

Young, Robert J.C. (1995) *Colonial desire. Hybridity in theory, culture and race*. New York, Routledge, 236 p. (ISBN 0-415-05373-0).

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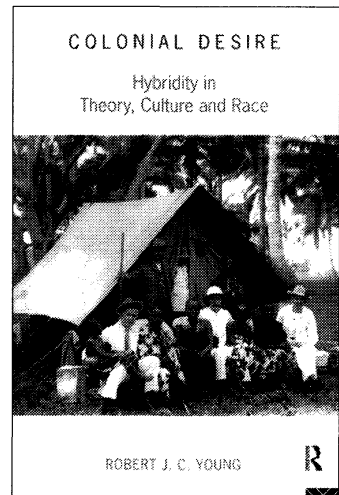
un thème qui, de Empédocle à Ellsworth Huntington en passant par Albert le Grand et Jean Bodin, a alimenté continuellement la réflexion intéressant les connaissances géographiques.

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Sex, desire, imperial preference and commercial ventures. It was a steamy, rapacious and volatile mix, cloaked in justificatory ideology, the latter founded upon a seeming excess of Victorian self-confidence and an unflagging determination among colonisers to bring civilisation to subordinate races — and wealth and prestige to the mother country. Yet, as Young shows us, the projects of empire brought with them a response from subject peoples which subtly altered the imperial design and tinged the attitudes and actions of those starting out as zealous cogs in the machinery of conquest. The imperial blueprint became hybridised, with a yearning for otherness. These are Young's two themes.



For the more sceptical among us, narratives that expose colonial pretensions are especially satisfying when the claims of 'the white man's burden' or the sham of scientific objectivity are revealed as an underlying racism, self-interest and mixing of economic avarice with sexual desire: that which Young describes as "the corrupt conjunction of such hybridized sexual and economic discourses" fuelling the cultural construction of race (p. 158). The Kiplingesque characters civilising 'the dark continent' or the exotic Far East were less diligent bearers of light and wisdom than we had been taught. We have been aware of that for some time, thanks to the colonial discourse studies of Said, Bhabha and others.

But it is always salutary to be reminded of the complicity between the colonial enterprise and the purveyors of literary and academic knowledge, the latter colluding in imperialism's expansion (our own geography acted as the 'handmaid of empire'). This book deepens our knowledge of the ideological support system behind imperial exploitation and provides lessons in our own age of inequality. If we condemn racist ideologies, let us remember the views of Arnold, Renan, Gobineau or Burton — or the murderous actions of U.S. General Jacob Smith in the

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Philippines. If we deplore the hideous practice of 'ethnic cleansing', let us recall the destruction of now-extinct peoples, Caribs, Tasmanians and Beotuks, as well as the ejection of Scottish crofters and Irish peasants. The custom is deeply embedded in the culture of Europe and North America. If today we censure the combination of predatory commerce and abusive sex, Philippine feminists draw our attention to the offensive sex tourism industry with their bitterly parodied slogan, "We welcome you with open arms and open legs".

But, at the end, it is heartening to know that cultural colonialism was never quite so unidirectional, omnipotent, so impermeable to reverse currents of cultural influence; it became hybridised in its contacts with different colonial contexts — a sort of conceptual variation of 'going native'. In the colonies we always knew that, deep down. We may have borrowed the cultural fabric from the mother country, but we added our own dyes and hues reflecting local realities, so that, while retaining patterns of the imported original, the cloth became subtly different — and at least partially ours.

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