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Community in the 19th Century UK

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Introduction

How do I know what it means to be British, what the British nation is supposed to be like? I find out from newspaper editorials, or history books, or films, or songs—and I take it for granted that what I am ingesting is also being ingested by millions of other Britons whom I will never meet. (Miller 32)

This query by David Miller highlights the crucial role modern media play in shaping our perceptions of national identity. It suggests that the understanding of what it means to be British is produced by shared cultural narratives. Media coverage is instrumental for the development of a national identity (Polonska-Kimunguyi and Kimunguyi 509-510; et al. 372) and it thus also plays a key role in framing and constructing the concept of British national identity (Isentyeva and Abdel Kafi 90; Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2-3). National identities inherently rely on a distinction between those who belong and those who do not; some are entitled to citizenship or a passport, while others are not. However, this exclusion becomes problematic when it is linked to privilege and reinforces hierarchical distinctions, leading to the marginalisation of certain groups (Isentyeva and Abdel Kafi 90). This is particularly evident in the way media narratives have influenced British national identity during important moments in history. In the 19th century, newspapers were the primary medium for spreading these narratives, which often inserted ideas of privilege and hierarchy into British identity. Early in the 19th century, significant technological advancements like the Koenig steam press reduced the cost of printing and paper, leading to economies of scale (Van Der Hoeven et al. 866). Moreover, newspapers had also faced multiple taxes that were gradually repealed: advertisement duty, a tax on advertisements, which was abolished in 1853; stamp duty, a tax per newspaper sheet, reduced in 1836 and abolished in 1855; and paper excise duty, a tax on paper production, abolished in 1861 (Brown 24–25). This made newspapers cheaper to create and sell, while rising literacy rates increased the readership (867), thereby enhancing the press's influence and reach. Consequently, newspapers were crucial in shaping public opinion and reinforcing national identities during this period. This thesis will examine how media coverage and narratives surrounding three historical events – the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1877, and her Golden Jubilee in 1887 – were central in constructing Britishness. The Great Exhibition of 1851, held in London's Crystal Palace, showcased Britain's industrial achievements and imperial influence, positioning the nation as a global leader in progress and innovation. Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1877 formalised Britain's imperial dominance, which symbolised the monarchy's

direct connection to the Empire and reinforcing Britain's authority over its colonies. Finally, the Golden Jubilee in 1887 celebrated Queen Victoria's then 50-year reign, with elaborate public ceremonies and international participation that highlighted both the unity of the British people and the vast reach of the Empire. These events are the focus of this analysis because they represent moments when British national identity was prominently displayed and debated in public discourse, which illustrates how media narratives sought to shape a cohesive sense of Britishness and imperial pride. Due to their historical remoteness, I will research these events using the documentation they left behind, particularly speeches, newspaper articles, and illustrations. This thesis is guided by the research question: How did the media narratives surrounding these events shape the construction of British national identity and collective belonging in the 19th century? To address this, I will analyse how British media portrayed these events to reinforce ideas of British supremacy and unity among the population. These diverse media outputs offer a comprehensive view of the period's public discourse as they capture different aspects of media influence and public reception. By including different types of media, the analysis will consider not only the written narratives, but also visual and rhetorical strategies used to construct and spread national identity.

Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities provides the foundation for this thesis. Anderson argues that national communities are imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (16). This emphasises that national identity is constructed not through direct interaction, but through shared mental images. Furthermore, Anderson highlights how the rise of print media in early modern Europe was closely connected to the emergence of nationalism. He argues that the daily habit of reading newspapers and the awareness of others doing the same helped to create a national identity that was ingrained in everyday life (34-36). His notion of an imagined community remained influential into the 19th century, where in Britain, newspapers continued to unite readers through shared narratives. Such media-driven connections illustrate the capacity of shared narratives to motivate personal and collective actions, such as sacrifices made for the nation. Ultimately, Anderson asserts that "it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (17). David Miller's work complements this by detailing the aspects of how concepts of nationalism are recognised and applied within society.

National identity requires recognising nations as real entities and considering membership in a nation as a significant component of personal identity (7-8). Ethically, nationality implies that duties to fellow nationals differ from those owed to individuals from other countries (8). Politically, nationality is associated with sovereignty and that the nation's interests should be considered of highest importance (8). Neither Anderson or Miller explicitly discusses female duties within national identity, Anderson's framing implicitly aligns with historical expectations of male participation in national defence, and Miller's ethical obligations could similarly suggest traditional roles. However, this analysis deliberately avoids such gender distinctions. Instead, I focus on British national identity as a shared construct spanning all genders, examining how a collective sense of belonging is shaped through cultural and media narratives that unify citizens.

The Victorian era in Britain was marked by national identity that intertwined closely with imperial ambitions. Britain, despite its small size, emerged as one of the strongest imperial nation (Steinbach 86). The abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 and slavery in 1830s signalled a shift in imperial focus toward economic dominance and moral superiority (Steinbach 95), reinforcing Britain's self-image as a civilising force. The British believed in their ability to create a universal Empire, with virtually no threat from other European countries, especially after the collapse of the Napoleonic Era in 1815 (Darwin, *Empire Project* 72), and the ability to suppress potential local resistance (*Empire Project* 27). An idealised version of Queen Victoria came to symbolise this era and she became a monarch characterised by stability and strength (Steinbach 92). This imperial spirit was not limited to politics but also had an impact on daily life; the nation's cultural and political identity was heavily influenced by the distribution of imperial ideals through mass-produced popular culture, such as newspapers, maps, or paintings, grounded in narratives that emphasised racial and cultural supremacy (Darwin, *Unfinished Empire* 6; Potter 61). During the Victorian era, the English national character was marked by a commitment to spreading Christian civilisation. This was emphasised through qualities of ethical virtue and conservatism, which collectively reinforced the belief in British superiority (Mandler 32–33). Krishan Kumar adds to this character, arguing that it was shaped by a collaboration of cultural components and political structures (*The Making* 21-24). The English language functioned as a tool for communication and cultural continuity, while Christianity inspired societal norms and traditions. These cultural factors merged with the political framework of the monarchy and parliamentary systems, which

turned cultural and political nationalism into one identity. Kumar describes this as "missionary nationalism" ("Nation" 579), in which the English felt committed to a greater purpose, whether religious, cultural, or political. As mentioned, particularly in the 19th century, English nationalism involved a form of mission and duty that was defined in terms of spreading the western ideals of civilisation, thereby highlighting the connection between imperial ambitions and national identity ("Nation" 579-80). This intertwining can be understood through Kumar's concept of "imperial nationalism" (577). Initially, this concept might seem contradictory, as nationalism prioritises the state and individual autonomy, whereas imperialism requires controlling numerous countries and cultures. However, English nationalism blended these elements together which gave the dominant groups a distinct perception of their identity and destiny during the time of the Empire, an influence that persists to this day. Kumar states "English nationalism, past and present, is the nationalism of an imperial state—one that carries the stamp of its imperial past even when the Empire has gone" ("Nation" 577). Thus, the Victorian era's missionary nationalism, with its duty to spread civilisation and Christian values, grew into a form of imperial nationalism that continues to impact English national consciousness even after the Empire's collapse ("Nation" 578). In this way, the heritage of imperialism is ingrained in the current national identity.

This evolution of nationalism was not just influenced by historical events, but it was also notably shaped by their portrayal in the media. The media played a crucial role in spreading narratives that fostered a collective national identity, because they highlighted the importance of these events and shaped how they were perceived by the public. The three events chosen for this analysis represent the height of Britain's imperial and industrial eras. They stood out due to their extensive public engagement, direct government participation, and significant symbolic impact on British society. These events were not only important moments in British history but also served as symbols that resonated deeply within the national consciousness. Examining these events reveals how historically significant moments and their media portrayals work together to construct and maintain a sense of national identity.

The Great Exhibition of 1851, which showcased Britain's industrial and imperial progress, was such a fundamental moment and was extensively celebrated. Opened by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park on May 1st, this exhibition reinforced Britain's status as the first industrialised nation, which helped to

represent Britain as a powerful and developed country (Auerbach 1-2; Pond 65). A central theme of the exhibition was industrial accomplishment and it featured a diverse collection of art as well as industrial products from around the world (Auerbach 2). While the organisers emphasised internationality, the event predominantly centred on British achievements, allowing Britain to show its cultural superiority over other nations (Shears 78). As both host and curator, Britain presented itself in the best possible light which reinforced its image of moral integrity, civility, and hard work (Shears 77). The organisers understood the influential power of newspapers to form public opinion and narratives (Pond 63). As a result, they ensured extensive media coverage that not only generated publicity and curiosity, drawing large crowds and enhancing the exhibition's importance (63), but the coverage also significantly shaped public perception. It evoked a feeling of pride among the British public (65), particularly through the efforts of writers as well politicians (Auerbach 165). They used the exhibition to articulate and celebrate what they saw as essential British values and traits, especially by contrasting it with other cultures, which were often depicted as inferior. Such narratives were strategically employed to create a collective national identity that was explicitly British, fostering a sense of unity and distinctiveness at home while simultaneously setting Britain apart on an international stage (Shears 78). This approach promoted a more exclusive mindset among the British public, which deepened nationalistic sentiments (Auerbach 189). The exhibition, therefore, was not just a display of global culture and industry but a significant moment in the construction of British national identity in the 19th century.

Queen Victoria adopted the title Empress of India in 1876, which was another significant moment in British imperial history, as it strategically enhanced her royal status and strengthened British authority in India. Queen Victoria had long been intrigued by India, often calling herself Empress even before receiving the official title, despite the fact that she had never travelled to India (Taylor "Queen" 264). This self-perception stemmed from her extensive involvement in the military administration of India following the transfer of power from the East India Company to British control, after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 (266). Indian soldiers rebelled against the British East India Company, and the British media emphasised the brutal attacks on women and children to classify the rebels as vicious. In response, Queen Victoria supported military centralisation and specific governance reforms, which contributed to the establishment of direct British rule over India through the Government of India Act in 1858 (267). Her role in overseeing and influencing Indian matters shaped her perception of

herself as an imperial ruler (267). Therefore, when she was formally granted the title, it reinforced Queen Victoria's position, yet it also symbolically united the vast territories of the British Empire under a single monarch, underlining a connection between the queen and her overseas territories. Moreover, the Royal Titles Bill of 1876, which declared Queen Victoria as Queen-Empress, was a strategic move to enhance the British monarchy's status in India (Thompson 191). This title was formally announced during the Delhi Durbar of 1877, which was a big event in Delhi that served as a display of allegiance from Indian royalty and demonstrated that the British royal family were seen as the rightful heirs to the Mughal rulers (Chakravorty 229). This event was without the attendance of Queen Victoria herself, yet it notably strengthened the validity and the perception of legitimacy of British rule, underscoring the interconnection of the British monarchy with the governance of India. Such celebrations surrounding the queen, along with her golden and diamond jubilees, which in comparison she did attend in person, were large displays that highlighted both her royalty and the British Empire (Steinbach 92). Through these significant events, her image as the embodiment of Britain and its Empire was established and continually reinforced, making her a monarch able to cultivate unity and loyalty among her subjects. Duncan Bell notes "Victoria was thus a central element in the iconographic order of Greater Britain, her name alone exerting a 'magic force', her image linked [...] to the idea of freedom itself" (10). Queen Victoria was an essential character in British identity and a larger imperial narrative because of her role in promoting nationalism inside Britain and her Empire.

To analyse further the construction of Britishness, Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887 serves as a third event that captures the Empire's ideology and its impact on national identity. The golden jubilee, significantly shaped by her position as Empress of India and her favourable stance towards the country, highlighted and celebrated the Empire's glory (Taylor, *Empress* 228). Victoria's influence was evident through the allocation of special seats for Indians, emphasising their respected status during the celebrations (Hight 161). The visible inclusion of Indian dignitaries underlined the Empire's vastness and once again reminded British subjects of the extent of their imperial domain. Along with Indian horse soldiers, she went in a carriage from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey during the jubilee celebrations (Steinbach 220). The jubilee was not only marked by the parade but also through a wide range of advertising: "Souvenirs, memorabilia, and quotidian objects of all sorts celebrated Victoria both as a consumer and as an object to be consumed, both as ordinary,

domestic, and middle-class, and as head of an enormous Empire that spread the benefits of British civilization to lesser peoples” (220). These pieces, made affordable to the middle class, aimed to produce pride and participation in the Empire's achievements among its citizens. The production and distribution of numerous items, such as free pots for “30,000 poor children” (220) were designed to engage a wide demographic to ensure that the celebratory and imperialistic spirit reached all levels of society in order to reinforce a collective identity connected to the Empire's success. By showcasing the Empire's accomplishments and emphasising citizens' ties to the monarchy, the celebration aimed to foster a sense of collective belonging through its displays of imperial power and inclusivity. This was done in order to foster pride and loyalty in the populace. The celebration created a sense of collective emotional engagement in the narrative of the Empire by integrating the public into the jubilee through visual spectacle, personal souvenirs, and public ceremonies. This deliberate manipulation of public opinion aimed to ensure the Empire's future by creating a population devoted to the monarchy and its imperial purpose, while also honouring the Empire's past glories.

This thesis will analyse how media narratives surrounding these events were crafted to shape British national identity. I choose these events precisely because they exemplify instances where media narratives were deliberately constructed to inspire national pride and unity. Given the already mentioned persistent influence of the Empire on Britain today, it is important to examine the formation of national identity during the 19th century, a period in which these imperial narratives were actively constructed and reproduced. National identity grew during this time and was strengthened by a number of political and cultural mechanisms. Among these mechanisms were public celebrations, media portrayals, and governmental policies, all of which strengthened the interconnected nature of nationalism and imperialism. By promoting a sense of shared heritage and imperial destiny, these elements helped to solidify a collective British identity. Despite the rich body of theory on the construction of a national community, a gap remains in research specifically examining the impact of important historical events on the development of British national identity through media narratives. While scholars like Anderson, Miller, or Kumar have laid foundational theories on imagined communities and the role of media in crafting national identity, less attention has been paid to how specific events constructed such an identity, particularly during the Victorian era. For my thesis, I have chosen the aforementioned events, as they not only marked significant

moments but also played a fundamental role in spreading certain narratives. It is essential to comprehend these dynamics because they highlight the media's significant role in establishing and reflecting national identity. Such dynamics provide insights into the continuous interaction between media narratives and national identity construction. My thesis, therefore, is that media narratives surrounding the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1876, and her Golden Jubilee in 1887 shaped British national identity by employing specific narrative strategies – Othering, imperial pride, and the myth of national unity – to foster a collective sense of belonging. I will analyse how these strategies in media representations constructed an imagined national community in 19th century. This will show how the strategic portrayal of these events in the media reinforced British superiority and unity, which influenced the national consciousness as well as national identity.

I will explore the construction of Britishness through a combination of theoretical insights and analyses across multiple chapters. The first chapter lays a theoretical foundation by discussing how collective identities are imagined and constructed. This discussion draws on Linda Colley's and David Miller's insights into collective identity, alongside Krishan Kumar's and Benedict Anderson's analysis of the media's role in shaping national identity. Chapter two continues with an examination of the concept of Othering. The chapter highlights the language and visual representation used to differentiate the Other, drawing on the works of Zygmunt Bauman and Homi K. Bhabha, who explore the dynamics of difference, and Edward Said, with whose theories I will analyse visual depictions. The narrative then shifts in chapter three to the themes of imperial pride and the monarchy. In this part, I will analyse imperial rhetoric with Mary Louise Pratt's frameworks and I will examine how the royal family is portrayed in national narratives with insights from David Cannadine. In chapter four, I will discuss the myth of the nation by focusing on how myths and symbols are used to simplify national identity. This analysis draws on Roland Barthes' concept of how signs are transformed into ideological tools through naturalisation, combined with Gérard Bouchard's understanding of myths as adaptive systems that legitimise authority and maintain societal cohesion. The thesis wraps up with a conclusion of the findings and a reflection on the study's limitations, offering a comprehensive look at how national narratives contribute to the construction of collective identities. To analyse how these events were able to shape British national identity, it is first necessary to establish a theory foundation for understanding the processes by which national identities are constructed.

1. “How do I know what it means to be British?”: The Construction of a Nation

This chapter explores the various theories of how national identity is formed, drawing on the ideas of scholars such as Linda Colley, David Miller, and Benedict Anderson. These theorists provide key frameworks for understanding how a national identity is created through shared culture, collective experiences, and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. I will expand upon their works and contrast it with other scholars, with a particular focus on how media, cultural narratives, and social institutions contribute to shaping a cohesive sense of national belonging. Through this exploration, the chapter aims to illustrate the constructed nature of national identity in order to create a foundation for a deeper analysis of British identity in the 19th century.

To understand the formation of national identity, it is crucial to distinguish between the social and cultural constructs of a nation and the political institution of a state. According to Miller "[...] 'nation' must refer to a community of people with an aspiration to be politically self-determining, and 'state' must refer to the set of political institutions that they may aspire to possess for themselves" (19). A nation refers to a community connected by a common identity, which is often characterised by shared history and language. It is formed through collective beliefs, mutual recognition, and a common culture (19). A state, on the other hand, is a political and legal entity that is in charge of governance, the execution of policies, and is distinguished by its sovereignty over a certain territory (19). Anderson's concept of nationality as an imagined community, which highlights the constructed nature of national identity and its power to unite individuals through shared cultural elements, ties into the idea of nation. He argues that nationality is socially constructed and, once established, can be applied in different contexts and ways (Anderson 3). Similar to Miller, Anderson sees a nation not as a mere fantasy but as a constructed community, which is created through mutual beliefs and cultural elements. According to Anderson, this unity is imagined as a “deep, horizontal comradeship” that persists “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each” (5). This comradeship is built through collective experiences; individuals repeatedly encounter the same narratives, symbols, and cultural references which reinforces a mental image of unity even among those who will never meet face to face (Anderson 4). This notion mirrors Miller's concept of national identity being formed through a shared public culture. National identity, therefore, is socially constructed and based on a shared sense of

belonging rather than biological or 'racial'¹ connections. Miller suggests it comes from a "common public culture" (25), which involves a collective understanding of core principles and values. These characteristics are not inherent traits but encompass widely accepted ideas, such as adherence to democratic values, respect for the rule of law, and social norms like fairness and integrity (Miller 26-27). This shared culture forms the basis for national identity and unites people through common beliefs and practices.

Both Miller and Anderson emphasise the critical role of media and communication in the dissemination of shared culture. National identities are constructed not through direct relationships, as seen in small communities, but through shared beliefs that are widely distributed via cultural tools like literature, newspapers, or other forms of communication (Miller 31-32). Anderson describes how the rise of print capitalism and the shift from Latin to vernacular languages began in early modern Europe and laid the foundation for a national consciousness (Anderson 37-38). Print capitalism, driven by the need to increase profits, gradually targeted the "monoglot masses" (Anderson 38) by creating books, pamphlets, and newspapers in the vernacular languages that people actually spoke, rather than the exclusive Latin used by elites. This trend had advanced significantly by the 19th century, with vernacular languages gaining significance as print capitalism grew. During this period, newspapers, novels, and pamphlets played a crucial role in spreading ideas that contributed to the formation of a shared national consciousness (Anderson 42). These publications, written now in accessible languages, enabled people who spoke the same language to engage with narratives and experiences (42). This collective identity was foundational for the rise of nationalist sentiments. While these printed materials did not directly spread nationalist ideas in their early stages, they created conditions in which people could imagine their shared connection, which ultimately led to the foundation for nationalism. As Anderson puts it "these fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (42). The spread of these publications fostered shared narratives, allowing a broader sense of identity to form that became the core of nationalist movements (44).

¹ The term 'race' will appear throughout this thesis in scare quotes to emphasise its status as a socially constructed category rather than a scientifically valid classification. It acknowledges that cultural and social distinctions, which justify racialised exclusion, are often falsely attributed to supposed genetic and biological differences (Hall 109).

Building on the foundational role of media in shaping national consciousness, it is important to examine how these shared narratives contribute to perceptions of equality within the imagined community of a nation. The concept of the nation as an imagined community includes a symbolic dismissal of hierarchy (Anderson 5) in that it emphasises the perception of equality among all members, regardless of real-life social divisions. Anderson describes nationalism as fostering a sense of "horizontal comradeship" (5), in which individuals feel connected as equals within a collective identity, distinct from older, hierarchical forms of community like dynastic realms or religious Empires. However, this imagined equality does not mean that nations are free of actual hierarchies or power dynamics; nations still have significant social inequalities and class distinctions. Anderson's point is that the concept of the nation is constructed to emphasise a sense of "fraternity" (5) and shared belonging, even if unequal power relations persist within society. Therefore, his idea of nationalism as horizontal is symbolic rather than a sign of a literal lack of internal hierarchies; it determines how the nation is viewed and conceived. This process aligns closely with Miller's concept of a common public culture. The distribution of shared narratives through media, such as newspapers and literature, helped to create a collective understanding of core principles and values which emphasised the shared public culture that forms the basis of national identity (Miller 26-27). By integrating the ideals of national identity into the daily lives of individuals, the shared public culture allows members to engage with and internalise the constructed national narrative, which in turn makes the imagined community feel authentic.

