were both manufactured and marketed.

As he demonstrates, the particular conditions of the late nineteenth century produced a new type of hero, heroes who came to be embedded in the particular market conditions of the period. These were markets characterized by the extraordinary speed of communications, by the existence of a vigorous press, with journalists writing in fresh and vivid styles, achieving immediacy by sending 'copy' back with remarkable speed, supplemented by the possibility of image production and dissemination – through engravings and later photographs. Such images were themselves capable of creating fantasies of exoticism, heroism and drama. And, in addition to all of that, there were new possibilities for the printed word, the speedy production of attractive, exciting and above all cheap books that could condense the essences of heroism within their covers. Such books could be produced in extraordinarily extensive print runs, achieving sales hitherto virtually unheard of, and strikingly extending their reach to most social classes and to both adults and children. Besides, heroes could be celebrated through symbolic arrivals and departures, through appearances and ceremonies which rendered their progress a matter of public spectacle, almost akin to the triumphs of Ancient Rome. Heroic reputations could also be built on the shoulders, as it were, of predecessors – a good example would be the ways in which the manufacture of the Kitchener legend was constructed out of the heroic reputation of General Charles Gordon, perhaps the most iconic hero of late nineteenth-century Britain.

Case studies are clearly exceptionally valuable in the examination of all these processes in a comparative perspective. The author uses the reputations of Colonel Jean-Baptiste Marchand and of General Horatio Herbert Kitchener (with echoes of another hero in that first name) to explore the manifold ways in which their heroic deeds were projected

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to the French and British publics. Both became publishing and political phenomena, though in somewhat varying ways and with different results. Each was fortunate enough to be celebrated by 'hero-makers' – Morphy, d'Ivoi and later Daudet and Delebecque for Marchand and the incomparable Steevens for Kitchener. Both had their exploits projected through notable publications. Throughout this study, Sèbe has used a remarkable variety of archives and sources, printed and visual, to demonstrate the significance of his chosen heroes and of their projection to all the imperial constituencies that contributed to the sense of a fantastical world.

It is a particular pleasure to introduce this stimulating work for its inclusion in the 'Studies in Imperialism' series. Heroes have long been an interest of mine, as past publications have revealed. I was privileged to be the external examiner of the author's Oxford D.Phil. thesis of which this book is a much developed version, and that experience led to our becoming collaborators on a number of projects. It is a source of some satisfaction to propose that this book should cement the growing reputation of Berny Sèbe in the field of comparative imperial studies.

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