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**Introduction:  
Mapping and Place Making in the French Empire**

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In this thematic volume, the authors examine the role of cartography and place-making in French imperial-colonial endeavors. Recent scholarship has considered the role of built environments, map-making, and the environment itself in the formation, expansion, and formalization of imperial and colonial regimes.<sup>1</sup> Historians of the French Empire, in particular, have considered the physical and epistemological construction of empire and colonial systems through place-making strategies that range from geographical surveying, cartography, border negotiations, the construction or reconstruction of cities, as well as the establishment of certain railway and road systems.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, greater attention has been paid to the ways that indigenous communities pushed against French endeavors, shaped place-making, or developed alternatives to imperial-colonial places and policies.<sup>3</sup> These questions speak across disciplines, time periods, and geographies, reflecting a wide, geographic turn in French imperial-colonial studies.

This volume interrogates French imperial and colonial structures by centering the experiences of locations outside of the metropole. This is part of the larger geographic turn in historical scholarship that considers the ways that geographies and environments intimately affect conceptions of place-making.<sup>4</sup> The larger practice of dividing, naming, and mapping places and people was a project that served ideological and geographic colonization by making space legible to the political-economic interests of colonial officials.<sup>5</sup> French cartographers and geographers flattened complexities and imposed their vision of isolated and divided regions. The

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Santiago Faria, Anne Shelley, and Sandra Ataíde Lobo, editors, 2023, *The built environment through the prism of the colonial press*, New York: Routledge.

Eleonora Rohland et al, editors, 2021, *Contact, conquest and colonization: how practices of comparing shaped empires and colonialism around the world*, New York: Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading, see the following works, among many others: Jean-Marc Besse, editor, 2022, *Forme du savoir, forme de pouvoir : les atlas géographiques à l'époque moderne et contemporaine*, Rome: École française de Rome. Charmaine A. Nelson, 2016, *Slavery, geography and empire in nineteenth-century marine landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*, New York: Routledge. Mary Sponberg Pedley, 2005, *The commerce of cartography: making and marketing maps in eighteenth-century France and England*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> James R. Akerman, 2017, *Decolonizing the Map: Cartography from Colony to Nation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Besse, *Forme du savoir*.

<sup>4</sup> Sean Hawkins, 2002, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana: The Encounter between the LoDagaa and "The World on Paper," 1892-1991*, London: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas J. Bassett, 1994, "Cartography and Empire Building in Nineteenth-Century West Africa," *Geographical Review* 3: 316-335.

impact of such work was tangible, wide-reaching, and long-lasting.

Articles in this volume consider a variety of essential questions that interrogate the global effects of French imperial and colonial expansion. What role did ideas of the land and the environment play in French imperial-colonial projects? How were cartographic practices deployed in French imperial-colonial expansion? What roles did place-making and spatial constructions play in French empire-building? How did indigenous actors respond to, negotiate within, or resist French cartographic and place-making practices? How did indigenous conceptions of place inform or shape French building and mapping? What policies affected place-making on a local level, and how were these policies deployed?

This volume contributes to the growing body of literature that considers place and cartography across global imperial and colonial structures.<sup>6</sup> This volume brings together scholarship from a range of fields that illuminate points of convergence and departure within the French Empire. Tessa Evans considers the role of cartography as a form of French imperialism and indigenous resistance in the eighteenth-century Louisiana Territory. Through a close examination of Quapaw and French maps, Evans reveals how mapping served the political aims of both communities. William Matt Cavert examines the political and geographic aftereffects of the 1907 discovery of phosphates on the island of Makatea, French Polynesia. Cavert uses this environmental and geographic history to consider how the French colonial system was spread and solidified on the island and the complex socio-political maneuverings that took place during the period to construct the colonial system.

Gregory Valdespino's article takes up constructions of domestic spaces by Senegalese women as a form of political action working both within and against the French colonial government following World War I. Valdespino evocatively connects these political actions to earlier domestic constructions implemented by *tirailleurs sénégalais* deployed to Europe during the war. Vincent Clément examines voyeuristic colonial road trips that traveled across the African continent in the 1920s. Clément examines how these trips affected the dissemination of damaging racial stereotypes in the French metropole, particularly in popular children's books. These essays open the door for future research into these topics, and we hope they will generate interdisciplinary conversations that continue to grapple with the geographic and cartographic afterlives of French imperial-colonial structures.

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<sup>6</sup> For examples of other texts engaging empire and geography beyond the French context, see the following: Avtar Brah, 1996, *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities*, New York: Routledge. Livio Sansone, Elisée Soumonni, and Boubacar Barry, eds., 2008, *Africa, Brazil, and the Construction of Trans-Atlantic Black Identities*, Trenton: Africa World Press. Michael Herbert Fisher, 2004, *Counterflows to colonialism: Indian travellers and settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*, Delhi: Permanent Black.

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