It is important to note that Anderson's emphasis on fraternity and comradeship introduces a gendered dimension to the concept of national identity. The use of masculine-coded terms suggests that the imagined community is often envisioned through a male-centric lens, thereby potentially marginalising women and non-male identities within the national narrative. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the construction of British national identity as a whole to examine how shared culture and media contribute to a collective sense of belonging among citizens of all genders. This thesis will take a broader understanding of Britishness while recognising the gendered aspects in Anderson's work.

The frameworks of nationalism and shared culture, as articulated by Anderson and Miller, provide a lens through which to understand the construction of British national identity, which has historically been shaped by dominant cultural narratives that define belonging through both inclusion and exclusion. British national identity has long been defined by a

dominant culture that establishes itself as the standard against which differences are assessed (Hall 109). Historically, Britishness has been closely associated with "whiteness" (109), framing it as the norm while positioning ethnic and cultural differences as the Other. British identity is not static but actively constructed through cultural practices, traditions, and social codes (116-117). These representations, from everyday customs to national rituals, work to construct a sense of belonging within an imagined community, where shared memory, historical narratives, and a collective identity provide a unified sense of purpose for the nation (116). Britishness has historically functioned as a flexible, often ambiguous identity marker, one that gains meaning by distinguishing itself from what it is not. As Stuart Hall argues, Britishness serves as an "empty signifier" (109) that takes on definition through contrasts with external groups or internal minorities. National identities, Hall explains, establish their boundaries by "marking their limits—defining what they are in relation to what they are not" (122). Britishness was shaped through contrasts with the Other, particularly through religious distinctions from Catholic Europe and encounters during imperial expansion (Colley 327). By setting Britain apart from its Catholic neighbours, Protestantism acted as a unifying national principle that brought together England, Scotland, and Wales (Colley 317). British national identity thus arises from both shared cultural practices and the continuous process of establishing boundaries, illustrating how the ideals of unity within the imagined community only coexist with exclusionary dynamics that define who is considered British.

However, the inclusion of Ireland within the United Kingdom adds, due to its Catholic majority, complexity to this narrative. Ireland's predominantly Catholic population and history of resistance highlighted religious and cultural conflicts within the union (Colley 328). The colonial-like dynamics and Irish opposition to British policies exposed cracks in the supposed unity of British identity (Colley 327; Hall 104). Ireland's role in Britain's national narrative went beyond religious and cultural differences; it challenged the concept of a unified British identity. Despite the Act of Union in 1801, attempts to fully integrate Ireland failed, which highlighted the limits of Britain's imperial reach within its own Isles (Hall 104). This exclusion, reinforced by the colonial lens through which Ireland was viewed (104), marked Ireland as outside the narrative of Britishness. As a result, Ireland's unique relationship with Britain falls outside the scope of this thesis, which focuses on the formation of an imagined national community within Great Britain.

The formation of a cohesive national identity is not unique to Britain. Throughout the 19th century, many European states redefined their governance structures to strengthen their ties with their citizens to insert a deeper sense of national belonging (Hobsbawm 81, *Nations*). The connection between the government and its citizens became more intertwined in daily life, as the government assumed a greater role in both public and private spheres. It came to be seen not only as a governing authority but also as a central force in shaping and providing a collective national identity. States expanded their influence through mechanisms like tax collection and conscription, which made the state an integral part of people's experiences (*Nations* 81-82). This increased presence induced a deeper sense of belonging to the national community. Moreover, symbols and traditions played a crucial role in creating unity (*Nations* 90). Education became a key tool in this process, as schools not only taught literacy² and basic skills but also to promoted national values (*Nations* 91). States sometimes invented or reshaped traditions to cultivate national pride and a sense of historical continuity (*Nations* 92). Thus, the integration of state institutions, cultural symbols, and education systems into daily life played a vital role in fostering a shared national identity, where citizens felt increasingly connected to both their nation and each other.

The adoption of nationalist ideas by ruling elites demonstrates how nationalism can be used to reinforce existing power structures. The shift from popular nationalism – a movement driven by ordinary people who share a cultural or linguistic background – to "official nationalism", a term borrowed from Seton-Watson³, occurred because ruling elites saw the potential danger in popular nationalist movements (Anderson 85). These movements often threatened their power by fostering a sense of unity and identity that could undermine traditional hierarchical authority (85). To maintain control, elites adopted nationalist ideas and symbols into official state policy, using them to align national identity with existing power structures rather than allowing these movements to challenge their dominance (Anderson 85). In doing so, they intended to control the power of nationalism to stabilise and legitimise their rule instead of letting it grow into an independent and potentially revolutionary force. In the

² "In 1800 around 40 percent of males and 60 percent of females in England and Wales were illiterate. By 1840 this had decreased to 33 percent of men and 50 percent of women, and, by 1870, these rates had dropped further still to 20 percent of men and 25 percent of women" (Lloyd). This demonstrates the expansion and growing influence of the education system.

³ Seton-Watson defines "official nationalism" as the strategy adopted by national leaders to impose their nationality on all citizens, regardless of linguistic, cultural, or religious differences (148). Viewing their own culture as superior, they considered this integration beneficial, fostering a unified national identity (Seton-Watson 148).

British Empire, this was evident through efforts like "Anglicization" (88), which was achieved by British colonial rulers using language, education, and culture to create a sense of unity and loyalty among colonial subjects (88-89). This form of official nationalism allowed the British to navigate the complications of ruling diverse territories by attempting to implement a common cultural framework while reinforcing existing power structures. It was a conscious effort to stretch the "short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the Empire" (86) to ensure that the different regions remained aligned with the interests of the central authority, connected by a superficial sense of shared national identity.

In summary, both Miller and Anderson emphasise that national identity is socially constructed through shared beliefs, culture, and narratives disseminated through media and institutions. The formation of national identity involves both unifying elements and the definition of the Other, as seen in the British context through Hall's work. The historical processes described by Hobsbawm illustrate how states actively fostered national identity through education, symbols, and traditions, often taking over nationalist movements to maintain control, as explained by Anderson's concept of "official nationalism" (85). Together, these theories reveal how nations are imagined communities, constructed through shared culture and collective experiences, while also being shaped by power dynamics and historical contexts.

In positioning my analysis within these frameworks of Anderson, Miller, Hall, Colley, and Hobsbawm, I aim to build on their insights to explore the construction of British national identity in the 19th century. Anderson's concept of the imagined community effectively illustrates how shared narratives and media foster a collective sense of belonging. However, I intend to explore the specific narratives distributed through newspapers, speeches, and visual representations that shaped Britishness during this period. Similarly, Miller's idea of a "common public culture" (25) highlights the role of shared beliefs and practices in unifying a nation. Yet, I argue that this concept requires additional elaboration, particularly in examining how these common beliefs were constructed through myths, symbols, and narratives tied to imperial pride and the monarchy. Hall's and Colley's exploration of identity formation through inclusion and exclusion provides a lens for analysing how mechanisms of Othering were used to outline the boundaries of Britishness. In 19th century Britain, narratives of progress, civilisation, and moral superiority not only reinforced national pride but also marginalised those who fell outside this imposed image of British identity. This process underscores the

need to view national identity as a contested and negotiated space, rather than a fixed or consistent one.

The construction of 19th century British national identity relied heavily on shared narratives disseminated through influential newspapers, such as *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* and *The Times*. Both papers played crucial roles in shaping public opinion, as they used shared symbols, myths, and narratives to reinforce Britishness by portraying who belonged – and who did not – within this imagined community. I chose to work exclusively with those two papers because their contrasting political stances, wide influence, and popularity provide insight into how national identity was constructed through the press. All articles used for my analyses were authored anonymously. While *Lloyd's Weekly News* aligned with liberal attitudes and appealed to the working class (Jacobs 619), *The Times* had a conservative stance and catered to a wealthier readership (Brown 28). These differences make them ideal for examining how both papers, despite contrasting stances, used similar techniques to shape public opinion and build specific narratives.

Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper (also called *Lloyd's Weekly News* or just *Lloyds's News*), first published in 1842, grew rapidly under the publisher Edward Lloyd's marketing and editorial strategies, achieving significant influence and becoming one of the most widely read Sunday newspapers in Britain (Griffiths 106-107). In 1852, as Douglas Jerrold assumed the role of editor, the newspaper's extensive coverage of Duke of Wellington's death as well as funeral drove sales to over 150,000 copies per week (107). This upward trend continued through the decade, as Lloyd's investment in advanced printing technology drove *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* to reach a near million-weekly circulation by the 1880s, solidifying its impact on the British press (108).

The Times became Britain's leading daily newspaper by the 19th century, known for its quality reporting, editorial independence, and political influence (Brown 24). Unlike many newspapers of the time, it was financially independent and highly profitable, which catered to a wealthy and influential readership (28). Between 1800 and 1860, *The Times* rose to a position of superiority over other newspapers with its circulation reaching between 40,000 and 50,000 copies sold daily (26).

2. “The danger must be signalled”: Othering

This chapter explores the concept of Othering, a framework that examines how identities are constructed through processes of differentiation and exclusion. In two subchapters, I will analyse both the language and imagery that shape the perception of the Other. First, I will look at insights from Bauman and Bhabha to examine how language in newspaper articles is used to establish hierarchies and reinforce superiority. The second subchapter, *Picturing the Other: Visual Representation of the Other*, will draw on Said’s work to explore how visuals support to the exoticisation and marginalisation of foreign identities. Together, these sections show how Othering operates through both language and images to uphold structures of dominance.

Crafting Hierarchy: The Language of Difference and Superiority

Othering functions as a process of distinction and marginalisation, which maintains power by constructing identities rooted in ambivalence and control. Bhabha argues that ambivalence – a combination of attraction and repulsion – gives (colonial) stereotypes their power, while allowing them to endure and adapt across various contexts (95). Although they seem stable, stereotypes act as inconsistent projections of a ‘truth’ that lacks any foundational validation. To understand how colonial power functions, it is essential to explore the “regime of truth” (96) it creates, which is the system of knowledge defining what is (and can be) seen as true within the colonial order, rather than judging its depictions by external ethical standards (96). This exposes the dual nature of Othering, in which the colonised are simultaneously desired and rejected (96). Colonial power further establishes this duality by shaping the colonised subject around strategic differences of desire and domination, casting them as a recognisable yet simplified Other. This portrayal is a controlled identity, crafted to be fixed and predictable and thus enabling the coloniser to understand and dominate the colonised within a stable hierarchy (101). Through this constructed identity, colonial discourse not only labels but also reduces the complexity of the colonised to strengthen power structures that uphold ‘racial’ and cultural hierarchies (101). Bhabha’s exploration of stereotypes through the lens of fetishism highlights this ambivalence, as the stereotype is not only a misrepresentation but a tool that combines domination with fascination. It offers the coloniser a sense of superiority and pleasure while managing anxieties about perceived ‘racial’

or cultural threats. The stereotype, therefore, operates as a dual image that justifies control while relieving fears about the Other's difference (107).

Zygmunt Bauman examines how the nation-state fosters unity by contrasting insiders with outsiders. Since social bonds are insufficient for consistent unity, the state uses propaganda to cultivate an imagined community fixed in a homogenous national character. This effort to unify emphasises linguistic, ethnic, and cultural standardisation while reducing internal differences. To maintain stability, the state constructs a collective memory and history, erasing contradictions to present a shared mission and destiny (Bauman 65). Patriotism thereby turns the population into loyal citizens who support the unifying power of nationalism. Bauman further explores how Othering distinguishes strangers from natives to protect this unity (67). When direct exclusion is impossible, societies establish symbolic boundaries, such as rules, rituals, and restrictions, to distance outsiders and restrict their influence on a national group. Stigma plays a central role, since it attaches negative meanings to specific traits of the Other, which transforms visible differences into signs of hidden threats (68). Stigmatisation thus renders an outsider's traits as permanent markers, which justifies exclusion. Together, Othering and stigma solidify the Other's status, upholding the national identity while protecting its boundaries.

In this chapter, I extend Bhabha's framework on Othering beyond colonial power to explore how dominant groups construct hierarchy through the creation of an Other. While colonialism provides a crucial context for understanding this process, I bring to bear Bhabha's ideas on a broader scale to examine how these dynamics developed in 19th century British nationalistic narratives. Through several media, among them newspapers and images, Britishness was defined in contrast to the traits of the Other, constructing an 'us versus them' framework that clarified what was to be considered British and what was not, ultimately reinforcing national unity. This unity, however, came at a price: the exclusion and marginalisation of the Other sustained a hierarchical system that privileged those who identified with dominant British values while relegating others to positions of inferiority. For those in power and those who profited from this arrangement, the social and economic benefits outweighed the ethical costs, further establishing the dynamics of privilege and discrimination. By analysing what the British regime of truth looked like, I explore how specific values, assumptions, and depictions of the Other in media were used to shape a cohesive British identity. Building on Bauman's exploration of how the nation-state constructs unity by

defining insiders and outsiders, and Bhabha's framework for understanding the dynamics of Othering, I now turn to the practical application of these theories in the context of 19th century British media in the selected three events.

Exhibiting Difference

The Great Exhibition of 1851 received extensive coverage in both *The Times* and *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, with both reporting on it throughout its five-month duration. To narrow down my focus, I concentrate on articles from the first four weeks after the opening. For this analysis, I selected an article from *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* dated 25 May 1851, titled "The Great Exhibition". The article offers a direct comparison between the Canadian and Chinese sections of the exhibition; it portrays Canada, a British colony, as prosperous, while China is depicted as lagging in development. In 1851, British interests in China were primarily focused on securing a steady supply of tea, porcelain and silk, while utilising the opium trade to balance the trade deficit (Guotu 10). Despite this mutual economic dependency, Britain and China were presented in starkly unequal terms, which reflected broader imperialist attitudes.

We shall ask them first to accompany us into one of the most important of the British settlements in the New World—we mean Canada, which, if it does not exhibit so vast an amount of wealth, and so dazzling a display of gold, silver, jewellery, and embroidery, as our Indian Empire, possesses many curious and interesting peculiarities which we can assure our readers will well repay them for an hour spent in examining its contributions." ("The Great Exhibition" 9)

The subheading "A Visit to Canada" in the article signals a patronising yet approving perspective that depicts Canada as a valuable colony with significant potential for growth, provided it remains under British guidance. Canada is described as "one of the most important of the British settlements in the New World" (9)⁴ thereby positioning it firmly within the British Empire and the British worldview. The tone is one of familiarity as well as pride and it frames Canada as a "rising colony" with unique resources, like different types of wood, that will contribute to the British Empire. The phrase "properly estimated the value of the great industrial congress" reflects respect for Canada's understanding of its role within the Empire. Canada's contributions are seen as practical as well as valuable and aligned with British economic interests. Canada is depicted as a colony with "raw materials" that will form the basis of its "future prosperity" and its contributions are seen as early steps toward

⁴ The following section is based on "THE GREAT EXHIBITION." *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 25 May 1851: 9. British Library Newspapers. All quotes used in this subsection are taken from the same page.

industrialisation. Describing Canadian industries as "incipient efforts" and emphasising the need for a larger population for further development reflects a positive yet paternalistic perspective. This framing positions Canada within a developmental trajectory aligned with British notions of progress, while acknowledging that the colony has not yet attained the sophistication of British industries. While using language that creates a hierarchy, such as "rude and early stage of civilisation", it reflects the belief that Canada is behind Britain in development, but can still advance, yet only under British rule. This frames Canada as an in-progress version of British identity, a younger member of the Empire that can eventually catch up. Canada's "curious and interesting peculiarities" are intriguing, but the British reader is reassured that Canada is part of the Empire and has the potential for growth, making it both familiar and manageable. The ambivalence leans towards inclusion, with Canada seen as capable of development in a way that aligns with British ideals. This depiction stands in stark contrast to how China is portrayed.

China is framed as a culturally distant and exotic nation. This section's subheading "[a] Peep into China" already indicates a voyeuristic look into an alien culture. In the article's opening, the phrase "the industry of these singular people" exoticises Chinese people and presents them as fundamentally different. China's "characteristic adherence to the habits of their forefathers" and a resistance to "innovation of any kind" portrays them as static. Since Britain values progress, this reinforces preconceptions of China as an ancient but unchanging civilisation, which is already a form of Othering. It portrays Chinese society as sluggish and unable to change. By portraying China in this way, the phrasing implies that its cultural worth lies in its past rather than its present or future. This language suggests that while Chinese civilisation may be rich in tradition, it lacks progress, which implicitly contrasts it with Western nations that are viewed as more advanced. The emphasis on decorative and ornate goods, like "porcelain jars" and "lacquered tables" reinforces the idea that Chinese contributions are primarily aesthetic, as the emphasis is on manual labour rather than industrialised labour, and therefore lack the economic growth that Britain values. This representation portrays China as culturally regressive, which contrasts it to the British ideal of modernity. By portraying China as an eternal outsider, such a language strengthens the British identity that is based on separation from and superiority over an exotic Other. While Canada, as a colony, has many "interesting peculiarities" the Chinese are depicted as "a peculiar people". The word "peculiarities" in reference to Canada allows for a sense of curiosity as well as interest and

suggests that specific aspects are different but still valuable. In contrast, labelling the Chinese as a “peculiar people” implies a judgment about their whole character to frame them as unusual to alienate them. The Chinese part of the exhibit is also portrayed as decorative and non-essential. While the representative goods are described as beautiful, they are also described as lacking practical utility: “There seems to be scarcely anything which we have not already seen a thousand times”. On the surface, this dismissal reflects a view that Chinese products are culturally interesting but economically trivial. Repetition, often associated with mechanised, industrialised production, was central to European notions of progress and efficiency. Yet in this context, it is applied to handcrafted Chinese goods, suggesting a paradox: while these items are dismissed as lacking originality, they are also excluded from the industrial framework that defined modernity. Such biased characterisation reflects European prejudices, where industrial innovation was celebrated, while non-European crafts were exoticised and devalued. This ties into European ideals of originality, which are often compared to the stereotype of Asian cultures preferring repetition over individual creativity. This contrast further reinforces a hierarchy that celebrated European progress while devaluing non-European traditions.

An objectifying portrayal is captured in the next part of the article, which reduces a Chinese individual in the exhibit to a representative ‘type’ of his people. The article emphasises the variety of Chinese pieces on display before noting “a counter local is given to the spot by the presence of a real Chinaman, who sits in the midst of the nick-nacks of his country in full costume”. The term “real Chinaman” in the exhibit description diminishes the individual by reducing him to a cultural representative, blending him into the display of decorative “nick-nacks” and erasing his personal identity. While this phrasing objectifies him, treating him as part of the exhibition, it also turns him into a static symbol of an entire culture, which is a fantasy constructed by Western narratives to categorise and monitor foreignness. This reduction reflects a Western desire for control by presenting the Other as knowable and manageable within the colonial gaze. By positioning him among the objects, the article frames him as a passive spectacle, which satisfies British curiosity while denying his agency. This portrayal reinforces British identity as dynamic and individualistic, while the Chinese Other is reduced to a fixed and exotic presence, which exists only to be observed and classified.

To summarise, *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* uses contrasting portrayals of Canada and China to reinforce a British imperial worldview that places colonies on a developmental

trajectory under British guidance while distancing culturally distinct nations. By framing Canada as a promising member of the Empire and China as a static, exotic Other, the article highlights Britain's self-perception as both progressive and superior, reaffirming its imperial identity and control over cultural narratives.

Strangers in the Empire: Othering India

The media's portrayal of Canada and China highlights how British identity was defined against the Other; this same imperial lens shapes narratives about India, as a *Times* article, titled "India" from January 1, 1877, illustrates. The article frames British rule as a civilising force essential to India's progress. It offers a selective and biased narrative of Indian history, beginning from 1400 B.C. and ending in Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1877. By asserting that "India has always been under some paramount power [...] and has no history of its own" (3), the article positions the British Empire as the natural and rightful successor to earlier rulers. In doing so, it elevates British rule as the culmination of India's historical trajectory to portray it as benevolent and progressive in comparison to past powers.

