OUTLOOK ON EUROPE

POST-COLONISING EUROPE: THE GEOPOLITICS OF GLOBALISATION, EMPIRE AND BORDERS: HERE AND THERE, NOW AND THEN

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STALKING EUROPE

As American Gastarbeiter living and working in Europe we have been struck by the absence of contemporary Europe in the now prolific literature on empire and postcolonialism. While we do not claim the objectivity granted by Simmel to the stranger, we do believe that certain things have become apparent to us as a result of our ambiguous status of being at once in Europe but not of it. Our positioning allows both an 'alien' perspective and the outsider's freedom to be critical: that is, both the privilege (and the pain) of seeing and speaking against the grain. We have noted, specifically, that there is a strong tendency to see through a particular spatiotemporal optic and thus to reproduce a relatively fixed geographical and temporal framing of the imperial and the postcolonial here, there, now and then. Empire Now, despite a vigorous globalisation literature asserting the impossibility of defining the 'local,' is in fact localised in contemporary America. In contrast, postcolonial literature is dominated by Europe Past, its imperialisms and colonialisms understood as events that have come to an end: there are global aftershocks but the phenomena that sourced them are 'post.' Whether in the work of Hardt & Negri (2000) or in the more recent writings of Harvey (2003) and Gregory (2004), analyses of the United States not only dominate, contemporary Europe fails to appear within the analytical frame (with the exception of Gregory's brief account of Britain's participation in the war on Iraq). The reverse situation, namely, the predominance of associating Europe with past colonial and imperial practices, is exemplified in a recent publication on postcolonial geographies (Blunt & McEwen 2002) in which eight of 12 chapters join Europe to a concluded colonial past.

This state of affairs, we believe, is rooted in three factors. The first is the inescapable largeness and clarity of present imperial actions taken by the United States, and thus the unavoidable gravitational pull it exerts upon geopolitical analyses. This means that Europe, as an important imperial power, flies below the radar screen in both European and American academies (we suspect that in African and Asian languages we do not read there may be a different story). A second explanatory factor involves the overly complacent view held by European publics and many intellectuals and policy-makers regarding what are viewed as the inherently benign motivations and processes underlying 'Europe' and EU governance. Constituting European goodness against American badness (a not Herculean task), Europeans have internalised the model of a Europe which has
RENOUNCING ARMED WARFARE AND VIOLENCE AND ESTABLISHED SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND ETHICAL GOVERNANCE IN THEIR PLACE: BLOOD FOR ROSES. While there is certainly a reality to this analysis, there is also another Europe, one no less real but existing outside Europe’s geopolitical consciousness: namely, a Europe oddly unreflexive about its own imperialisms, past and present, as well as its contemporary less than enlightened attitude towards ‘strangers’. Alongside Europe’s self-positioning as the globe’s guardian of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and the apparently innocuous language of ‘the European social model’, ‘subsidiarity’, ‘commitology’, ‘intergovernmentalism’, ‘the four freedoms’, and so forth, are the still-standing statues of King Leopold in Brussels (no statue parks here), a continent radically absent of Jews, a developing literature on the benefits of empire (e.g. Ferguson 2004), a widely tolerated everyday racism concerning ‘the Turks’ and ‘the Moroccans’, and a blatant continental orientalism operating in the EU’s ‘eastern’ enlargement process: to say nothing of ‘Europe’s’ flourishing neocolonialist political economy. It is as if, despite a tourist trade sourced in the middle ages and the renaissance, European history begins in 1945 and takes place solely on the continent, west of the Fulda Gap. This bipolar EU/US reductionism functions as a powerful ‘selective tradition’ (Williams 1980, p. 39) which represses recognition that what permits Europe’s self-fashioning as a moral model are its strategic ‘operations of memory’ (Foucault 1972, pp. 123–124) whose selectivity facilitates the forgetting of a nexus of historical and geographical entanglements binding European states to one another as well as to the larger world within a still active continuum leading back to earlier rounds of European imperial expansion, both on and off the continent. The result is a geopolitical analysis which not only precludes recognition of the spatio-temporal complexities of empire, but masks Europe’s current complicity in the production of exploitative and oppressive relations within as well as beyond its newly minted frontiers.