The article "India" depicts British rule as a force of liberation and progress in India, crediting the British East India Company with bringing peace. This portrayal aligns with the same imperial strategies used in the depictions of Canada and China: constructing British rule as a force of liberation and progress. Just as Canadian development was framed as only possible under British guidance, and China was exoticised and dismissed as stagnant, India is similarly described as dependent on British intervention for peace. The British East India Company is credited in the article with bringing about the "peace and prosperity which now reign throughout the land" (3) to portray British rule as a liberation from oppression. It lists a number of events, including the "Mohammedan oppression (1803) and Mahratta anarchy (1819)" (3), to support the idea that British intervention saved India from internal unrest. Conveniently, this narrative overlooks the economic exploitation and political suppression that characterised colonial rule to emphasise an idealised image of British governance that is contrasted with the perceived failures of other powers and cultures. By positioning the British as liberators, the article constructs a moral reasoning for imperialism by suggesting that British governance has delivered stability that India supposedly could not achieve independently. This rhetoric serves to legitimise colonial authority and deny India's agency to emphasise the idea that British rule is essential to India's progress and well-being. In doing so, the article reflects

a broader colonial mindset that justified imperialism through claims of civilisational superiority while it simultaneously denied the possibility of a self-determined Indian history.

The article presents British rule as a civilising mission aimed at transforming India according to British values and culture. The article contextualises Lord Canning's arrival in 1856 as Governor-General (who is later Viceroy of India) among an "intense patriotic feeling to Anglicize and make all things new in India" (3). This motivation to reshape India in Britain's image reflected a broader imperial mission to impose British culture, values, and governance. British officials framed their policies as a benevolent "regeneration of India" (3), claiming to help develop "the higher principles which underlie the religion and the native institutions of the people of India, and which dwell within every human mind and heart" (3). The British would act as a "quickenning breath" (3) to bring these qualities to life, positioning themselves as facilitators for India's potential to guide it towards 'civilisation'. This rhetoric serves to justify British rule as a civilising mission. In addition to subtly claiming British superiority and moral authority over Indian culture, the suggestion that the British are helping to bring out the best in Indian society presents colonialism as a compassionate effort to help Indians realise their own potential, rather than as a violent imposition.

The sentiment of a civilising mission grew stronger in the aftermath of the Sepoy Rebellion. The text describes the "mercenary, undisciplined Sepoys of the Bengal army" (4) as soldiers motivated by "abounding plunder for their invariable reward" (4). This characterisation ignores the political and economic factors that fuelled the soldiers' uprising and instead reduces them to irrational individuals motivated only by greed. By focusing on the Sepoys' supposed lack of discipline, the article erases the rebellion's real causes and dismisses Indian resistance as irrational or rooted in an inherent moral failing. This portrayal aligns with the colonial narrative of Indians as morally and culturally inferior, incapable of self-governance, and resistant to the British civilising influence. In stark contrast, the British are described as embodying "calm, Christian heroism" which projects an image of moral righteousness and restraint. This dichotomy of the 'civilised' British and the 'barbaric' Indian rebels serves to justify British rule as not merely political dominance but as a moral duty. By framing the conflict as a test of British endurance, which "never endangered the stability of our rule in India" (4), the British assert their identity as disciplined to support their perceived moral superiority and their supposed right to rule.

Queen Victoria's declaration as Empress of India in 1876 and the Delhi Durbar in 1877 serve as the ultimate climax of the British civilising mission. Orchestrated by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, this strategic political move aimed to boost his domestic position and reinforce Britain's imperial identity (Taylor *Empress* 167). It served multiple purposes: appealing to monarchists at home, strengthening the Conservative Party, and signalling Britain's dominance over its colonies to rival European powers (*Empress* 167). The *Times* article describes the proclamation as "a great and illustrious position for this nation to have won; and if the responsibilities of it are great, the way in which we have come by it is the earnest of the constancy, prudence, and fortitude with which we may hope to hold it good" (4). The phrase "great and illustrious" (4) elevates British rule in India by presenting it as an important triumph that reflects positively on the British character. This portrayal constructs a hierarchy in which Britain "winning" this position is not merely a political achievement but also a moral and civilisational milestone. By associating British rule with virtues like "constancy, prudence, and fortitude" (4) the article justifies British authority and subtly frames Indians as lacking these same capacities. This is a hierarchical narrative that minimises Indian's agency and presents the British as legitimate rulers. Colonialism is reframed as a noble mission by erasing exploitative realities while casting the Indian population as dependent on British control for stability and progress.

In summary, the article "India" constructs a narrative that diminishes India's historical achievements and agency, casting British rule as a necessary force for civilisation. By framing the British as morally and culturally superior, this narrative justifies imperial domination as a natural. This portrayal not only legitimises British authority but also reinforces a colonial hierarchy that denies India's capacity for self-determination and independence, thereby reducing them to an Other.

Jubilee Cheers and Silent Others

In the articles from *The Times* and *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* surrounding Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, Othering is presented in a more subtle manner than in the ones about the exhibition or proclamation. After reviewing the articles published on or shortly after the two celebration days, and in the case of *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, the Sunday following, it is evident that the primary focus remains on the celebration itself. Instances of

imperial pride and the creation of a national myth are more prominent than explicit acts of Othering, but I analyse the examples I found in two articles.

In “Jubilee Reflections”, published on 26th June 1887, *Lloyd’s Illustrated Newspaper* portrays Queen Victoria as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon superiority and British civilisation as a global ideal.

“[...] In Queen Victoria, the world beholds the foremost constitutional monarch of the age, and the congratulations she received from almost every civilised nation on the globe formed in every case a tribute to the private and public character of the Sovereign, and the greatness of the Anglo-Saxon race whose energies she has inspired” (“Jubilee Reflections” 1).

The text portrays Queen Victoria as a symbol of the “greatness of the Anglo-Saxon race” (1) and presents British civilisation as a global model, representing an imperialist ideology that constructs a hierarchical distinction between ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ nations. By positioning the British, and particularly those of Anglo-Saxon heritage, as inherently superior, the text implies that British qualities are honourable and it aligns moral authority and cultural superiority with ‘racial’ lineage. However, the concept of an “Anglo-Saxon race” (1) is not a biological reality but a social and political construct, used to justify Britain’s colonial ambitions by portraying certain groups as naturally suited for leadership and civilisation. The phrase implies that only people who share British values and culture are deserving of respect and autonomy, therefore excluding and marginalising non-British and non-Western identities inside the British Empire. This constructed sense of superiority not only rationalises colonial dominance over ‘uncivilised’ peoples but also promotes an exclusionary national identity. The reference to “almost every civilised nation on the globe” (1) further implies a dichotomy between ‘civilised’ nations (those that celebrated Queen Victoria’s Jubilee) and ‘uncivilised’ ones (those that did not), which reinforces a colonial worldview in which British and Western civilisation is positioned as the standard.

The Times coverage of Queen Victoria’s Jubilee in “Her Majesty’s Jubilee” subtly reinforces British superiority by contrasting the crowd’s enthusiastic response to British royals with its indifference toward foreign dignitaries. The *Times* published a six-page article on 22nd June 1887 that retells the Golden Jubilee celebrations in great detail. Following Queen Victoria’s carriage at every stop along the way, it recounts the full ceremony. Although many royals from various countries attended, the article emphasises that only the British royals were of real interest. The text’s description of the passive reaction to “Indian visitors” (“Her

Majesty's Jubilee." 6) and foreign Princes in the parade subtly reinforces a sense of national Othering that differentiates between British and non-British figures, even within the context of a celebratory event meant to unify the Empire. The "Indian visitors" – likely lower-ranking dignitaries but that is not further explained – are acknowledged but described as merely "arous[ing] some interest but very few cheers" (6), an indifferent response that implies they are not important to the core of the celebration. Meanwhile, the foreign princes pass through "in closed carriages and in silence" and the crowd "felt no disposition to cheer" (6). By highlighting a division between British and non-British nobility, this word choice suggests that the foreigners are both physically and symbolically removed from the primary spectacle and that the general public feels little connection to them. In contrast, British figures, especially Queen Victoria and Princess Beatrice, are met with "loud and continuous" (6) cheers, which shows enthusiasm that is notably absent for the foreign representatives. This disparity indicates that the crowd reserves its admiration and emotional investment for British royalty, whom they view as symbols of their own national identity and pride. The indifference toward non-British figures, despite their high status, indicates that only those of British descent or those directly tied to the British monarchy are seen as deserving of respect. This selective celebration reflects a broader colonial mentality in which British identity is preferred, while others, even if part of the Empire, are viewed as outsiders. The lack of cheers for the Indian visitors and foreign Princes indicates a hierarchy in which British figures are held in higher regard, regardless of the visitors' own nobility or ties to the Empire. In sum, the coverage of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee subtly reinforces a hierarchical, exclusionary view of British identity, celebrating British royals as symbols of national pride while marginalising non-British figures, even within an event meant to showcase unity across the Empire.

Returning to Bauman and Bhabha, my aim is to examine the regime of truth as it operates in three key historical moments: the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria's proclamation of Empress of India, her Golden Jubilee in 1887. By focusing on these events, I uncover how particular values, assumptions, and portrayals of the Other in the media contributed to constructing a British identity. The regime of truth in these moments functions as a structured ideology that legitimises British imperialism by framing British identity as the ultimate standard of civilisation and morality. It establishes a developmental hierarchy, which places British subjects at the top, with colonies like Canada seen as on a path toward British-style progress under imperial guidance, while non-colonial cultures, such as China, are

depicted as resistant to development and locked in a static, exotic past. India, meanwhile, is portrayed as lacking its own history or capacity for self-governance, its past erased to present British rule as a natural evolution toward civilisation. The regime of truth in this narrative constructs 'truth' as British supremacy, presenting British rule as a stabilising and civilising force while depicting colonised peoples as either dependent on British guidance or inherently deficient. By selectively elevating 'British' values – such as "constancy" and "fortitude" ("India." 4) – and portraying figures like Queen Victoria as symbols of moral superiority, the regime creates an image of Britishness as morally righteous by contrasting it with what is seen as inferior. Even within celebratory events like Queen Victoria's Jubilee that was meant to show unity of the Empire, there is a distinction between British royals, who are met with respect and cheers, and foreign dignitaries, whose presence is largely ignored. This regime of truth denies the agency and history of colonised cultures to cast British rule as a civilising force that brings peace and moral improvement. Through these repeated and controlled narratives, the British regime of truth constructs a worldview where imperial rule is not only powerful but also necessary. It positions British domination as a natural and generous mission. In alignment with Bauman's theory, this imperial regime utilises stigma and Othering to reinforce British superiority by marking colonised subjects as permanently different and, thus, manageable only through British rule. This stigmatisation turns cultural and racial differences into symbols of threats or problems, thereby rationalising exclusion from the British community.

Picturing the Other: Visual Representation of the Other

Visual representation is a tool that is used to shape cultural narratives, define the Other, and reinforce dominant ideologies to uphold systems of power and control. Edward Said explores how the concept of the Orient was constructed as both an essential part of European history and a contrasting cultural Other, which reinforces Western power and ideology through a structured system of representation. In *Orientalism*, Said describes the Orient as an integral part of European history, but one that exists as a cultural contrast to Europe itself (1). The Orient represents not only Europe's neighbouring countries but also its colonies and serves as a permanent Other in Western consciousness. Said argues that Orientalism developed as a structured discourse, a system through which the West both represents and produces the East to impose a view of it through a distinctly European lens (2-3). Western powers exercise influence over the Orient to define it politically as well as socially in order to fit their own ideas

and ideologies, which means that “[...] the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (3). This created a relationship marked by power and control in which the West established a "complex hegemony" (5) over the East, framing it in ways that justified Western authority. Said compares the Orient to a "stage" (63) where stereotyped figures represent the entirety of the East, not as a vast, diverse region but as a confined, accessible idea attached to Europe (63). This Orientalist framework impacts the Orient itself, the scholars who study it, and the Western audience consuming these representations (67). Through this discourse, academics and institutions further support these depictions, ultimately shaping not only knowledge but also the perceived reality of the Orient. This constructed ‘reality’ gains legitimacy over time, which changes into a tradition of the East that Western audiences and institutions accept as objective truth (94). Orientalism has developed a unified identity centred on viewing the East as exotic, timeless, and fundamentally different from the West, shaped by institutions, specific kinds of writing, and illustrations that reinforce exoticism (202). This combination has produced an agreement within the field, leading Orientalists to depict the East consistently in ways deemed 'correct' and aligned with these established perspectives (202). Building on this framework, I intend to analyse how the Other is visually constructed and examine the role of visual depictions in producing an Orient.

Dangerous Other at the Great Exhibition

In this subchapter, I will focus solely on illustrations by Thomas Onwhyn and those featured in *Punch*, where Onwhyn also contributed as an illustrator (Houfe). *Punch* was first published in 1845 and soon became a widely successful weekly paper, which within only four years “had become the most talked-about and enjoyed periodical of its time” (Altick xvii). Combining text with satirical, cartoon-like illustrations, *Punch* appealed to a broad readership, including Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (xvii). Amy Matthewson argues that the magazine was successful because it offered readers a new way to understand the world through satire, explaining that “*Punch* engaged with dramatic events in a way that allowed for the ‘strange’ and unfamiliar to become knowable in a palpable, light-hearted, albeit stereotypical, fashion” (205). Alongside his work for *Punch*, Thomas Onwhyn also created a number of picture books that targeted a mainstream audience, often mocking themes like tourism and fashion (Houfe).

He both wrote and illustrated *Mr and Mrs Brown's Visit to London to see the Grand Exposition of all Nations*, which was published in 1851 by Ackerman and Co., part of which I will analyse.



Figure 1: Onwhyn, *Mr and Mrs Brown's Visit to London to see the Grand Exposition of All Nations*, 1851.

Mr and Mrs Brown's Visit to London follows a British family's tour through the exhibition, accompanied by images. Across eleven pages, the booklet employs Othering by portraying various cultures as inferior or dangerous. Figure 1 displays a page from the booklet with two panels: on the left, the family interacts with a "party from the Cannibal Islands" and on the right "Esquimaux [Inuit], Indians" are shown eating tallow.

These caricatures of non-European cultures are racist and demeaning. Exaggerated depictions, such as darkened skin, distorted facial expressions, and large eyes, reinforce stereotypes that alienate these figures from British norms of appearance to cast them as exotic and primitive. Such portrayals establish a racial hierarchy to present non-British people as physically and culturally distinct in a negative, animalistic way to suggest they are closer to animals than humans, which strips them of both individuality and humanity. In both panels, a stark contrast appears between British civility and the 'savagery' of other cultures. In the left panel, "Little Johnny" (Onwhyn), a British child, functions as a symbol of British purity and vulnerability. His fearful posture, sitting on a British adult, emphasises his need for protection from the surrounding non-British figures. The foreign people from the "Cannibal Islands" are attempting to buy the child, a portrayal that plays into fears of abduction and cannibalism. By framing them as potential threats to British children, the image suggests foreign people lack

moral boundaries, which reinforces the perception that British society must remain cautious against 'uncivilised' influences. The gesture of holding a big knife and giving a price for the child depicts the belief that foreign cultures commodify human life, which feeds into fears that immoral nations would steal British innocence. In the background, menu cards list dishes, including "Soup à la Hottentot" a term historically used derogatorily for the Khoikhoi people of South Africa ("Hottentot"). This label transforms the soup into something both intriguing and repulsive which underlines the notion that foreign cultures consume foods that are different to British tastes. Such exoticisation underscores cultural difference to portray non-European diets as strange rather than legitimate, which further represents these cultures as inherently different. Another sign advertises "Train Oil in Any Perfection" mocking the consumption of animal fat-based products and implying that other cultures are satisfied with food British society would deem unrefined. The use of labels like "Soup à la Hottentot" and "Train Oil" reduces entire cultures to stereotypes, oversimplifying them to elements that serve British perceptions of foreign people as primitive.

In the second panel, non-British figures clutch a barrel labelled "Russian Tallow" (Onwhyn), suggesting they are driven by primal needs and have to compete over basic resources without the restraint associated with British society. Tallow, used for making candles and soap, is reduced to a symbol of basic sustenance, which portrays these groups as concerned solely with survival. In contrast, the first panel's restaurant setting underscores British refinement, while in the second panel, the foreign figures are shown pushing to grab what they can, suggesting a primitive, animal-like nature. This depiction positions foreign characters as a group fighting over a shared resource, which emphasises a lack of individuality. Such a portrayal dehumanises them by comparing them to animals fighting for food instead of showing them as civilised people who would share resources. The hierarchy that is reinforced by this visual language presents other cultures as chaotic and motivated by primitive instincts, while British society is framed as orderly, sophisticated, and self-restrained. The message conveyed is that non-British people lack the discipline and social order that defines 'civilised' British behaviour to reinforce a cultural superiority. The symbolism further suggests that these groups are either content with or desperate for a substance British society considers low value. This reduction implies they are stuck at a basic level of material needs and are not aiming to the higher standards of taste that British culture values. Additionally, by depicting foreign figures fighting for tallow, the illustrator hints at economic underdevelopment in these

cultures, which ultimately portrays them as incapable of autonomy. This aligns with colonial narratives that justified British intervention as a means of bringing 'civilisation' and 'progress' to societies that are deemed underdeveloped and therefore in need of British guidance.

The illustrations in *Mr and Mrs Brown's Visit to London to see the Grand Exposition of All Nations* reinforce British cultural superiority through visual Othering. Dehumanising imagery depicts foreign figures as primitive and inferior, which presents non-European cultures as exotic, dependent on British control, and potentially threatening.

Visualising the Empire at Queen Victoria's Proclamation

On 13th January 1877, *Punch* published a brief article along with an illustration, titled *Kaiser-i-Hind*. The image (Figure 2) depicts Queen Victoria being proclaimed as Empress of India, surrounded by symbols of British colonial power and representations of India. *Kaiser-i-Hind* was the title specifically crafted for Queen Victoria's role as Empress, but it was only used in India (Cohn 201). The term, chosen for its connection to Roman, German, and Indian traditions, represented imperial authority while deliberately distancing itself from associations with Hindu or Muslim titles (201). The illustration was created by Edward Linley Sambourne, a cartoonist who began working for *Punch* in 1871 and would later rise to the position of chief principal cartoonist in 1901 ("Edward Linley Sambourne"). The artwork offers many aspects to analyse, but in this chapter, I will only focus on two: the depiction of the elephant and the portrayal of a personified India linked to a chain of medallions. In the following chapter, I will then focus on the representation of Lord Lytton and Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.

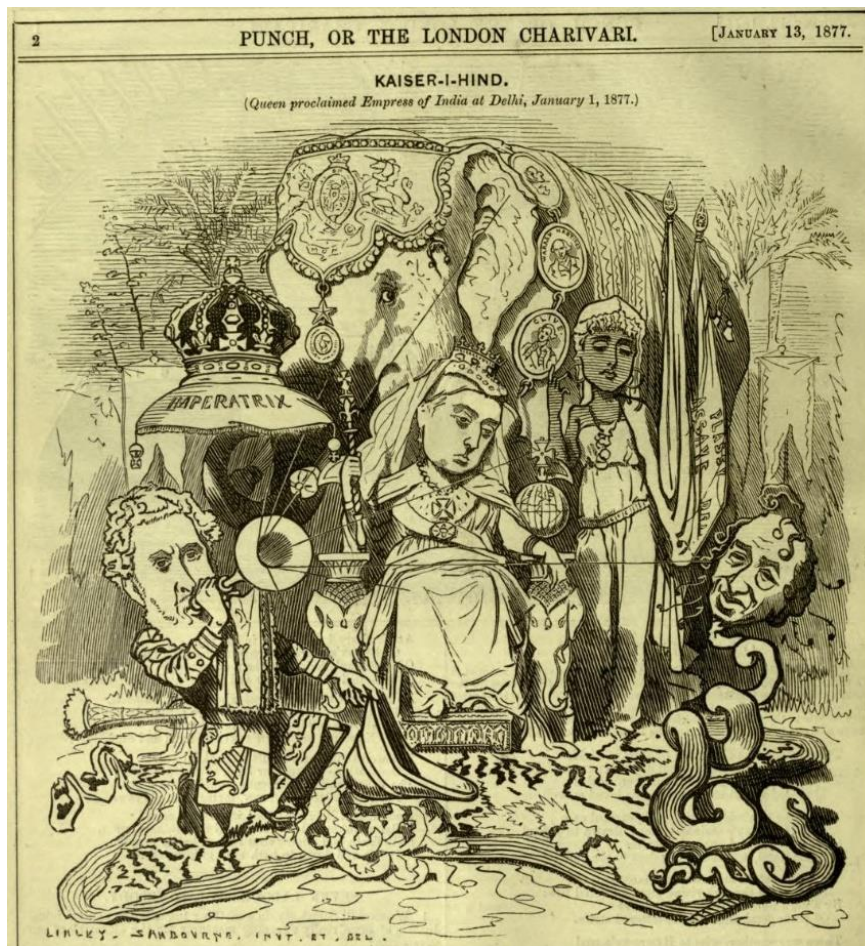


Figure 2: Linley Sambourne, *Kaiser-i-Hind.*, 1877.

The elephant, positioned behind Queen Victoria, serves as a central element of this image, symbolising the sub-continent's size, as well as India's exoticism and submission within a colonial framework. According to Aryama Ghosh, the "[...] orientalist gaze associated elephant[s] with the Indian geographical imagery" (242), which is evident in this image as well, since the elephant functions as an instantly recognisable symbol linking the scene to India. The presence of the elephant displays India's 'exotic' wildlife with unfamiliar customs and landscapes, which shows a simplistic and stereotyped view of India. This geographical simplification reduces India to a collection of symbols that fit Western expectations, instead of presenting it as a diverse nation. The elephant, despite its size and power, is depicted as subdued and domesticated, standing passively beside Victoria, ready to do her bidding while holding her new imperial crown. This imagery reinforces the colonial narrative that British rule has 'tamed' India, as it presents the elephant not as a symbol of wilderness, but as a compliant participant in a British ceremony. The elephant's placement within this carefully regulated, ceremonial British setting subtly conveys the Orientalist idea that British imperial rule has brought discipline and order to India's supposedly wild nature, which is consistent with the

imperialist rationale for colonisation. In addition, the elephant is a symbol of Oriental passivity. Decorated with elaborate accessories and standing in the background, the elephant contrasts with the active figures of British officials. This contrast reinforces the Orientalist trope of the East as passive and docile, and the West as dynamic and progressive. Despite the elephant's association with strength and power, it has been rendered a silent, subordinate participant in this British-controlled spectacle, symbolising India as an exotic, yet submissive land. The elephant holds Victoria's crown to symbolise India's role in elevating British imperial authority, which shows how India's suppression added to Britain's perceived supremacy; a theme that is continued in the depiction of the female figure as a personification of India.

The female figure, positioned at the Queen's left, embodies a constructed Orientalist image that highlights colonial narratives of exoticism, submission, and British imperial dominance. It personifies India, depicted as a young woman dressed in traditional attire that conforms to British stereotypes. Her clothing, jewellery, and posture reflect a crafted, exoticised image of Indian femininity, designed to appeal to British imaginations of the Orient. This portrayal aligns with Orientalist ideas, where the East is reduced to easily identifiable, romanticised symbols rather than represented with cultural accuracy. Although the woman's specific religion cannot be identified with certainty, the styling of her attire and the decorative use of the veil suggest a representation leaning more toward Hindu cultural associations. However, this choice is less about accurately representing Hindu or Muslim culture and more about fitting into the colonial narrative of India as an exotic, feminised land under British control. This ambiguity, in turn, speaks to the West's ignorance for major differences between Indian cultures, homogenising them into a single, Othered image for the purposes of colonial representation. Her attire, which includes elements such as large earrings and a headdress, emphasises India's perceived Otherness and reinforces the notion of the country as a land of exotic fascination. Standing passively beside Queen Victoria, the figure is positioned as visually and symbolically subordinate to the British monarch which reinforces India's place within the colonial hierarchy as a dependent entity. The contrast between the young, feminised Indian figure and the older, sovereign British Queen underscores a broader colonial narrative of maturity, authority, and control. The Queen represents the guiding hand of British imperialism over a 'childlike' and submissive India. Her resigned demeanour and stance convey a sense of submission, as though she has come to terms with her position under British rule. This intentional passivity is consistent with Orientalist depictions of Eastern nations as naturally

submissive and in need of Western direction. It suggests that India, represented by this woman, has been tamed and incorporated into the British Empire, echoing the imperialist belief that colonised lands benefitted from British rule. The depiction of the female figure holding the medallion of “Clive” in this illustration is highly symbolic and supports British colonial narratives through an Orientalist lens. During the 18th century, Robert Clive, an army officer with the East India Company, played a key role in establishing British control in India (Bowen). The act of holding the medallion subtly implies that India has been claimed and ‘branded’ by British imperial power. The medallion acts as a metaphor for the way colonial rule imposed British figures, values, and symbols onto the subjugated land. By physically holding Clive’s image, the woman represents an India that has been marked by British conquest, with her identity framed by British historical figures rather than by her own agency or culture. The medallion also suggests that the colonial legacy has been internalised by India’s symbolic representation. Rather than rejecting Clive’s image, the personified India is shown accepting or even embracing this legacy by holding the medallion. This implies a narrative of submission; India has come to accept its colonial rulers as part of its identity. This aligns with Orientalist themes, which often depict colonised lands as grateful for Western ‘guidance’. This visual alignment between the medallion and the female figure underscores the interconnected narratives of submission as well control and it links India’s symbolic acceptance of colonial dominance to a broader narrative of British imperial continuity and legitimacy.

The placement of Clive’s medallion symbolises the continuity of British control from Clive’s time to the present moment in which Queen Victoria is being proclaimed Empress of India. The medallion is part of a chain that wraps around the elephant, beginning with an unidentifiable medallion, followed by one featuring the image of Warren Hastings, a governor-general of Bengal during the 18th century (Reynolds). It then transitions to the Clive medallion and ends with Queen Victoria seated on a throne. This arrangement symbolises an unbroken lineage of British authority, suggesting that the governance established in the 18th century naturally evolved into Queen Victoria’s formal imperial role. The depiction conveys the idea that British rule is deeply rooted and historically justified, thereby masking its violent and exploitative aspects in favour of a legitimising narrative. In this way, the illustration captures a view of India that removes its agency and autonomy, reducing it to a passive, feminine symbol under the firm, paternal control of the British crown. Through this Orientalist lens, India is not

represented as a nation with its own history or voice, but rather an object in the British imperial project.

Kaiser-i-Hind reflects British imperial narratives by depicting India as exotic, submissive, and dependent on British rule. The domesticated elephant symbolises a tamed India contributing to British glory, while the medallions connect India's colonial past to Queen Victoria's imperial rule, which makes British dominance seem natural and unbroken. The female figure holding Clive's medallion represents a romanticised, passive India and is framed as a compliant part of Britain's imperial vision.

Hierarchy in Punch's Jubilee Illustration

Punch published an illustration titled *Mr. Punch's Celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 1886* in its *Almanack for 1886*. The image was likely published in 1886 to anticipate and build interest in Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887. As noted by the British Museum, it was reused in 1887, which highlights its continued relevance during the Jubilee celebrations. The artwork was created by Joseph Swain, a wood-engraver who worked for the magazine and provided various prints for it ("Joseph Swain"). The illustration is highly detailed and showcases elements of Queen Victoria's reign and accomplishments, but for this analysis I will focus on the depiction of Queen Victoria and the colonies.



Figure 3: Swain, *Mr. Punch's Celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 1886*, 1886.

The image depicts aspects of Othering by portraying a hierarchy between the British and various colonial subjects. Queen Victoria is positioned centrally and elevated on a throne that stands on a dais, which symbolises her dominance and authority over the subjects around her. While the colonial subjects and animals symbolise exoticism, submission, and subordination, Queen Victoria embodies authority and civilisation. Her posture and stillness emphasise her control as the unchallenged ruler. Surrounding the queen are symbols of British authority – such as the heraldic lion, banners, and soldiers – that reinforce her strength and command. The Queen's downward gaze, a physical representation of her moral and political superiority, mirrors the lion's calm demeanour, creating a visual parallel between her human authority and the lion's symbolic portrayal of British imperial power. This gaze underscores the hierarchy within the Empire, with colonial subjects positioned at her feet, their posture and offerings reinforcing their inferiority and subordination. Queen Victoria's detachment from the activity surrounding her further highlights her elevated status. Her lack of engagement with the colonial subjects and their offerings suggests that she is removed from the everyday realities of the Empire, which shows the hierarchical division. This detachment presents her as a figure of ultimate authority, positioned above the conflict and unbothered by the hardship of colonial life. The image's layered composition visually constructs a pyramid-like hierarchy, with Queen Victoria at the top which symbolically echoes the position of God in the great chain of being. Slightly below her are soldiers and banners, representing Britain's power and unity, while the colonial subjects, placed at the base, underscore their subordination through their admiration and exoticism. The great chain of being envisions existence as a divinely ordered continuum, ascending from inanimate objects to plants, animals, humans, angels, and ultimately God (Nagasawa 45), a structure the image reinforces through its symbolic layering. In contrast, the background, which is depicted in lighter ink, hints at broader imperial achievements. This pyramid-like arrangement mirrors the Empire's structure, with the Queen as the highest authority on top. Together, these elements create an image of control and British imperial dominance. This hierarchical structure not only emphasises British imperial power but also uses symbolic and visual markers to differentiate Queen Victoria's control from the exoticism of the colonial subjects portrayed around her.

The depiction of Otherness of the colonial subjects relies on visual and symbolic strategies that reinforce their subordinate and exotic status in contrast to British figures and Queen Victoria. The colonised are portrayed in stereotypical and exaggerated attire, reducing

their identities to exoticised symbols of their cultures. Indian figures wear turbans, jewellery, and floral garlands, while African subjects are shown with shields, spears, and feathered headgear, suggesting tropes of 'primitive' societies. Australian representation includes a kangaroo, which emphasises its distance from European norms. These costumes serve as recognisable markers of cultural difference rather than authentic descriptions of the people. The subjects are positioned at the margins of the illustration, physically distanced from the central focus on Queen Victoria and the British lion, which symbolise their peripheral role in the Empire. Their placement and animated poses – bowing, gesturing, or offering gifts – show them as subservient and dependent in order to frame them as grateful to the Empire's wealth and success. This dynamic is emphasised by the portrayal of animals, such as the tiger and elephant, signifying India's exoticism nature, and the kangaroo and sheep representing Australia's natural resources. These animals tie the colonial figures to their lands to highlight their geographical and cultural separation from British identity. The subjects are visually differentiated by their attire and props but homogenised within their groups, with no unique features or individual characteristics. This reduction to generic symbols dehumanises them and reinforces their role as representations of their lands rather than autonomous individuals. Their exaggerated expressions contrast sharply with the restraint of the British figures, particularly Queen Victoria, to reinforce stereotypes of 'primitive' peoples as emotional and lacking self-discipline. The colonial subjects are further linked to nature through their props and animals. In contrast, the British figures, especially Queen Victoria, are aligned with modernity, order, and control, to symbolise the 'civilised' world. This hierarchy is underscored by the height and posture of the figures: colonial subjects are depicted on a lower level, crouching or kneeling as they look up at Queen Victoria, whose elevated position on the throne highlights her authority. This visual arrangement mirrors the political and cultural hierarchy of the British Empire to emphasise the colonies' dependence on Britain and their status as outsiders to the British identity.

Mr. Punch's Celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 1886 visually embodies the process of Othering to reinforce British imperial hierarchy and dominance. Queen Victoria's central, elevated position symbolises authority and civilisation, contrasting with the colonial subjects, who are portrayed as subordinate and exotic. Their exaggerated attire and animated gestures emphasise their cultural and geographical distance, which frames them as fundamentally different from and inferior to British identity. The pyramid-like composition and the contrast

between restrained British figures and expressive colonial subjects amplify this dynamic. The image constructs a narrative of imperial control, using Othering to emphasise British superiority and to portray Queen Victoria as the unifying authority of the Empire.

Drawing on Edward Said's framework of *Orientalism*, the three illustrations analysed in this subchapter show how visual media contributed to the construction of the colonial Other and reinforced British imperial hierarchies. Said's argument that the Orient was both a necessary contrast to the West and an integral part of Western identity resonates throughout these images, which simplify and exoticise non-European cultures to legitimise British authority and dominance. These works simplify complex cultures into exaggerated tropes, such as the 'cannibal' figures in *Mr and Mrs Brown's visit to London*, the exoticised Indian woman in *Kaiser-i-Hind*, and the submissive colonial subjects in *Mr. Punch's Celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 1886*. Through caricature and deliberate composition, they articulate a clear colonial hierarchy which elevates Britishness as the height of moral, cultural, and political refinement while framing colonised peoples as inferior, primitive, or threatening. Just as Said describes the Orient as "not a free subject of thought or action" (3) these illustrations depict colonised figures as lacking agency, either grateful for British intervention or presented as threats that justify imperial control. In *Mr and Mrs Brown's visit to London*, non-European cultures are dehumanised, presented as morally and physically inferior to British civility. *Kaiser-i-Hind* reinforces the narrative of a subdued, passive Orient through its portrayal of India as an exotic but compliant contributor to British imperial greatness. Similarly, *Mr. Punch's Celebration* constructs a visual hierarchy that places Queen Victoria as a civilising figure presiding over grateful, exoticised colonial subjects. These visual depictions serve to legitimise British imperialism by portraying colonised peoples as in need of governance and British intervention.

Through the lens of Said's Orientalist framework, these illustrations reflect and perpetuate a constructed reality of the Other, yet they also demonstrate how visual media could amplify and adapt Orientalist narratives in ways that textual representations alone cannot fully capture. The imagery analysed does not simply portray the Orient as a homogenous, timeless construct; it actively incorporates British anxieties about cultural contamination and physical threats, as seen for example in *Mr and Mrs Brown's Visit to London*. The depiction of a British child being 'purchased' by foreign figures introduces an element of 'racial' and moral panic that exceeds Said's emphasis on a static Orient designed

for Western consumption. This material suggests that Orientalism could simultaneously construct the Other as passive and as a source of active danger. By examining these visual narratives alongside Said's theory, this subchapter highlights the intersection of textual and visual representations in crafting and disseminating imperial dominance. These visual narratives exemplify how Orientalism operated as a structured discourse across media to shape public perceptions and embed colonial hierarchies within the Western imagination. The process of Othering establishes a framework of imperial hierarchies that is further amplified in performative displays of imperial pride and monarchy.

3. "The European presence is absolutely uncontested": Imperial Pride and Monarchy

In this chapter, I examine how the interplay between imperial pride and the monarchy reinforced British dominance. I explore how imperial events and mediated representations of Queen Victoria and the Empire constructed a cohesive narrative of British superiority for domestic audiences. These dynamics will be analysed through Symbolic Contact Zones and Imperial Rhetoric, drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's framework in the first subchapter. The second subchapter focuses on portrayals of the monarchy and Empire in public and cultural spaces, which is guided by David Cannadine's insights.

Symbolic Contact Zones and Imperial Rhetoric

Contact zones, traditionally understood as spaces of interaction between different cultures, provide a lens through which to explore the symbolic and representational dynamics of imperialism, particularly within the cultural and ideological spaces of the metropole. Mary Louise Pratt's concept refers to "social spaces" where cultures interact under conditions marked by stark inequalities, often characterised by "domination and subordination" (7). These contact zones are defined by relationships that reflect significant power imbalances, which includes force and domination (7-8). Rather than focusing exclusively on conquest, the concept of contact zones highlights the interactions and exchanges that occur between groups to emphasise how their identities and practices become interconnected within these asymmetrical dynamics (8). Central to these interactions is the figure of the "seeing-man" (9), which describes how European colonisers aimed to maintain an image of moral innocence while continuing to establish dominance (9). The seeing-man represents the anti-conquest

strategy, which allows the coloniser to assert dominance through observation and representation without engaging directly in acts of conquest. However, in this analysis, I propose expanding the idea of the contact zone to include symbolic and representational encounters within the Empire itself, thereby shifting the site of contact away from the colonial frontier and into the cultural and ideological spaces of the metropole, where the colonised are represented rather than physically present. This reinterpretation does not intend to disregard Pratt's emphasis on mutual interaction but to explore a different, yet related, dimension of imperialism: how the Empire was imagined and reinforced within the coloniser's own home and society. The 'encounter' occurs between the representations of colonised peoples, which are shaped by colonial ideologies, and domestic audiences, who consume these narratives as part of their understanding of Empire. For these audiences, the symbolic contact zone becomes the primary site of engagement with imperialism, as few had direct experience of colonial territories or peoples. While this approach shifts the focus from direct cultural exchange to mediated representations, it remains consistent with Pratt's broader critique of imperial systems of knowledge. As Pratt notes, imperialism relied on controlling the means of representation and interpretation (7), which often excluded the voices of the colonised. By studying how these representations functioned within the Empire, it provides a way of understanding how imperial hierarchies were maintained and normalised, especially in the absence of physical contact. In this analysis, I argue that the absence of the colonised in these symbolic encounters is central to the critique; it underscores how imperial ideologies not only silenced and marginalised colonised voices but also depended on their constructed images to justify and sustain the Empire. This reimagined contact zone is primarily for the colonisers. It serves as a space where domestic audiences encounter the Empire and define their own identities in relation to the constructed Other. The seeing-man plays a critical role in this process, embodied by the authors and the media narratives they create, which act as mediators between the colonised world and metropolitan society. These narratives, shaped by an imperial gaze, construct representations of the colonised for domestic consumption. By framing imperial events and colonial subjects through this lens, media narratives symbolically possess and control their depictions, exclude the direct agency of the colonised, and present their own version of imperial reality.

Exhibiting Imperial Supremacy

A *Times* article titled "The Opening of the Great Exhibition" published on 2nd May, 1851, provides a detailed account of the Exhibition's opening day on 1st May. The article includes depictions of the monarch and the Empire as divine figures to justify Britain's colonising mission as both a moral obligation and a manifestation of its global supremacy.

Queen Victoria's entrance on the opening day as described in "The Opening of the Great Exhibition" is an example of divine framing. The article refers to the Crystal Palace as the "Great Temple of Industry" (4), which evokes religious imagery by portraying the exhibition as a sacred site devoted to imperial unity and industrial advancement. The use of the word "temple" carries strong religious connotations, as it traditionally suggests a place of worship and divine authority; this elevates the significance of industry and the Empire to a quasi-religious plane. In this symbolic temple, Queen Victoria is presented as a leader who has received heavenly approval and whose presence is validated by nature itself.

On her [Queen Victoria] appearance the vast assemblage rose to welcome her, a burst of enthusiastic cheering broke forth from every side—ladies waved their handkerchiefs, gentlemen their hats, and the whole scene presented was one of unusual splendour. The sun, too, for a moment emerged from the envious clouds that for some time previously had dimmed his lustre, and a flood of light pouring in through the glittering dome of the transept illuminated this imposing spectacle of loyalty ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" 5)

The description of the sun breaking through the "envious clouds" transforms the Exhibition into a scene of divine significance, as if blessed by higher forces. The sun emerging at this moment is portrayed as a divine sign and suggests that even the natural world acknowledges the significance of the occasion. The phrase "envious clouds" (5) implies that nature itself is compelled to give way to the Empire's glory which reinforces the alignment between monarchy and god's will. This narrative legitimises the imperial project by casting it as an extension of natural law and divine order to frame British imperialism as a moral and civilising force destined to enlighten the world. The Great Exhibition, therefore, becomes more than a national celebration; it is portrayed as a divine affirmation of Britain's destiny as a global leader. Just as the alignment between monarchy and God legitimises Britain's imperial mission, the exhibition is classified as a celebration of harmony and universal admiration which further reinforces the moral justification of British imperialism.

The Times article showcases the Great Exhibition as a harmonious event that transcends the violence and conflict often associated with imperial conquest.

Never before was so vast a multitude collected together within the memory of man. The struggles of great nations in battle, the levies of whole races, never called forth such an array as thronged the streets of London on the 1st of May. [...] [H]ere was an occasion which might be celebrated by the whole human race without one pang of regret, envy, or national hate. Not London alone, but the large contingents furnished to its teeming population by every people under the sun, came out into the streets [...]. ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" 5)

By comparing the gathering of the "vast multitude" (5) in London to armies or the mass migrations of history, the narrative casts the Exhibition as a celebration of "pure and universal glory" (5), untarnished by war or oppression. While historical conquests are remembered for their division and suffering, the exhibition is depicted as an embodiment of unity, where Britain's Empire is admired and respected rather than resented. The enthusiastic participation of "foreign friends" further reinforces this narrative as it presents the Empire's subjects and allies as willingly celebrating British achievements. However, this portrayal is deeply ironic, as the exhibition was built on the exploitation of colonised peoples, with many of its celebrated achievements derived from resources and labour extracted through imperial rule. Indian resources, for example, were framed as commodities to benefit British industry, which reflected the economic control exercised by the East India Company even before formal colonisation (Auerbach 100). Similarly, raw materials from Africa and goods from "Australasia" (101) were displayed to highlight the Empire's wealth and reach. Such examples reveal how the achievements celebrated at the exhibition were tied to the exploitation and subjugation of these regions. Prince Albert's leadership was evident in this demonstration of imperial unity and power; as President of the Royal Commission, he functioned as the Exhibition's figurehead (28) and transformed it into a global occasion that promoted industrial advancement (23). Albert encouraged global exchange (24), improved his own reputation, and aligned the monarchy with national development (15).

Prince Albert's speech further underscores Queen Victoria's symbolic importance. "[...] [I]t becomes our duty to return our humble thanks to your Majesty for the most gracious manner in which your Majesty has condescended to associate yourself with your subjects by yourself contributing some most valuable and interesting articles to the Exhibition" ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" 5). This recognition elevates the Queen's role to both a unifying figure and a benevolent leader. The phrase "condescended to associate yourself with

your subjects" (5) subtly reinforces her superior status while suggesting that her participation adds extreme significance to the event. By contributing valuable items rather than merely appearing ceremonially, Queen Victoria is portrayed as an active participant in the Empire's progress and thereby embodies its collective achievements. This portrayal unites the monarchy with its citizens in a shared mission to showcase British superiority, which reinforces the monarchy's centrality to both national identity and imperial consciousness. This integration of Queen Victoria into the fabric of British progress and identity extends beyond domestic narratives, as her role in encounters with figures from foreign nations further establishes Britain's self-portrayal as a global power.

One such encounter was with Mr Hsing, a Chinese figure associated with the ship *Keying*. The *Keying*, the first Chinese junk (a type of ship) to reach Europe, arrived in England in 1848 and became a symbol of fascination for the British public ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" V&A). Hsing, who had been part of the crew, attended the Great Exhibition in 1851, likely due to the widespread interest in the *Keying* and its journey ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" V&A). His presence at the Exhibition illustrates how imperial narratives appropriated encounters with foreign representatives to affirm Britain's global supremacy.

It was at this stage of the proceedings that the Chinaman, already referred to, and whom we discover to be no less a person than the Mandarin Hsing of the Chinese junk, unable any longer to control his feelings, made his way through foreign diplomatists, Ministers of State, and the distinguished circle with which Court etiquette had surrounded the throne, and, advancing close to Her Majesty, saluted her by a grand salaam, which she most graciously acknowledged. ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" 5)

Although China was not a British colony, its weakened sovereignty after the Opium Wars positioned it within Britain's sphere of influence. The description of Hsing as "unable any longer to control his feelings" (5) contrasts with the choreographed nature of the event and portrays him as emotionally overwhelmed and spontaneous. This framing diminishes Hsing's agency and heightens the portrayal of Queen Victoria as an awe-inspiring figure whose presence evokes unrestrained admiration. The salaam – an Arabic greeting rather than a Chinese one – underscores the homogenising tendency of imperial narratives. These narratives homogenise all foreigners into a single Other, which erases cultural specificity to emphasise British centrality and dominance. By portraying a representative of an ancient civilisation bowing to the British monarch, the narrative casts Britain as dominant as it presents its values and governance as superior. The ceremonial gesture is depicted as more than

diplomatic courtesy; it is transformed into a symbolic affirmation of Britain's leadership. Witnessed by both the public and aristocracy, the scene becomes a performative contact zone, where interactions are ideologically framed to naturalise British imperial supremacy. The anonymous author, functioning as the seeing-man, mediates this moment for a domestic audience and ensures it aligns with the narrative of Britain as a moral and civilising force. Hesing's gesture is interpreted as evidence of Britain's ability to command admiration across cultures and his agency is erased to frame his actions as a validation of British supremacy. This performative depiction reduces anxieties about Britain's place in an era of imperial rivalries by portraying its dominance as natural and celebrated even by non-colonised powers. The Great Exhibition thus becomes a stage where the monarchy and Empire's moral and cultural authority are performed and consumed, which legitimises British imperialism in the eyes of its domestic audience.

The opening day of the Great Exhibition, as described in *The Times*, highlights how religious imagery and symbolic gestures were used to present British imperialism as a moral duty and a sign of divine favour. Queen Victoria is portrayed as a unifying and almost sacred figure, while the Exhibition itself is framed as a celebration of harmony and progress. Encounters with foreign figures, like Hesing, are shaped to emphasise Britain's global dominance, casting its imperial mission as both natural and admired. These narratives helped solidify the monarchy's role at the heart of British identity and imperial ambition.

Empress of Imperial Authority

On January 7th, 1877, *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* published an article titled "Proclamation of the Queen as Empress of India". The article recounted a speech delivered by Viceroy Edward Robert Lytton during the proclamation ceremony in India and provided an example of how imperial rhetoric legitimised and reinforced British rule. Edward Robert Lytton, who became Viceroy of India in 1876, organised the 1877 Delhi Durbar to strengthen alliances with India's princes, demonstrate a shift towards indirect rule, and showcase British power (Washbrook). It was a big event intended to solidify British rule and symbolically bring the Empire together under Queen Victoria's new title of Empress of India.

The Viceroy's address to the gathered audience repeatedly emphasises themes of British protection, impartiality, and unity, to craft a narrative that positions imperial rule as benevolent and essential.

The princes and peoples had found full security under her Majesty's rule. The Viceroy proceeded to explain the reasons for the assumption of the title of Empress, which was intended to be to the princes and peoples of India a symbol of the union of their interests and a claim upon their loyal allegiance, the Imperial power giving them a guarantee of impartial protection. ("Proclamation of the Queen as Empress of India" 2)

The proclamation emphasised the supposed benefits of British governance, stating that both "princes and peoples had found full security under her Majesty's rule" (2). The use of "found" (2) suggests that security existed only under British rule. This disregards the longstanding structures of governance and stability in India before colonisation and portrays British intervention as the sole source of order and safety. Similarly, the term "security" (2) reflects the myths the British created to justify their imperial presence. It presents British rule as protective and benevolent while ignoring the violence, exploitation, and destabilisation that imperial control imposed on colonised regions. The Viceroy's speech framed the adoption of the title Empress as a symbolic act of unity, intended to connect India to the protective and impartial authority of British rule. By presenting the title as a "guarantee of impartial protection" (2), the address further reinforced the image of British governance as a stabilising and superior administrative force. The article deepens this narrative by focusing on the Viceroy's remarks to the Indian princes and chiefs, as well as to a more general population, which frames British governance as both protective and superior. His speech emphasises the "loyal allegiance" (2) and presents this as a natural result of the supposed security and justice provided under imperial rule. While it recognises the cooperation of the Indian princes, the address simultaneously reinforces their subordinate position within the imperial hierarchy by emphasising the "impartial protection" (2) extended by British governance. This dual dynamic of recognising loyalty while asserting control shows how the proclamation used local rulers to consolidate power while ensuring the Crown's ultimate supremacy.

The constructed image of imperial unity is further extended in the Viceroy's address to the broader Indian populace, where he adopts a paternalistic tone to justify British dominance. While acknowledging the people's "claim to participate largely in the administration of the country" (2), he frames this participation as dependent on their adoption of "the only system of education" (2) capable of preparing them to "comprehend and practise the principles of the Queen's government" (2). Education becomes both a tool for improvement and a mechanism to integrate Indians into the imperial framework to ensure compliance with British systems and dependence on colonial rule. This rhetoric of guidance and dependency mirrors the

hierarchical relationship emphasised in the Viceroy's address to the princes, which presents British governance as not only necessary but morally imperative to maintain stability and progress across the Empire.

The portrayal of India's dependence extends into its positioning as both necessary to and reliant upon the British Empire. The Viceroy's claim that "no enemy could attack the Empire in India without assailing the whole Empire" (2) emphasises Britain's role as India's ultimate protector and frames British governance as the foundation of India's security and stability. This narrative presents India's safety as inseparable from British imperial power and portrays the Empire's strength as a safety net against external threats. At the same time, the statement ties India's security to the Empire's overall stability and links its fate to the broader framework of imperial rule. It constructs a narrative of shared destiny, where British governance serves as the only source of order and protection. This dual focus – presenting Britain as both the provider and beneficiary of security – reveals the rhetorical aim of the speech: to underscore India's dependence on British power and assert its critical importance to the Empire. This dependency is further reinforced through the emphasis on the "fidelity of her Majesty's allies" (2), particularly Indian princes and chiefs. Their loyalty is celebrated as internal stability, yet their role remains confined within a hierarchy that underscores their subordination to imperial authority. Such loyalty and military strength create an image of the Empire as invincible. The Viceroy's statement about Britain's "ample power to repel and punish assailants" (2) serves not only as a declaration of military superiority but also as a reminder of the Empire's moral legitimacy. The rhetoric masks the exploitative dynamics of colonial rule and instead presents British governance as a stabilising force for India's benefit. This portrayal of harmony and mutual benefit aligns with broader imperial strategies that help to maintain an illusion of voluntary collaboration. These interconnected themes of education, security, loyalty, and military strength conclude in a vision of British rule as crucial, both for India's progress and for the Empire's cohesion. The article, uncritically reflecting the Viceroy's rhetoric, celebrates this narrative as evidence of British dominance and disregards the systemic inequalities and strategies that underpinned colonial governance. This rhetoric aligns with what Taylor identifies as Lytton's strategic demonstration of power in India, which intended to send a message to Russia and other European powers about the Empire's strength and unity (173 *Empress*).

The depiction in “Proclamation of the Queen as Empress of India” of the Viceroy’s rhetoric also aligns with Pratt’s concept of the contact zone, reimagined as a symbolic space operating both within the Empire and in competition with other imperial powers. This contact zone is mediated through medial representation, where the imperial gaze constructs the colonised as loyal and subordinate for domestic audiences and rival Empires alike. The colonised are depicted as integral yet subordinate, serving as evidence of Britain’s success in governance while reinforcing hierarchies of power. Simultaneously, this symbolic contact zone extends to rival Empires, projecting British moral and structural superiority in an increasingly competitive global context. As Pratt observes, imperialism did not merely silence colonised voices but reframed and controlled their representation to serve imperial agendas (9). In “Proclamation of the Queen as Empress of India” the voices of the colonised are present but are mediated to reinforce imperial power. They are presented in roles that validate the coloniser’s authority and uphold the Empire’s narrative of moral superiority.

Jubilee of Imperial Supremacy

The article used for this part is the same I have already analysed in my previous chapter, namely “Her Majesty’s Jubilee”, published by *The Times*. As the piece is five pages long, it offers numerous excerpts that lend themselves to analysis through various theoretical lenses. The imperial rhetoric surrounding the Jubilee, as captured in these passages, reveals how British media framed this event as elaborate affirmations of British dominance, moral legitimacy, and civilising authority. The article’s portrayal of Queen Victoria’s Jubilee as a moment of universal admiration and unity positions the event as a rhetorical affirmation of British stability.

Everybody had known that the occasion of the jubilee would be remarkable; few, perhaps, had been able to realize the fervour and the strength of the popular feeling. The sounds no less than the sights of yesterday were a revelation. Surely never was any manifestation of Royal pomp so successful in calling forth from an assemblage so completely representative and unanimous such cordial expressions of loyalty, of sympathy, and of affection [...]. (“Her Majesty’s Jubilee” 5)

The description of the Jubilee as “remarkable” and “worthy to be treasured in memory” (5) underscores its role as a rhetorical assertion of imperial unity and grandeur, which frames the British Empire as a cohesive and harmonious entity. The emphasis on the “fervour and the strength of the popular feeling” (5) constructs a narrative of universal admiration for British

governance, with the crowd's enthusiasm portrayed as a natural response to show their loyalty and affection. This rhetorical strategy transforms the event into a symbolic representation of imperial stability and thereby displays the Empire as a force for unity and order. The media maintains the appearance of inclusivity throughout the Empire by portraying the gathering as "completely representative and unanimous" (5), which indicates that the many subjects under British control happily and willingly participated in the celebration. This framing masks the asymmetrical power dynamics underpinning colonial rule and instead portrays the Empire as a benevolent structure that commands respect as well as devotion from all its. The depiction of the crowd's "cordial expressions of loyalty" (5) promotes the idea that the Empire is not only powerful but also backed by all British nationals. At the same time, this representation evokes pride among British domestic audiences, since it positions them as central participants in a global civilising mission. The Jubilee is presented as a defining moment in imperial history through a rhetoric that highlights its emotional and symbolic significance. This portrayal affirms the British monarchy's role as a unifying and stabilising force. Furthermore, terms like "revelation" and "worthy to be treasured" (5) draw attention to the event's significance; it is both a celebration of Queen Victoria's reign and an opportunity to reaffirm the ideological foundations of the Empire. The use of such language reinforces the narrative of Britain's moral and cultural superiority on a global stage.

Mediated representations of Indian royalty within imperial spectacles transformed the colonised into decorative symbols of the Empire's wealth and reach, which crafted a contact zone where cultural distinctiveness was taken to reinforce British supremacy and authority. The Jubilee created a symbolic space where the coloniser and the colonised meet, albeit within a highly asymmetrical framework dictated by the imperial gaze.

The swarthy visages of these Orientals, with their dusky, aesthetic hues of maroon and saffron, and their flashing diamonds were not more impressive than their stately and solemn gait, which told of a familiarity with ceremonial of which not merely our own Princes but even those of the brilliant Courts of Europe are unable to boast. ("Her Majesty's Jubilee" 6)

The Indian royalty, such as Maharajahs and Nizams, and their suites, described in detail with "many-coloured, gem-decked turbans" and "dusky, aesthetic hues" (6) are presented not as autonomous agents but as ornamental symbols of the Empire's wealth, diversity, and reach. The phrase "swarthy visages of these Orientals" (6) exemplifies the racialised lens through which the imperial gaze viewed the Indian princes. By focusing on their physical appearance,

such descriptions reduce them to aesthetic objects and construct them to serve the spectacle of imperial authority. This racialised framing erases individual identities and replaces them with a homogenised and exoticised image of subordination. This aligns with imperial fantasies of domination and Otherness; their role is confined to evoking curiosity and admiration from the crowd to amplify the grandeur of the event. The emphasis on the "stately and solemn gait" of the Indian princes and their "familiarity with ceremonial" (6) highlights their cultural and ceremonial competence, but this recognition is used primarily to elevate the standing of British governance. The article presents the colonised as inferior participants in a broader imperial narrative that revolves around British power by drawing a comparison between the princes' demeanour and the British monarchy's supremacy. This portrayal reflects the civilising rhetoric prevalent in imperial discourse: the princes are celebrated not for their agency but merely as evidence of the Empire's ability to integrate and promote its colonial subjects. This commodification of the Indian princes is particularly evident in the focus on material details, such as the Rao of Kutch's turban, which is "blazed with scintillating lights of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds" (5). These descriptions transform the princes into objects of fascination and symbols of imperial achievement to frame their presence as a testament to Britain's ability to command loyalty and extract wealth from its colonies. This rhetoric reinforces the asymmetrical dynamics of the contact zone: the princes are visible and celebrated, but only in a curated manner that supports the narrative of British supremacy. Their individual voices and agency are noticeably absent and are replaced by the imperial gaze's interpretation of their significance.

The reactions of the crowd during the Jubilee illustrate the hierarchical structure of British imperial identity. At the top of this hierarchy is Queen Victoria, whose procession, met with "hearty cheers" and "enthusiastic" (6) displays of loyalty, is the emotional and symbolic highlight of the event. Her role as the unifying figure of the Empire and the embodiment of moral and structural authority overshadowed all other participants. Below her in this imperial hierarchy were the Indian princes, who elicited "great curiosity" and admiration for their "gem-decked turbans" (6). Celebrated for their ceremonial greatness, they were carefully curated as symbols of the Empire's inclusivity and reach. However, their role remained complementary, restricted to boost the spectacle and to enhance Britain's image as a powerful Empire. Their presence symbolised the control of vast and wealthy territories and reinforced the idea that the British monarchy's greatness came from its ability to command loyalty from diverse and

prominent subjects. In my previous chapter about Othering, I discuss how the indifference toward the "Indian visitors" described as eliciting "very few cheers" (6) further underscores this arrangement. As lower-ranking, non-specified dignitaries, the visitors were acknowledged but marginalised, their presence treated as secondary yet served a decorative role that reinforced Britain's imperial reach. This indifference is a deliberate act of Othering, used to emphasise the exclusivity of British identity and reinforce the narrative that the importance and admiration are reserved for those directly connected to the British monarchy. The media made a clear distinction between figures who could symbolise imperial success and those who lacked the symbolic value or spectacle to captivate the audience. This arrangement highlights how the media selectively framed figures to reinforce the imperial narrative, which ensured that only those who enhanced the portrayal of British dominance were celebrated. The Jubilee thus becomes an orchestrated performance of British supremacy, where loyalty and admiration were reserved primarily for Queen Victoria, while the princes were subordinate contributors, and the visitors were excluded from the central spectacle altogether. Through this representation, the media reinforced the Othering of the colonised and affirmed the hierarchical structure of the British Empire with imperial rhetoric.

In examining the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India in 1877, and Her Majesty's Jubilee in 1887 through the lens of Mary Louise Pratt's theory of contact zones, this sub-chapter reimagines these imperial spectacles as symbolic spaces where Britain's identity as a global power was constructed and reinforced. Pratt's concept of the contact zone underscores the asymmetrical relations of power embedded within these events and thereby highlights how representations of an Other were mediated to serve imperial agendas. By shifting the focus from physical sites of colonial interaction to the cultural and ideological spaces of the metropole, this analysis demonstrates how domestic audiences engaged with Empire through carefully curated narratives that reinforced British supremacy and moral legitimacy. The symbolic contact zone, framed by the imperial gaze, enabled the coloniser to construct an image of Empire that excluded the voices of the colonised while appropriating their representations to affirm hierarchical structures of power. This mediation not only maintained the illusion of imperial unity and benevolence but also cultivated a collective British identity rooted in superiority over the Other. Ultimately, Pratt's framework illuminates how these spectacles functioned as performative representations of imperial ideology by transforming the distant realities of Empire into

consumable narratives that normalised and spread colonial domination within the domestic sphere.

Portrayal of the Monarch

During Victoria's reign, the representation of the Queen redefined the British monarchy from a national institution of declining political power into a symbolic foundation of an expansive and unified Empire (Cannadine 101). This decline in political power stemmed from constitutional reforms, the rise of parliamentary democracy, and the growth of political parties (Turner 85-86). This transformation elevated the monarch from a domestic authority figure to an imperial symbol of greatness and global dominance (Cannadine 101). The monarchy aligned Queen Victoria's image with the ideals and ambitions of the Empire and prioritised the maintenance of its relevance. It transitioned from direct governance to a role that embodied and legitimised the Empire's vast reach (101). This shift highlights how the monarchy successfully embedded itself into a larger imperial project, which relied on presenting Queen Victoria simultaneously as both the head and the embodiment of a global civilisation that extended beyond Britain's borders. Victoria's image became omnipresent (102), symbolising both possession and devotion through the naming of landmarks, towns, and natural features across the globe, "[...] her name was literally *everywhere*" (102). Her presence was reinforced by statues and monumental architecture, and symbols of the monarchy became part of everyday life through coins and stamps with her portrait. Her name was also immortalised in the Victoria Cross, the highest military honour, highlighting her role as a symbol of imperial authority and national pride (103). These visual elements were meant to connect British subjects to their ruler and thereby fostered a sense of unity. Elaborate ceremonies and public celebrations of royal milestones, such as parades and jubilees, served to solidify this connection by demonstrating its imperial supremacy, with Queen Victoria at the centre (105). Through these deliberate visual and cultural strategies, the monarchy created a shared imperial identity that tied subjects across vast distances to a single, unifying figure.

Visual representations played an important role in turning the British Empire into a recognisable and cohesive entity. The focus of this effort was Queen Victoria's image, which was disseminated via different types of media, such as portraits, coins, and public artwork. The British Empire, however, was not merely a product of the collective imagination; it was constructed through materials and cultural exchanges that connected the domestic and

colonial spheres (Cannadine 134). This connection was strengthened by the Empire's military and administrative structures. As leader of the Empire's military, the monarch directly commissioned officers, which symbolised the queen's authority and unified the armed forces under the Crown (134). These ties between governance, military power, and cultural representation led many Britons to view the Empire not as a distant entity but as an extension of their own social reality, as "their Empire existed overseas: but the British tried to make it seem like home" (135). Instead of feeling disconnected to the Empire due to size of it, Britons were encouraged to see the Empire as an important part of their daily lives.

By analysing three illustrations, namely a painting, a cartoon, and a Jubilee invitation card, I will demonstrate how the representation of Queen Victoria was instrumental in constructing a sense of imperial unity. The first is an oil painting, *The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851*, which was likely aimed at an upper and middle-class audience familiar with art and major cultural events. The second is a satirical cartoon from *Punch*, which presumably targeted the literate public, particularly middle- and upper-class readers interested in politics and current affairs. The Jubilee invitation card appears to have been made for rural communities, which may have included a mix of local elites and middle- and lower-class residents. These different pictures show how Victoria's image resonated with diverse parts of British society and promoted a sense of pride and unity with the Empire that crossed social boundaries. The Queen's image reinforced imperial hierarchies and created symbolic encounters within the metropole. These interactions, much like Pratt's concept of contact zones, allowed domestic audiences to engage with and imagine the Empire as cohesive and familiar.

The Exhibition of Imperial Grandeur

The first image I chose for this analysis is an oil painting, titled *The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851*. It was created by the London painter Henry Courtenay Selous between 1851 and 1852 and is now part of the collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum. I picked this artwork because it is one of the most famous pictorial representations of the exhibition, particularly notable for its widespread reproduction as prints for sale ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" V&A). The painting shows the opening ceremony at the Crystal Palace with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert both standing on a raised platform. Queen Victoria stands at the centre of the open pathway that extends through the

crowd and leads to the stage, positioned on the platform itself. Prince Albert is positioned further to the right but is still a prominent figure in the painting. They are surrounded by

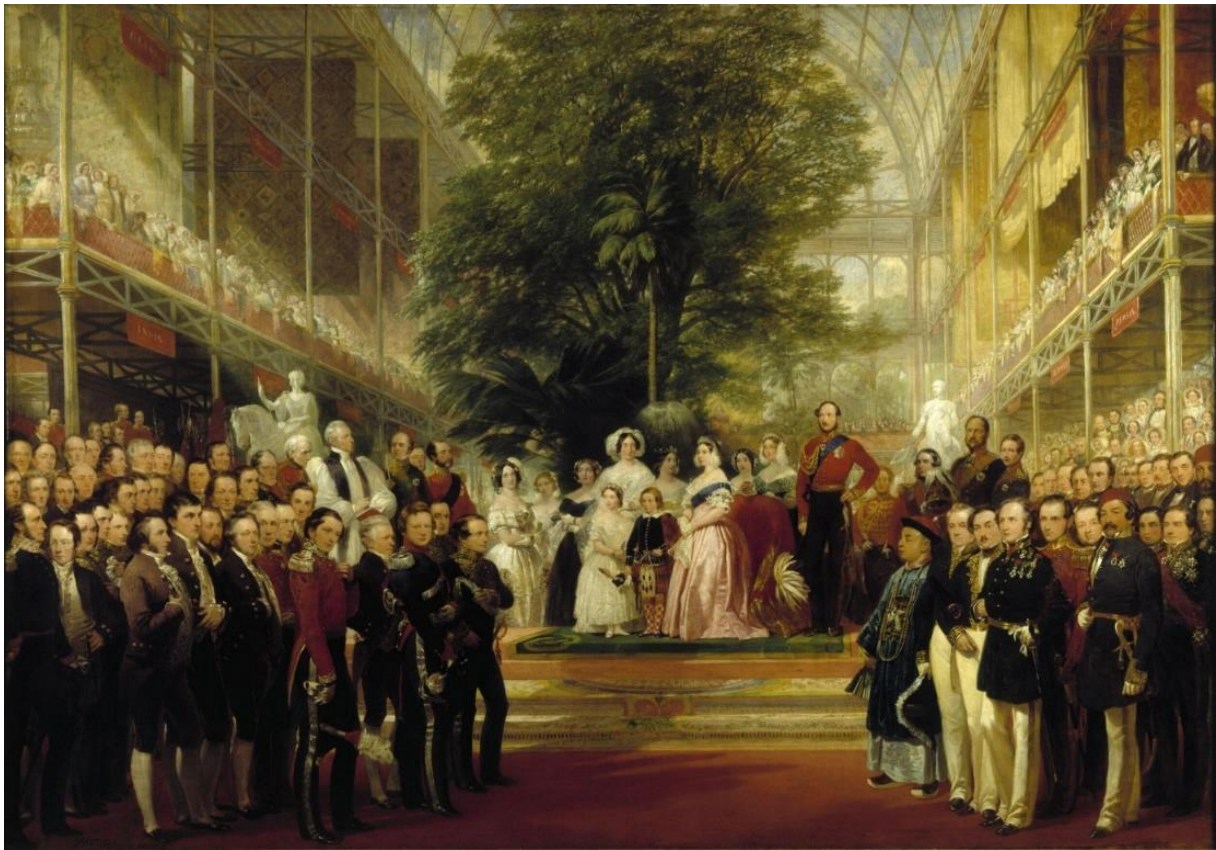


Figure 4: Selous, *The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851*, 1851-1852.

important figures, such as “Joseph Paxton [the architect] with his hat under his arm; Charles Fox, whose firm built the Crystal Palace [...] and Henry Cole, the first director of the South Kensington (later renamed the V&A)” (“The Opening of the Great Exhibition” V&A). There are also members of the royal family present, including some of their children. Princess Alice is standing near the Queen, and Prince of Wales Albert Edward is wearing a kilt. Moreover, the archbishop of Canterbury bestows a blessing on the exhibition. Due to limited space, I can only focus on following aspects: the royal family's placement as well as their representation as a unifying force as well as the interplay between religion, imperial ideology, and the framing of cultural interactions.

Queen Victoria's central position in the painting highlights her role as the symbolic figurehead of the British Empire, while Prince Albert stands slightly to her side. This arrangement reflects his role as both a supporter of the Queen's authority and the driving force behind the Great Exhibition. Although he is not at the centre, Albert's close proximity to Victoria and his clear visibility among the figures emphasise his importance. By positioning him

near the Queen without overshadowing her, the painting emphasises her as the heart of the Empire while acknowledging Albert's crucial contributions. His position highlights the significance of both his individual contribution to the exhibition and his function in bolstering the Queen's presence. The royal family, which is surrounded by a diverse group of people, including politicians, military commanders, and aristocrats, shows that all facets of the Empire are united under their rule. By placing Queen Victoria and Prince Albert on a dais, the painting visually distinguishes them from the crowd to underline their superior status as the heads of the British Empire. This elevation conveys the idea that the monarchy exists above the social and political structures of the Empire and thereby appears as a unifying and stabilising force. Victoria and Albert are turned into figures that embody the Empire's ideals, which are further elevated by their placement on the stage that functions as a pedestal. This choice shows that they are not meant to be perceived as ordinary individuals, but that they function as symbols that link their image to the permanence of the British Empire. The inclusion of their son, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, reinforces this narrative. Dressed in Highland attire, he represents the monarchy's embrace of Scottish traditions and symbolises unity within the United Kingdom. His position right next to Victoria highlights his role as the future ruler of the Empire and embodies its continuity and stability. The queen's depiction alongside her children portrays her as the nurturing centre of her own family, which is a role that is further extended; she is not only a mother, but also a maternal figure to the Empire. This imagery reflects Victorian ideals of motherhood, which celebrated nurturing care, moral authority, and domestic stability. By embodying these qualities, Victoria links the monarchy to these ideals of domestic life to make the Empire seem less distant and more like a family under her guidance. This dual role strengthened the monarchy's narrative as a stabilising and benevolent force by combining these private ideals with public leadership. This intertwining of monarchy and imperial ideology is further reinforced by the religious framing of the event.

The painting's depiction of the archbishop of Canterbury blessing the Great Exhibition, set against the backdrop of the Crystal Palace itself, emphasises the interplay between religion, monarchy, and imperial ideology. With its massive, transparent structure, and use of iron and glass, the Crystal Palace represents the height of British industrial and architectural achievement. The palace symbolises the Empire's modernity and dominance. Its resemblance to a cathedral additionally fills it with a sacred quality, which frames it not merely as a technological achievement but as a space where progress and spirituality meet and unite. The

archbishop's blessing reinforces this sacred association to transform the event from a display of industrial power into a symbolic and moral undertaking. By pointing to God as a figure of eternity and the ultimate source of authority, the blessing legitimises both the monarchy and Britain's imperial mission as part of a divinely guided plan. The Crystal Palace's open design provided a vast and adaptable space that allowed for the display of goods and innovations from across Britain and its colonies. This layout reflects the Empire's global reach and interconnectedness as it symbolised the way diverse contributions were brought together under British authority. At the same time, the scale of the Crystal Palace, which turns the people in the foreground into relatively small figures, represents the great triumphs of the Empire and implies that its development surpasses any ruler or organisation. The archbishop's blessing situates the celebration within a framework of divine sanction and connects moral and religious authority to Britain's imperial ambitions. The alignment of religion, monarchy, and imperialism within the Great Exhibition extends to its portrayal of cultural encounters, which is exemplified by a Chinese person in the painting.

The inclusion of this Chinese person illustrates how the Great Exhibition presented cultural encounters in order to affirm Britain's imperial supremacy. Although it has not been confirmed, the Victoria and Albert Museum speculates that this figure may be Mr. Hsing. Based on my analysis of an article describing the opening of the exhibition in the previous chapter, which mentions Mandarin Hsing's ceremonial "grand salaam" ("The Opening of the Great Exhibition" 5) to Queen Victoria, I argue that this figure likely represents him. This interpretation is supported by the article's description of his role in the opening ceremony. Yet, in this painting, the figure does not perform a gesture of respect. Instead, his inclusion relies on visual cues, most notably his decorated attire, to represent the power and sophistication of China as another great Empire, which is thereby shown as honouring Britain. His presence is framed as a symbol of admiration and respect for British values as well as governance to show that non-colonised Empires acknowledge British superiority. This framing reinforces hierarchical narratives that situate China within Britain's ideological framework of global dominance. Similarly, textual accounts of Hsing's "grand salaam" (5) transform a diplomatic courtesy into a symbolic affirmation of Britain's moral and cultural leadership, which aligns his actions with the broader imperial rhetoric of the Exhibition. While the painting does not depict this specific gesture, it mirrors the textual framing by using Hsing's rich attire and placement within the scene to visualise Britain's global reach. Both representations construct Hsing as a

participant in a performative contact zone where cultural interactions are ideologically framed to naturalise British dominance. Together, these representations situate Hsing within the ideological framework of the Great Exhibition that transforms him into a figure that legitimises and glorifies British imperialism

The painting *The Opening of the Great Exhibition* captures the symbolism of the monarchy, religion, and imperial ideology. Queen Victoria's position, supported by Prince Albert and their children, presents the royal family as a unifying force at the heart of the British Empire. The archbishop's blessing ties the event to divine approval, transforming industrial progress into a moral and sacred achievement. The inclusion of a Chinese figure highlights Britain's global reach and frames cultural encounters as a testament to British superiority. Together, these elements celebrate the Empire's dominance as both natural and divinely sanctioned.

Forging Unity Through the Empress of India

The second illustration *Kaiser-i-Hind* (Figure 2, p.33) discussed in this chapter is the same analysed above in "Picturing the Other: Visual Representation of the Other". Because it offers numerous layers of interpretation, it merits a re-examination here; this time with a focus on the contrasting depictions of Lord Lytton and Prime Minister Disraeli. I will explore how the portrayals of these two critique the performative aspects of British imperial authority while simultaneously reinforcing Queen Victoria's symbolic role as a unifying figure.

On the left side, Lord Lytton is shown playing the trumpet, which indicates his role in amplifying and broadcasting the display and spectacle of the British Empire. The trumpet, an instrument associated with announcements and ceremonials, symbolises his function as the announcer of Queen Victoria's new title, as he is loudly proclaiming her status as Empress to the world. The image also plays on the phrase 'blowing one's own trumpet', which suggests that Lytton's actions not only served to promote the Queen's new title but also to draw attention to his own role in orchestrating the event. This self-promotion aligns with the performative and propagandistic nature of the Delhi Durbar, where the focus was less on governance and more on projecting British dominance and unity through elaborate displays. The cartoon critiques Lytton's role by portraying him as an overblown as well as ridiculous figure. It implies that his attempts to enhance the monarchy's reputation focused more on show and noise than on real content. According to Taylor, Lytton aimed to repair the damage

caused domestically by opposition to the queen's new title by utilising what he described as the "enthusiasm of the Asiatic mind" (*Empress* 173). He believed Indian political sentiment was passive and unresponsive without British intervention. Drawing on his supposed understanding of the 'native character', Lytton focused on engaging Indian princes and chiefs through titles and ceremonial displays to secure their loyalty (173). This emphasis on spectacle and performance is further reinforced through another symbolic element in the illustration: a hat.

Lord Lytton is holding a hat, which normally symbolises a request for offerings, but in this case stands for Britain's insatiable greed for more territory. The hat, held open and ready to collect, serves as a metaphor for the acquisition of territories within the framework of British imperialism. However, the act of holding a hat in a beggar-like position introduces an element of irony. It hints at a critique of Britain's imperial ambitions as it suggests that despite its immense power, the Empire was never content and always wanted more wealth and land. Just as one might collect coins in a hat, Britain's expansion was motivated by the desire for economic, political, and symbolic gains. Considering that "Lytton wanted to make a display of the overwhelming military power of British India, to send out a message [...]" (Taylor *Empress* 173), both the trumpet and the hat serve as complementary symbols of British imperial ambitions. While the trumpet loudly announces Britain's military power and warns off rivals, like Russia, for domination over India, the hat silently shows the rewards of this dominance, such as territories, wealth, and resources gathered into the Empire's fold. While Lytton's efforts focused on projecting British strength through spectacle, Disraeli's actions centred on reinforcing imperial authority through the symbolic elevation of Queen Victoria's status.

The depiction of Disraeli as a snake on the right in the cartoon reflects both his political manoeuvring and the contentious process of establishing Queen Victoria's title as Empress of India. In 1876, prime minister Disraeli proposed this title to underscore Britain's imperial dominance, a move designed to boost both the monarchy's prestige and his own political standing (Taylor *Empress* 168). The snake imagery highlights Disraeli's manipulative nature and suggests that his advocacy for the title was driven by personal ambition rather than national interest. The biblical association of the snake with the devil, drawn from the serpent that deceives Eve, portrays Disraeli as a corrupting influence. This imagery casts Disraeli as a corrupting influence who tempts others with promises of power while hiding the moral consequences. Just as a snake moves stealthily around its target, Disraeli's influence was

insidious and he carefully winds through the political landscape to achieve his objectives. The cartoon's symbolism also reflects the controversy that surrounded the proposal. Queen Victoria supported the idea but preferred the term "Queen-Empress" (168) to maintain a distinction between Britain as a kingdom and India as a colony. Disraeli's insistence on the more imperial-sounding title faced strong opposition in Parliament and among the public, who saw it as un-British and similar to authoritarian Empires like those of Napoleon or Russia (169). The snake's association with deception and corruption mirrors the accusations against Disraeli, whose reputation was damaged by the debate (171). The image suggests that his methods were morally questionable, disguising imperial ambition with misleading language while hiding the political opportunism behind it. The snake's biblical connotations as a cursed animal are the source of the metaphor. According to Genesis 3:14, God sentenced the serpent to crawl on its belly in disgrace, which is a punishment that symbolised moral corruption (*King James Version*). This punishment parallels the critique of Disraeli's political strategies and suggests that his cunning manoeuvres, while effective, were questionable. His attempt to inflate Victoria's image through the title Empress of India frustrated the queen, who disliked the controversy it generated (Taylor *Empress* 171). Disraeli's plans were limited by popular opinion and parliamentary opposition, which is reflected in the final agreement to use the title mostly in India (171). The snake's winding form thus represents Disraeli's ability to navigate controversy and manipulate symbols of power.

The satirical depictions of Lord Lytton and Disraeli in the cartoon highlight the constructed nature of Queen Victoria's image as a unifying figure of the British Empire. While the cartoon critiques the artificiality and self-interest behind Lord Lytton's and Disraeli's efforts, it simultaneously underscores the necessity and effectiveness of these actions. By portraying Lytton playing the trumpet and holding a hat to collect territories, the cartoon critiques the performative and self-serving aspects of imperial authority, while Disraeli's depiction as a snake underscores the political manoeuvring required to secure Victoria's title as Empress of India. The comparison between their flawed, opportunistic portrayals and Victoria's composed, regal figure reinforces her role as a stabilising force. This contrast highlights how the monarchy evolved during Victoria's reign, as it changed from a domestic institution with declining power to a central symbol of the Empire. The cartoon contrasts the political chaos with Victoria's calm authority and thereby reflects broader cultural efforts to present the Queen as the embodiment imperial stability.

A Jubilee Card of Imperial Design

For this analysis, I also selected an invitation card designed for a countryside church service in 1887, created to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Designed by J.F. Weedon (V&A), the print demonstrates how imperial ideology was disseminated to the general public to embed imperial narratives into everyday life. As mentioned, the card likely aimed at a wide audience, which included rural churchgoers and local communities taking part in Jubilee celebrations.



Figure 5: J.F. Weedon, *untitled*, 1887.

The dual images of Queen Victoria in this Jubilee card, representing her in 1837 and 1887, transform her into a symbol of stability by capturing both the continuity and transformation of her reign. Both portraits include a crown, but their depictions highlight different aspects of her sovereignty. The 1837 portrait, with Victoria shown as a youthful and

idealised queen, symbolises the promise and innocence of a new reign. The crown here emphasises her legitimacy and the start of her journey as a monarch. However, in the 1887 painting, Queen Victoria is drawn as a much more experienced and powerful monarch, with both a veil and a crown to show her as the head of a vast Empire. Her composed expression conveys a sense of experience and authority which suggests that she has successfully navigated the changes and challenges of her – at the time – 50-year reign. Together, these images bridge the gap between the past and the present to show Victoria as a reliable ruler despite the changes during her reign. The youthful image ties her to the realm of national identity and traditional British values, while the mature image positions her as a figure of imperial grandeur and global influence. Through this continuity, the public is reassured that the monarchy is still a stable force in spite of the British Empire's growth and complexity. This crafted continuity aligns with Hobsbawm's notion of the "invented tradition" (1 *The invention*) wherein such displays of royal imagery are not merely reflections of the past but serve to create a ritualistic and symbolic connection to an idealised history. As Hobsbawm notes "nothing appears more ancient, and linked to an immemorial past, than the pageantry which surrounds British monarchy in its public ceremonial manifestations" (1). The Jubilee celebrations, as embodied in this card, are a deliberate construction of historical continuity, which fosters a collective belief in the monarchy's unbroken connection to national and imperial identity. This portrayal of Victoria as a symbol of continuity extends beyond her personal image to the visual representation of the British Empire, where she legitimises the broader imperial structure.

In the Jubilee card, the attire and positioning of the colonial figures and the lone British overseer reinforce Queen Victoria's role as the central authority of the British Empire by visually representing its alleged diversity and hierarchical structure. The colonial figures are depicted in stereotypical representations of Indian, African, and Indigenous North American attire. These simplified, stereotypical depictions – such as the turbaned figures representing India and the figure with dark skin and minimal clothing suggesting African subjects – serve as visual representation for the Empire's vast reach. The figure in the hat and full attire appears to represent a generic colonised individual rather than a specific person. The turban-like headgear and long coat link this figure to an Egyptian identity or, more broadly, to the stereotypical 'Oriental' image shaped by British imperial imagination. The ambiguity of this figure reflects the broader trend in imperial propaganda to reduce diverse cultures into

oversimplified and stereotypical portrayals. Rather than depicting the distinct identities of colonised peoples, such representations served as visual representation for the Empire's size; it blends different cultures of the colonised into a singular, subordinate image. The representation of the figure with a feathered headgear and traditional attire appears to be a stereotypical portrayal of an indigenous person from North America, even if that is historically inaccurate in terms of Britain's colonies in 1887. This character therefore likely serves as a visual reminder for Britain's historical colonial influence in North America or as a generalised symbol of indigenous peoples within the British Empire. The British overseer, dressed in a red shirt and white trousers, stands confidently with a hand on his hip, which demonstrates colonial authority and administration. The clear distinction between the British figure and the colonial subjects underscores the imperial hierarchy: the British stand as figures of power and governance, while the colonial figures are depicted in passive poses. Queen Victoria's portrait, framed as a round emblem, is visually separate from the colonial scene. This emphasises her authority as abstract and overarching rather than directly involved. The separation places her in a theoretical space which presents her as a unifying figure whose rule legitimises the imperial hierarchy. While the British overseer represents authority on the ground, Victoria's image serves as a distant yet omnipresent symbol of imperial control.

The religious text on the Jubilee card, drawn from Leviticus 25:11 "[a] Jubilee shall that Fiftieth year be unto you" (*King James Version*) carries significant implications for imperial justification. This meaning becomes even clearer when paired with the continuation in Leviticus 25:13 "[i]n the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession" (*King James Version*). In the original biblical context, the Jubilee year was a time for the restoration of land, the liberation of slaves, and the forgiveness of debts. The way this passage is used in relation to Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, however, changes its original meaning to uphold British imperial ideology. The biblical call to "return every man unto his possession" (*King James Version*), commands rightful ownership and self-determination, yet within the British Empire, this idea is ironically inverted to justify Britain's territorial acquisitions as part of a divine order. Colonial lands are framed as being in their 'rightful place' under British governance, which casts British rule as an act of restoration and justice while erasing the autonomy of colonised peoples. This understanding validates the idea that British imperialism brings stability as well as rightful order to colonial territories and thereby positions British rule as a form of benevolent leadership. The Empire's appropriation of lands and

resources is reframed as a process of returning these territories to a higher, divinely guided authority which hides the realities of exploitation with a narrative of moral redemption. This reference to Jubilee also aligns with the notion of the civilising mission to bring order and progress to its colonies. By framing imperial rule as a divine restoration, British expansion is portrayed as a noble effort to improve colonial societies. This framing legitimises the idea that British control is natural as well as divinely determined, which supports the Empire's dominance while presenting it as a righteous enterprise.

To summarise, the Jubilee card for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 uses imagery and biblical references to promote imperial ideology. The dual portraits of Victoria emphasise stability and continuity, portraying her as both a national symbol and an imperial leader. Stereotypical depictions of colonial figures highlight the Empire's reach while reinforcing hierarchical narratives. The religious text then reframes British expansion as divinely sanctioned, which casts imperial rule as benevolent and justified. Together, the card celebrates the monarchy's role in legitimising and uniting the Empire.

The portrayal of Queen Victoria as the symbolic foundation of imperial unity, as explored throughout this subchapter, highlights how the British monarchy served as an anchor for both national identity and the justification of colonial rule. Through public spectacles, ceremonial imagery, and mediated representations, the monarchy was transformed into a stabilising force that reassured domestic audiences of Britain's moral and cultural supremacy. These depictions functioned within the symbolic contact zones, where mediated encounters with the colonised were carefully staged to reinforce hierarchical power dynamics. In these spaces, colonised subjects were framed as subordinate as well as dependent, and their perceived inferiority thereby underscored the necessity of British guidance. It is within these symbolic contact zones that Othering performed its dual role: justifying imperial domination and shaping British identity. The construction of the Other as inferior and dangerous validated Britain's imperial mission, portraying colonial control as a benevolent duty. Simultaneously, these representations allowed the British to see themselves reflected as the opposite of the colonised: civilised, moral, and enlightened. Imperial pride, therefore, was inseparable from this process of identity formation. The monarchy, as the figurehead of these imperial narratives, continually affirmed Britain's self-image. By participating in these mediated encounters, domestic audiences acquired an identity that depended on the suppression and marginalisation of the colonised. The cyclical nature of this process – Othering to justify

imperialism, and imperialism to reinforce pride and identity – ensured that the ideological structures of the Empire remained embedded within British society. The queen's image, omnipresent and honoured, stood as a symbol of this identity. Victoria's role as such a symbol leads to an exploration of how myths transformed these representations into enduring narratives that defined and sustained a collective national identity.

4. “The function of myth is to empty reality”: The Myth of the Nation

In this chapter, I explore the role of myths as the foundational ideological structures that support and sustain both Othering and imperial pride. Myths create narratives as well as symbols that define British values as superior and set the standards by which civility and progress are measured. By constructing a shared history and common destiny through symbols, rituals, and recurring themes, myths foster a collective identity that aligns with and supports imperial ideas. While Othering presents colonised peoples as inferior and in need of British leadership, imperial pride results from celebrating Britain's moral and cultural superiority. These processes rely on myths to provide the necessary justification and coherence, making these interpretations appear self-evident and natural. Using both Roland Barthes's theory of myths as semiological systems and Gérard Bouchard's insights into their adaptive and symbolic functions, I will analyse media representations of the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1877, and her Golden Jubilee in 1887 to demonstrate that these myths are fundamental to the cycle of Othering and imperial pride, and that together, they construct a national identity rooted in the ideologies of the Empire.

Myth as a Tool for Simplifying National Identity

According to Roland Barthes, myths reshape meaning by transforming familiar symbols into carriers of new ideological messages (142). At its core, myth operates by building on a pre-existing system of meaning (Barthes 113). In the first-order system, a sign consists of a form (the signifier) and an idea (the signified) that together create meaning (112-14). For example, as Barthes illustrates, a rose might signify love or passion (111). Myth takes this entire sign – the rose as a symbol of love – and elevates it to a second-order system to use it as a signifier for a broader concept (113), such as the passion for a patriotic movement. In this process, the original meaning of the rose (love) does not disappear entirely (117). Instead, the sign's

meaning is emptied of its complexities, and it is reduced as well as adapted to fit the new ideological purpose (116), in this case, a patriotic movement. This reconfiguration is crucial because the myth presents its newly constructed meaning as natural rather than as a deliberate creation (130). Myths operate so seamlessly within culture that their constructed messages are often mistaken for common sense or universal truths, or as Barthes says “myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden - if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious - but because they are naturalized” (130). Myth turns historical and political realities into natural and eternal truths and shapes collective understanding by making its messages seem obvious and conclusive (143).

G rard Bouchard’s perspective complements Barthes’s analysis by exploring how myths function not only as semiotic constructs but also as adaptive narratives that shape a society’s core values and ideals (2). They foster a collective identity and sense of belonging by linking individuals to a shared history and a common destiny (3), through symbols, rituals, and recurring themes (277). Symbols serve as representations of unity and pride, while rituals play a crucial role in keeping myths alive. As Bouchard states “rituals are particularly instrumental in this regard, not as a way to heal the wounds but, on the contrary, to reopen them and to reload the myths” (5). Certain historical events and their retellings can therefore evoke different emotions. Similarly, rituals, such as ceremonies or parades, bring forth emotional responses that reaffirm narratives which sustain national identity (5). Moreover, these myths can adapt to changing contexts while maintaining the desired main message (4). Barthes’s concept of naturalisation helps explain how this adaptation is possible: symbols are stripped of their original complexities and recontextualised to convey ideological meanings that appear self-evident and universal (143). In doing so, Bouchard explains, myths not only adapt but also present a society’s actions and beliefs as morally justified or inevitable (3). Myths also serve to legitimise social and political systems by framing policies and hierarchies as divinely determined (5-6). They are perceived as sacred, which makes them into tools for maintaining social order and cohesion (2). Furthermore, myths can mobilise collective action and inspire resistance during times of crisis (3) by encouraging societies to persist hardships and sustain ideals (277). Societies rely on “master myths” (4), which are foundational narratives that provide stability, and “derivative myths” (4) that adapt these core ideas to current challenges. This balance between continuity and adaptability helps societies navigate change while maintaining a sense of identity (4). By creating narratives that give collective meaning to

historical experiences and future aims, myths “[...] set forth visions of the past and the future of a society” (3). Myths are therefore tools that shape identity and legitimise authority by combining shared history with emotional symbolism. They provide societies with a sense of unity as well as purpose to maintain stability.

Together, Barthes and Bouchard provide complementary insights into the nature of myths. While Barthes lays the ground by explaining how signs are transformed into ideological carriers through naturalisation, Bouchard extends the understanding of myths as adaptive systems that sustain societal identity and cohesion. Myths combine reality, fiction, and emotion in a way that legitimises authority, inspires action, and adapts to the needs of society, which in turn secures their relevance across time and contexts. In this analysis, I will draw on both frameworks of myths to examine how British national identity and imperial authority are constructed and sustained through media narratives surrounding the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Empress of India proclamation of 1877, and the Golden Jubilee of 1887, respectively. Each of these events serves as a reinforcement of master myths like British exceptionalism, imperial unity, and the civilising mission. Using Bouchard's concepts of symbols, rituals, and recurring themes, I will demonstrate how these articles employ emotional language, visual symbolism, and ceremonial descriptions to legitimise Britain's global dominance and moral authority. I will explore how these myths adapt to different historical contexts while maintaining a consistent message of British superiority and benevolence. Barthes's theory of myth as a second-order semiotic system will be employed to demonstrate how these narratives transform familiar signs, such as symbols of the monarchy, Empire, and industrial progress, into carriers of ideological meaning. This approach shows how myths distort signs, subordinate their original meanings, and recontextualise them to align with imperial ideologies. Together, these perspectives will reveal how media narratives not only unify British society but also justify hierarchical power structures and colonial policies to present British imperialism as both inevitable and morally justified.

Myths in the Great Exhibition

For this analysis, I chose the article “The Royal Opening of the Industrial Exhibition of all Nations”, published by *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* on May 4th, 1851. I selected it because it provides a detailed account of the exhibition's opening ceremony, in which the use of myth is especially evident as it frames the Great Exhibition as a symbol of British progress

and moral leadership. The article reinforces ideologies of the British Empire, particularly the myth of British exceptionalism, the myth of imperial unity, and the myth of the civilising mission by presenting the opening of the Great Exhibition as historically as well as morally significant.

The 1st of May, in this year of our Lord 1851, has passed into the gulf of time; but its recollection will live in history. The Queen of England on that day performed an act which will be identified with her name in all ages to come. On the 1st of May, the Great Exhibition of Industry was opened with regal pomp, by Queen Victoria I.; and the representatives of almost all the nations of the earth assembled, in their proper persons, to give welcome to our monarch, and to pay homage to that universal spirit of peace, good will, and holy brotherhood, which is the moving principle of this vast gathering of mortality and its products. ("The Royal Opening of the Industrial Exhibition of all Nations" 3)

In this article, the Great Exhibition emerges as an expression of global harmony under the guidance and leadership of Queen Victoria and, by extension, the British nation. The description of "representatives of almost all the nations of the earth" (3)⁵ assembling in London suggests that the world recognises Britain as the peak of civilisation. This event is not only an international gathering, but it is a stage where "our monarch" receives global recognition as well as respect, which reinforces the belief that British leadership and values possess universal legitimacy. The language, including phrases like "regal pomp" and "universal spirit of peace, good will, and holy brotherhood", constructs a sense of sacredness around the British Empire to portray it as a benevolent force. As Bouchard's notion of rituals indicates, the ceremonial opening serves as an enactment of the master myth of British exceptionalism, as it uses emotionally charged symbols and language (5) to reassert Britain's rightful place at the centre of a moral and unified world order. The ritual does not only rely on immediate participants; the article extends its impact by transforming readers into symbolic witnesses. This reflects Anderson's idea that national identity is formed through shared mental images and reinforced by the act of reading newspapers, with the knowledge that others are reading them too (34–36). This connection creates a shared sense of belonging among those present and those reading about the event, which underscores the communal nature of the ritual. Victoria's symbolic presence reinforced these ideals by humanising the Empire without disrupting its hierarchical structures. This dynamic allowed the Empire to hide its underlying

⁵ The following section is based on "The Royal Opening of the Industrial Exhibition of all Nations". *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 4 May 1851: 3. British Library Newspapers. All quotes used in this subsection are taken from the same page.

power dynamics and colonial oppression to present a harmonious vision of British power. Instead of addressing the political and military strength that sustained Britain's dominance, the passage presents a world where other nations voluntarily "pay homage" to the queen. The emphasis on peace and brotherhood reinforces this concealment, as it frames Britain's role as a promoter of global unison while obscuring the exploitation that sustained its dominance.

However, the language of "brotherhood" suggests a gendered perspective, which is rooted in masculine ideals of leadership and authority. Queen Victoria's role as a female monarch introduces an apparent contradiction, but instead of challenging the masculine associations of "brotherhood", her position complements them through a combination of patriarchal authority and maternal symbolism. The term "brotherhood" conveys unity under a governance system dominated by men, while Victoria's maternal image frames this unity as guided by care and moral responsibility. This dynamic positions her as both the symbolic 'mother' of the Empire and a figurehead who embodies and acts within male led structures of governance. Through this combination of "brotherhood" and maternal care, Britain's power is aligned with ideals of both strength and benevolence. This portrayal is further strengthened by the language of moral and aesthetic superiority, which frames British advancements as more than just material or industrial achievements.

The article highlights Britain as a global leader in technological progress, cultural refinement, and moral guidance.

The opening of the great temple of industry, ingenuity, and taste, was effected with a consequence and a success that must be highly gratifying to all who have for a moment reflected on the vast amount of good that will inevitably result from such an extensive research into the capabilities of both countries and peoples, and was a beautiful and clear illustration of the irrefutable doctrine that self-love and social are the same, and that the harmony and uninterrupted intercourse of individuals, is but a type of the advantages to be gained by a widening of the scope of the principle, and embracing nations in its sphere. ("The Royal Opening of the Industrial Exhibition of all Nations" 3)

The reference to the "great temple of industry, ingenuity, and taste" elevates British technological and cultural achievements to a sacred status. The symbol of a temple, used in many other articles and analysed in the previous chapter, conveys the idea that British progress represents not only practical success but also higher moral and aesthetic ideals. The inclusion of "taste" alongside industry and ingenuity highlights that British accomplishments encompass both technical expertise and refinement. This combination reinforces the myth of British exceptionalism as it suggests that Britain alone combines practicality and progress with beauty.

As a result, British advancements appear superior because they balance functionality with aesthetics. This framing positions the exhibition as deserving global respect and admiration. The phrase “effected with a consequence and a success” underscores the event’s significance and far-reaching impact. Similarly to the previous excerpt, this passage declared the lasting significance of the Great Exhibition as a defining moment in cultural memory. Additionally, the assertion that the exhibition offers “a vast amount of good that will inevitably result [...]” reflects confidence in Britain’s ability to guide the world toward progress and improvement. The phrase “a vast amount of good” presents the outcomes of the exhibition as concrete and measurable which grounds the statement in apparent fact. However, the use of “inevitably” shifts the tone and frames these outcomes not just as likely but as unavoidable; it transforms a prediction into a proclamation of certainty. This rhetorical strategy blurs the boundary between what has already been achieved and what is yet to come to show Britain as an unchallengeable authority. By presenting predictions as assured realities, the article reinforces the belief in Britain’s influence as both benevolent and essential. The term “inevitably” suggests that British efforts guarantee positive outcomes and thereby creates a sense of moral and historical inevitability. This language mirrors the function of myth as described by Bouchard, where myths transform contingent events into moral inevitability (3). This also aligns with Barthes’s concept of naturalisation (130), as this narrative frames British authority and its civilising mission as timeless rather than constructed. In this context, the exhibition is not merely a display of industrial and cultural dominance but an affirmation of Britain’s civilising mission; it portrays the Empire’s authority as a natural and beneficial order, one that others accept willingly in the present and are expected to continue accepting in the future. By showcasing not only industrial advancements but also the refinement symbolised by taste, the exhibition further portrays Britain as a model of progress. This narrative asserts that British culture excels in technological development while also setting the standard for aesthetic and moral excellence. As a result, the exhibition serves as evidence of Britain’s leadership in advancing global knowledge, technology, and cultural refinement. The idea that British advancements balance functionality with aesthetics leads to the notion that such achievements also serve a greater purpose.

British progress is framed not only as a national achievement but also as a means of promoting global improvement and unity. The phrase “self-love and social are the same” suggests that Britain’s pursuit of its own national progress benefits the broader world. In this

context, “self-love” refers to Britain’s focus on advancing its own industry and culture. However, this framing introduces a potential contradiction with Christian doctrine, which traditionally warns against self-love as selfishness or pride and advocates instead for humility and selflessness (*King James Version*, Philippians 2:3). The article reconciles this apparent contradiction by redefining self-love within a moral framework that aligns with Britain’s imperial narrative. Instead of presenting self-love as selfishness, it portrays it as a morally justified pursuit, where Britain’s achievements are seen as gifts to the world. The rhetoric implies that Britain’s progress is divinely sanctioned, as it casts Britain’s industrial and cultural advancements as tools for uplifting others. The text describes Britain’s self-interest as a force for global good which turns the critique of self-love into a claim that national progress embodies care and service. The Great Exhibition reflects this notion by showcasing British achievements that allegedly offer knowledge and solutions for other nations. This perspective reinforces the myth of the civilising mission, which portrays British imperial expansion as a benevolent effort to improve supposedly less developed societies. It also supports the myth of British exceptionalism by presenting Britain as uniquely capable of harmonising its own interests with the success for others. The phrase “harmony and uninterrupted intercourse of individuals” expands this idea to a global scale since it suggests that the peaceful and productive interactions seen within British society can serve as a model for international relations. The text portrays the Great Exhibition as a microcosm of an ideal world order, where nations cooperate under British guidance to achieve shared success. This reinforces Britain’s self-image as a nation uniquely suited to lead and organise global progress.

In brief, the article “The Royal Opening of the Industrial Exhibition of all Nations” uses the Great Exhibition to reinforce the myths of British exceptionalism, imperial unity, and the civilising mission. It portrays the event as a moment of global harmony, with nations gathering to honour British values and leadership. Queen Victoria is depicted as a unifying figure who combines maternal care with authority to embody the Empire’s values. By presenting British progress as a benefit to the world, the article casts imperialism as natural and benevolent to position Britain as uniquely suited to lead global improvement.

The Empress and the Empire Myth

The journalistic piece selected for this analysis was published on the 1st of January 1877 in *The Times*. While the paper's index lists it under the title “The Proclamation at Delhi”, the

actual page replaces this title with the simpler subheading “London, Monday, January 1, 1877”. It addresses the formal announcement of Queen Victoria’s assumption of the title “Empress of India” and reinforces the myths of British exceptionalism, the civilising mission, and imperial unity. By portraying British rule as morally justified and essential for India’s progress, the article frames imperial dominance as a benevolent duty rather than an act of exploitation.

Here and there a green spot of common human benevolence reveals itself in the dreary retrospect, and India has thereby learnt to dream of rulers better than the cruel and licentious conceptions of her own mythology. But rarely indeed has there been any trace of that true Imperial instinct which conquers to conciliate, which chastises in kindness, which comforts the weak, tames the strong, and makes it a rule that the triumphs of peace shall adorn or hide those of war. It might be that not only national genius but national opportunities were necessary for the exercise of such salutary and creative beneficence. It cannot be denied that England has both the opportunities and the genius to use them. Since the days of Rome no Power has so combined the gifts of war and of peace, of policy, of material improvement, and of enterprise by sea and land, and, above all, the art of dealing with discordant races, as our own. (“London, Monday, January 1, 1877” 9)

The article supports the myth of British exceptionalism by portraying Britain as a nation uniquely equipped with the qualities necessary for effective and fair rule, especially when compared to previous rulers of India. The statement that “England has both the opportunities and the genius to use them” (9)⁶ asserts that Britain possesses not only the chance to govern effectively but also an inherent talent or “genius” for leadership. This idea promotes the belief that British rule stems from a unique national character and a sense of destined superiority. The text further amplifies this notion by claiming that Britain is the legitimate successor of Rome, as Empires go, since it balances “war”, “peace”, “policy”, “material improvement”, and “enterprise by sea and land” equally successfully. The article’s reference to Rome shows how myths shape views of the past and future (Bouchard 3), as it positions the British Empire as the heir to the Roman Empire’s achievements, especially the period of *Pax Romana*, a time of relative peace and stability across the Roman Empire. This narrative draws on the medieval concept of *translatio imperii*, which posits the transfer of cultural and political supremacy from one dominant Empire to another over time (Baehr 1). This theory links national authority to a broader universal tradition, which suggests continuity between Empires as they take on the responsibility of civilising the world (Baehr 2). The article therapy positions Britain as the

⁶ The following section is based on “London, Monday, January 1, 1877”. The *Times*, 1 January 1877: 9. British Library Newspapers. All quotes used in this subsection are taken from the same page.

natural heir to the Roman Empire and grounds national identity and legitimacy in such a tradition of imperial power. This now unique ability to balance military strength with peaceful governance supports the idea that British rule is not only effective but also uniquely balanced and morally justified. By framing Britain as a nation that combines conquest with benevolence, the text elevates British leadership to a timeless and superior status, which reinforces the belief that no other nation can match Britain's capacity for Empire-building and governance.

What is equally significant is the omission of other contemporary Empires, such as the Russian, Ottoman, or Austro-Hungarian Empires. Their absence from the discussion suggests an implicit erasure, as if these powers were irrelevant or non-existent in the global landscape. This exclusion further strengthens the myth of British exceptionalism, as it allows Britain to stand unchallenged as the singular inheritor of imperial greatness. By ignoring these other Empires, the article positions Britain as exclusively qualified for leadership, not through direct comparison but through the absence of competition. According to Barthes, myths operate by transforming historical and political realities into seemingly natural truths (142). The rhetorical erasure of other Empires exemplifies this process: it frames Britain's imperial dominance not as a product of specific historical circumstances but as an unchallenged and inherent global truth. This rhetorical strategy naturalises British dominance by presenting its rule as inevitable and universal while erasing the diverse realities of imperial power in the 19th century. As Barthes explains, myths disguise their ideological intentions by presenting constructed meanings as self-evident (130). In this case, the omission of other Empires contributes to the myth's ability to present Britain's supremacy as natural and timeless, rather than the result of geopolitical dynamics.

The article also promotes the myth of the civilising mission by framing British imperial rule as a moral obligation to improve India, while contrasting British governance with the alleged cruelty and inefficiency of India's previous rulers. The statement that "India has thereby learnt to dream of rulers better than the cruel and licentious conceptions of her own mythology" portrays Indian rulers as inherently bad and immoral which suggests that India's own traditions cannot produce good leadership. The phrase "dream of rulers better" implies that British rule fulfils a long-standing desire for humane and enlightened governance, which casts British intervention as a necessary improvement. This framing supports the idea that British imperialism acts as a rescue of colonised societies from their own failings. Later in the article, this is further emphasised with the assertion that Indian rulers "represent the proved

impossibility of India uniting herself by her own internal development, or by any Asiatic agency". This statement claims that India lacks the capacity to achieve unity or progress through its own systems or leadership, which once again emphasises the notion that British intervention is necessary. The text positions British rule as the only possible solution for India's fragmentation and inefficiency. The description of "that true Imperial instinct which conquers to conciliate, which chastises in kindness, which comforts the weak, tames the strong" reinforces this idea by portraying British conquest as benevolent rather than oppressive. Britain appears as a ruler who punishes with compassion, protects the vulnerable, and restrains the powerful. This framing legitimises British rule as an act of moral responsibility and caring governance, which underlines that British conquest brings order and improvement to societies depicted as inferior. The phrase "the triumphs of peace shall adorn or hide those of war" further implies that British rule ultimately prioritises peace and constructive progress over military conquest. Even when violence occurs, the outcomes are depicted as leading to positive developments. This depiction of British rule as a moral and necessary intervention supports the broader idea of Britain's unique ability to unify diverse peoples under a stable governance.

The article reinforces the myth of imperial unity by emphasising Britain's capability to manage diverse peoples. The phrase "the art of dealing with discordant races" highlights Britain's supposed talent for governing different 'racial' and cultural groups. By describing this ability as an "art", the text suggests that British rule is not merely a matter of force or administration but a skilful practice. This portrayal casts British leadership as inherently superior, which implies that the Empire's ability to manage diversity reflects a sophisticated approach to governance. It supports the idea that the British Empire functions as a harmonious union where various peoples coexist under British authority. The assertion that British rule is the means "by which alone different races can be brought to a lasting unity" further reinforces this myth. The use of "alone" implies that no other method or system of governance can achieve the same level of stability. This framing presents British rule not just as an option but as a needed and inevitable solution for India's internal divisions. The suggestion that only Britain can create lasting harmony legitimises imperial control by portraying it as a generous force for order. It implies that India's diverse populations, left to their own devices, would remain fragmented and unstable. The effectiveness of this narrative relies, in part, on what it chooses to leave out. The text erases alternative models of imperial unity by once again

ignoring examples like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which successfully governed populations that spoke numerous languages: By the late 19th century, nine vernaculars were officially recognised in the Austrian half (Fellerer 714), while many more languages and dialects were spoken across the Empire, with no exact number available for the Hungarian half (Fellerer 715-16). This omission reinforces the belief that the British Empire uniquely serves a noble and essential purpose in uniting diverse groups. Myths help maintain social order and cohesion (Bouchard 2) by depicting British imperialism as a unifying force that benevolently integrates diverse communities, rather than as an act of domination. Thus, British dominance is depicted not as an act of exploitation but as a moral and civilising duty.

To conclude, the article "The Proclamation at Delhi" reinforces the myths of British exceptionalism, the civilising mission, and imperial unity in its account of Queen Victoria becoming Empress of India. It portrays British rule as morally necessary for India's progress by contrasting it with the supposed cruelty of India's previous rulers. Britain is depicted as the rightful successor to the Roman Empire, uniquely skilled in balancing military strength with peaceful governance. This piece ignores other Empires to frame Britain as the only true global leader.

Jubilee Myths of Imperial Power

The following analysis is based on the article "The Queen's Jubilee. Imposing Procession to the Abbey", which was published on the 26th June 1887, in *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*. Similarly to the other two articles analysed in this subchapter, this article is structured around three interconnected myths: British exceptionalism, imperial unity, and the civilising mission. These myths collectively construct a narrative that portrays Britain as an unequalled global power, its Empire as a naturally cohesive entity, and its governance as inherently advantageous to those within its reach.

At the upper or circus end was erected a triumphal arch of enormous proportions, which spanned the entire width of the street, and being surmounted by the Royal arms and crown, bore the motto, "Victoria, all nations salute you," this being succeeded right down the incline by a number of panels suspended from the houses in a transverse direction to give the appearance of a continuance of the triumphal arch. On the first of these, carrying on the legend, was inscribed "1837, Jubilee, 1887;" on the second, "The British Isles," and the succeeding were "The Indian Empire," "Your Colonies and Dependencies" "In Europe," "In Asia," "In America," "In Australasia," and "Oceania," "give you good greeting;" the whole terminating with a triumphal arch similar in construction to that at the upper end of the street, and with the motto "Victoria, our

Queen." [...] It was a very loyal and enthusiastic multitude (writes one correspondent) that waited patiently on the finest site in Europe—as Trafalgar-square has been called—for the arrival of the Royal cortege [...]. ("The Queen's Jubilee. Imposing Procession to the Abbey" 2)

The article projects a vision of Britain's global Empire as both expansive and universally acclaimed and thereby reveals the strategic work of myth-making that strengthens national narratives. Miller, previously discussed in relation to national identity, observes that "national histories contain elements of myth in so far as they interpret events in a particular way, and also in so far as they amplify the significance of some events and diminish the significance of others" (38). The Jubilee celebration does precisely this: it increases the importance of collective worship and removes any signs of dissent or inequality. This process of selective amplification aligns closely with Barthes's theory of myth as a second-order semiological system. The phrase "Victoria, all nations salute you" (2)⁷ transforms a celebratory tribute into a myth that naturalises British imperial dominance. At the first-order level, the signifier is the phrase itself, which pays homage to Queen Victoria, while the signified is the admiration (or presumed admiration) of all nations under the British Empire. Together, they form a straightforward sign celebrating the Queen's influence. Whereas at the second-order level, this sign becomes the form for a broader ideological concept: Britain's imperial power as universal, harmonious, and naturally accepted. The rhetorical device of hyperbole is central to this myth-making. The claim that "*all* nations salute " (emphasis added) the Queen transforms the historical and political realities of colonial domination into a depoliticised narrative as it erases resistance and exploitation while portraying Britain's rule as benevolent and inevitable. This hyperbolic statement elevates her reign to a divine and timeless status. However, this narrative leaves out the realities of nations engaged in commercial competition or military conflict with Britain. By erasing these challenges, the text creates an idealised image of a harmonious as well as uncontested Empire and avoids the complexities of rivalries or colonial resistance. The series of panels that followed the arch reinforced this narrative by mapping out the Empire's extent. Imprinted with titles such as "The British Isles", "The Indian Empire", "Your Colonies and Dependencies", and regions spanning "Europe", "Asia", "America", "Australasia", and "Oceania", these panels segment the world under British control. These visual and spatial

⁷ The following section is based on "The Queen's Jubilee. Imposing Procession to the Abbey". *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 26 June 1887: 2. British Library Newspapers. All quotes used in this subsection are taken from the same page.

displays embody this ideological function by recording the world as an extension of Britain. This aligns the linguistic message with physical spectacle to solidify the signification of Britain as a globally celebrated and uncontested power. The progression of these territories created a vision of a cohesive and organised Empire, with each region willingly participating in this display of loyalty and admiration. The phrase “give you good greeting” suggested a harmonious relationship and erases any indication of dissent or resistance within these regions. The concluding arch, mirroring the first, with the motto “Victoria, our Queen” ties the entire display together, as it emphasises not only the global reach of the Empire but also the central role of the Queen in uniting this vast dominion. While the Jubilee’s imagery elevated Britain and Queen Victoria to the peak of global hierarchy, the portrayal of the crowd gathered at Trafalgar Square underscored this same narrative on a domestic level.

The depiction of the crowd highlights Britain’s cultural superiority and loyalty to the monarchy. The description of the “loyal and enthusiastic multitude”, which was written by an unknown correspondent, gathered at Trafalgar Square, called the “finest site in Europe” further underscored Britain’s self-perception of superiority. The framing as the “finest site” asserted Britain’s cultural and architectural superiority and commemorated Admiral Nelson. His leadership at the Battle of Trafalgar secured an important naval victory against Napoleon’s fleet, a symbol of Britain’s naval and military dominance (Czislak 559). This association with Britain’s military achievements added weight to its imperial image and reinforced the perception of Britain as a global power in both cultural and military terms. The crowd’s patient anticipation of the Royal cortège highlighted a collective display of respect and unity as it portrays a devoted population willing to endure discomfort for the spectacle. This reinforces the idea that devotion to the monarchy was a civic duty and source of pride. Even the discomfort of the June heat became a minor sacrifice for this noble cause. Although the text briefly acknowledged dissent for the discomfort by mentioning “a few ill-conditioned creatures [who] gave vent to their disappointment by hissing”, these objections quickly turned into loud cheers a moment later. By framing criticism as an isolated incident, the narrative upholds national pride and respect for the monarchy as the dominant attitudes among the British public. This portrayal of unity and devotion supports the larger narrative of Britain’s imperial strength, which symbols of continuity, such as engraved panels, further strengthen.

The marking of the years 1837 and 1887 highlights Britain’s imperial dominance as a legacy of continuous history and justified authority. The inscription “1837, Jubilee, 1887” on a

panel positions the Jubilee as a key moment within a long timeline. By tying the event to the year of Queen Victoria's accession, it establishes a narrative of continuity in her reign and, by extension, Britain's enduring prominence. This focus on the passage of time transforms it into evidence of legitimacy and stability, especially as the absence of succession struggles during this period underscored the perception of the Empire as orderly. Each additional year of British power and social order consolidates the perception of the Empire as secure and justified. The use of these dates at a major public event creates a sense of historical continuity; the audience and readers of the coverage receive a reminder that Britain's authority and achievements developed gradually over many years, rather than suddenly or arbitrarily. This framing makes a myth of imperial continuity and inevitability, wherein the endurance of the Empire is used as proof of its legitimacy. Barthes asserts that myths distort history and reshape historical events into universal truths that appear apolitical (143). In this case, the inscription depoliticises Britain's imperial history by presenting it as natural and harmonious rather than as the product of political and military actions. It equates longevity with stability and morality, which conceals the exploitative foundations of Empire-building. The myth also simplifies the Empire's complexity by emphasising its temporal continuity. The inscription "1837, Jubilee, 1887" converts the political struggles and contested histories of British imperialism into a timeless symbol of order and permanence. This also aligns with Bouchard's insight that myths provide meaning to historical experiences and future ambitions (3), as it portrays Britain's extended dominance as both legitimate and inevitable. The inscription links the past to the present and reinforces the idea that Britain's imperial dominance is part of its destined history.

In brief, the article "The Queen's Jubilee. Imposing Procession to the Abbey" celebrates Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee by reinforcing the myths of British exceptionalism, imperial unity, and the civilising mission. It depicts Britain's Empire as harmonious and universally admired while erasing signs of dissent and colonial resistance. The Jubilee's imagery, such as triumphal arches and engraved panels, highlights the Empire's global reach and ties Victoria's reign to a narrative of destined imperial dominance.

Through the lens of Barthes and Bouchard, I analysed myths as ideological constructs that transform historical and political realities into naturalised truths. Media narratives surrounding the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1877, and her Golden Jubilee in 1887 demonstrate how myths of British exceptionalism, the civilising mission, and imperial unity rationalised colonial domination, legitimised hierarchical

power structures, and reinforced a collective national identity rooted in imperial pride. These myths took shape in media coverage and public ceremonies: the Great Exhibition emphasised Britain's progress in technology and morality, Queen Victoria's title as Empress of India linked Britain to the Roman Empire, and the Golden Jubilee portrayed the Empire as unified and peaceful. Symbols and rituals, such as parades or engraved panels, reinforced these narratives to portray Britain's global dominance as both inevitable and morally justified. The analysis revealed how these myths shaped British identity. By constructing the colonised Other as uncivilised, Britain was positioned as the embodiment of civilisation. Media and ceremonial practices amplified this perception to foster imperial pride by uniting the public around a shared belief in Britain's moral and cultural superiority. These narratives simplified complex political realities into symbols of British greatness, which supported a collective sense of national purpose. Ultimately, this exploration showed how myths legitimised colonial hierarchies, justified Britain's global dominance, and constructed a national identity rooted in British exceptionalism.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has explored how media narratives shaped the construction of British national identity during the mid-to-late 19th century, focusing on three significant events: the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1877, and her Golden Jubilee in 1887. It was guided by the research question: How did the media narratives surrounding these events shape the construction of British national identity and collective belonging in the 19th century? Its central thesis is that media representations of these events employed three key strategies – Othering, imperial pride, and the myth of national unity – to foster a collective sense of belonging and construct an imagined British national identity. To support this, my study demonstrates that these narratives, presented in *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* and *The Times* alongside visual representations such as cards, cartoons, and paintings, were not merely reflections of imperial power. Instead, they were deliberate acts of cultural production that reinforced British superiority, moral authority, and a shared identity rooted in imperial cohesion and destiny.

The process of Othering was as a key mechanism in defining British identity. By positioning colonised peoples and non-British individuals as inferior, exotic, or in need of British guidance, media and illustrations created an Other that served as a contrast to British self-perception. Visual materials such as the depiction of Indian royalty at Queen Victoria's proclamation or the symbolic portrayal of foreign representatives at the Great Exhibition emphasised their cultural differences by presenting them as curiosities to reinforce British superiority. Similarly, textual narratives described colonised individuals as loyal or thankful subjects but confined them within frameworks that maintained their subordination. These narratives constructed a binary: Britons were moral, civilised, and enlightened, while the colonised were uncivilised and dependent. This contrast not only justified imperial rule but also provided Britons with a sense of identity, one that relied on exclusion to define belonging.

Imperial pride further strengthened this identity by connecting citizens to a shared narrative of achievement and global influence. The aforementioned events presented the Empire as a harmonious and benevolent entity, with Britain at its centre. The Crystal Palace, depicted in paintings and described in textual accounts, symbolised Britain's technological and cultural supremacy. The proclamation, through ceremonial grandeur and textual framing, further highlighted Britain's dominance by symbolically uniting India under Victoria's rule which asserted moral authority and imperial cohesion. Similarly, the Jubilee celebrations

emphasised continuity and stability by linking Victoria's reign to the Empire's enduring greatness. These events invited the British public to emotionally connect with the Empire to foster a shared sense of pride and purpose. The portrayal of loyal colonial subjects and the celebration of Britain's technological superiority allowed Britons to see themselves as part of a community of global importance.

These processes of Othering and the cultivation of imperial pride were legitimised by myths, which transformed political and historical constructs into permanent truths. The myth of the civilising mission framed Britain's imperial expansion as a moral duty and emphasised its role in improving 'less advanced' societies. The myth of imperial unity portrayed the Empire as a cohesive family under British leadership, where diversity was a source of strength rather than conflict. The myth of British exceptionalism further underscored this narrative, as it portrayed Britain as uniquely capable of balancing technological progress with moral responsibility and governance. These myths were reinforced through rituals and symbols that filled abstract ideas of imperial dominance with tangible meaning. The Jubilee celebrations, for example, utilised big public parades and carefully curated imagery to emphasise Queen Victoria's role as both the mother of the Empire and a symbol of its enduring stability. These rituals and symbols work together to frame the Empire as inevitable and divine which embeds its rule in a narrative of continuity that connected Britain's historical achievements to its future ambitions.

These three processes – Othering, the fostering of imperial pride, and myth – are deeply interconnected. Othering provided the ideological foundation for imperial pride by defining the colonised as inferior and in need of British guidance. This, in turn, justified the celebrations of imperial achievements that fostered unity among the British public. Myths tied these processes together by framing them as natural, inevitable truths rather than constructed narratives. By presenting imperial dominance as divinely determined or morally essential, myths transformed political and cultural constructs into realities that shaped how Britons understood their place in the world. Visual materials were essential in connecting these processes, as they made the narratives both concrete and emotionally impactful. Together, these elements created a cohesive sense of belonging for Britons by rooting their shared identity in the Empire and masking the constructed nature of imperial narratives. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities, this analysis demonstrates how these narratives and visual representations created a shared national identity. Anderson posits that

nations are imagined communities, in which individuals perceive themselves as part of a group despite never meeting most of its members (4). The newspapers, illustrations, and ceremonies analysed here contributed to this imagined community by spreading narratives and images that linked individuals to the broader imperial project. Through participation in shared rituals, the consumption of imperial spectacles, and engagement with visual symbols, such as cards, paintings, or cartoons, Britons were encouraged to imagine themselves as part of a collective enterprise that was not only global but also moral and exceptional. The identity created through these processes was hierarchical and exclusionary, as it defined belonging through the subordination of colonised peoples and the emphasis on British superiority.

This thesis aims to demonstrate how the construction of British national identity during the 19th century relied on narratives of cultural superiority, 'benevolent' imperial leadership, and the illusion of imperial harmony. These narratives reinforced myths of British exceptionalism, which continue to influence contemporary discussions on nationalism, immigration, and Britain's enduring relationship with its colonial past. The relevance of nationalism today, often tied to nostalgic or exclusionary visions of the past (Elgenius and Rydgren 1231), underscores the importance of understanding how these identities were formed. Analysing the strategies that fostered these collective identities offers insight into the enduring power of such narratives and their role in sustaining inequalities and hierarchies. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. By focusing on three events, it provides a selective view of how British identity was constructed and leaves out other significant contexts such as military conflicts, economic policies, or everyday practices that might reveal alternative narratives. The focus on just two newspapers, *The Times* and *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, limits the scope of this study by potentially excluding alternative perspectives that could challenge the dominant narratives examined. Additionally, the study focuses on metropolitan perspectives, which means it does not explore the agency and experiences of colonised peoples or their responses to these imperial events. These perspectives are outside the scope of this analysis, but they are fundamental to the complexities of imperial identity. Future research could expand on these areas to incorporate a broader range of sources and perspectives to offer a deeper insight into the dynamics of identity formation.

Despite these limitations, this work seeks to highlight an essential point: national identity is not a static or inherent quality but a constructed, multi-dimensional, and

performative process. The recognition that identity is constructed provides a deeper understanding of the power dynamics that underpin collective identities and reveals the ways in which belonging is always political and never natural. This approach reveals the processes behind national identities and opens possibilities for building more inclusive forms of belonging.

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Appendix

Abstract

In this thesis, I explore how media narratives shaped British national identity in the mid-to-late 19th century by focusing on three key events: the Great Exhibition of 1851, Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1877, and her Golden Jubilee in 1887. Newspapers like *The Times* and *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* presented these events as symbols of British superiority, moral authority, and imperial unity. Through textual and visual representations, the media constructed a national identity that relied on exclusion, which elevated British dominance while masking the exploitation and violence that underpinned imperial rule.

Using Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities, I show how shared rituals and symbols brought together a diverse population under a collective identity rooted in the Empire. My analysis demonstrates that Othering reinforced a binary opposition, which presented the colonised as inferior and dependent while imperial pride elevated Britain as the moral and cultural peak of global civilisation. I argue that these narratives were deliberate acts of cultural production designed to secure public support for imperial expansion. Through their repetition and symbolism, these narratives reshaped public understanding of Britain's role on the global stage. Myths of British exceptionalism, the civilising mission, and imperial unity naturalised these hierarchies and justified colonial domination.

I contend that British national identity was not an organic development, but a deliberate construction closely tied to imperial narratives. By analysing these processes, I demonstrate how they defined Britain's sense of belonging and reinforced the Empire's central place in national identity during the 19th century.

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Arbeit untersuche ich, wie Medienberichte über drei Ereignisse die britische nationale Identität im mittleren bis späten 19. Jahrhundert prägten: die Weltausstellung von 1851, Queen Victorias Proklamation zur Kaiserin von Indien im Jahr 1877 und ihr Goldenes Thronjubiläum im Jahr 1887. Zeitungen wie *The Times* und *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* präsentierten diese Ereignisse als Beweise für die Überlegenheit Großbritanniens, seine moralische Führungskraft und die Stabilität sowie den Zusammenhalt des Britischen Empires. Medien erschufen durch Texte und Bilder eine nationale Identität, die sich durch Abgrenzung definierte. Diese Identität hob die britische Dominanz hervor, während sie die Ausbeutung und Gewalt, die das britische Weltreich erst ermöglichte, verbarg.

Ich beziehe mich auf Benedict Andersons Theorie der *Imagined Communities*, um zu zeigen, wie gemeinsame Rituale und Symbole eine vielfältige Bevölkerung unter einer Identität vereinten. Meine Analyse macht deutlich, dass das Konzept des *Otherring* eine Trennung verstärkte: Die Kolonisierten wurden als minderwertig und abhängig dargestellt, während Großbritannien als moralisches und kulturelles Zentrum der Welt hervorgehoben wurde. Ich argumentiere, dass diese Darstellungen gezielt gestaltet wurden, um öffentliche Zustimmung für die Ausweitung des britischen Weltreiches zu gewinnen. Indem diese Narrative immer wieder aufgegriffen und symbolisch aufgeladen wurden, prägten sie das Verständnis von Großbritanniens globaler Rolle. Der imperiale Stolz (*imperial pride*) diente dabei als zentrale Komponente, die diese Narrative mit einem Gefühl nationaler Überlegenheit und Einheit untermauerte. Mythen über britische Einzigartigkeit, die „zivilisierende Mission“ und die Einheit des Reichs normalisierten diese Hierarchien und legitimierten die koloniale Herrschaft.

Diese Arbeit zeigt, dass die britische nationale Identität nicht von Natur aus gegeben war, sondern konstruiert wurde und eng mit den Narrativen des britischen Weltreiches verknüpft war. Durch die Untersuchung dieser Narrative erkläre ich, wie sie das Zugehörigkeitsgefühl der Briten prägten.