A third factor contributing to the European academy’s silence on these issues is concerned with what Lyotard names ‘performativity’. Lyotard identifies knowledge as the principle force of production in postmodernity and a major, perhaps the major, stake in the worldwide competition for power. What drives knowledge production is not the ideal of knowledge for knowledge’s sake, but the economic ideal of efficiency – or, the ‘performativity criterion’ as it operates in service of the needs of business, management and government. ‘Research sectors that are unable to argue that they contribute even indirectly to the optimization of the system’s performance’, Lyotard writes, ‘are abandoned by the flow of capital and doomed to senescence’ (Lyotard 1989, p. 47). Across Europe, research is increasingly tied to an EU-driven agenda and thus to EU-funds. This has a specific ‘performativity’ effect on the legitimation and delegitimation of knowledges and methodologies in European universities. One can imagine that knowledges critical of the EU, that do not speak in its language, promote the optimisation of its performance, or operate in conformity with its research agenda, are doomed to death by dearth of funding. While the performativity criterion dominates US knowledge production as well, there is also a highly active, well-institutionalised culture of self-critique: no one critiques American imperialism better than intellectuals employed by American academies (as we have done and will continue to do in differing contexts). It may be that our rigorous training in auto-critique has potentiated our perplexed response to the absence of such a critique here.

DE-STABILISING EUROPE

Spurred by what we have perceived as a political and analytical need, we have moved in two directions. First, we have endeavoured in our own work to de-centre and re-situate analyses of Europe in ways that disrupt the largely a-geographical, a-historical and model-driven narratives that now predominate (Hooper 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007a, b; Kramsch 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Kramsch & Hooper 2004). This work operates through a double critical manoeuvre: namely, it re-embeds the contemporary European project within the trajectory of its own imperial present-past, while at the same time focusing attention on its ongoing post- and neo-colonial relations. While our project works with large debts to previous literatures and makes no claims for greater legitimacy, we have hoped to accomplish something somewhat different.
Specifically, we have attempted to avoid the bifurcated approach named above, namely, accounts of Europe which are overly histori­cised or overly presentist – as well as accounts confined to how and with what effects European empires operated in the past centuries between ‘1492’ and de-colonisation. We also have not been concerned with rehearsing the manifold ways in which the core nations of the EU continue to reproduce relations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ with their constitutive outsides along a variable geometry of ‘otherness’. These efforts, though important, have failed to provide a broader geopolitical contextualisation for contemporary Europe, one which suggests the ways in which EU-ropé’s imperial and colonial practices are rooted in a past but also have continued to evolve, mutate and adapt across space and time. The perhaps utopic intervention we have imagined and desired is one that problematises conventional borders between areas and periods, temporalities and spatialities, and, most importantly, continues to question its own assertions.

Our second move has been to initiate and begin to institutionalise a conversation on these issues through the organisation of a series of encounters with scholars whose current research contributes to the project of destabilising ‘Europe’. Organised as a public lecture series, ‘Postcolonising Europe: The Geopolitics of Globalisation, Empire, and Borders: Here and There, Now and Then,’ these encounters were held at Radboud University Nijmegen between September 2005 and March 2006. Successive lectures were given by Benedict Anderson, Frances Gouda, Harry Harootunian, Kristin Ross, Jane M. Jacobs and József Bórócz. In addition, seminars and methods workshops were conducted by each guest.¹

We asked the invited scholars to use their current work to think how contemporary Europe has continued to operate in the present in a neocolonialist, post-colonialist or imperialist mode. Specific questions were what do the words ‘colonial’, ‘imperial’ and their variants – post-colonial, neo-colonial, post-imperial, and empire – mean for Europe today? To what extent do they accurately capture contemporary processes of domination in ways that can be distinguished from previous rounds of imperial conquest? In what ways do they reproduce and/or contest the past? What do these words silence or marginalise? In short, what, if any, worthwhile political as well as analytical work do they perform?

Let us say, first, that the address of these questions did not happen in any focused or sustained way: our guests remained admirably anarchic. Nonetheless, each invited scholar provided important signposts signalling both the kind of analytical difficulties the ‘destabilising Europe’ project involves and how they have attempted to manoeuvre around and through these difficulties. We found the following two areas of particular interest.

**Re-worlding EU-rope** – All scholars identified the need to deconstruct and de-centre the putatively European origins and sovereignty of key concepts within Western political and social thought as well as its dominant epistemologies and ontologies – for example, nation, nationalism, citizenship, capitalism, modernity, the family, the public sphere, private property, the subject, the human, being, knowledge, society, truth, and so forth. The overall goal was seen as problematising their naturalised and hegemonic uses and the refusal to make their non-European constructions derivative, ‘after’, ‘other’ or dependent upon an assumed European universal or norm. Rather than reproduce the colonial binary frame of a putative West and the rest fashionable in current attempts to ‘provincialise Europe’, our guests were keen to reveal the full extent of Europe’s traditional *worldliness*, as geo-historical echo-chamber for ideas and social movements reverberating planet-wide.

Reflecting on the densely layered interconnections of the late nineteenth century as an form of ‘early globalisation’, and drawing on material from a yet-to-be-published manuscript, Anderson (2005a, b), for instance, convincingly demonstrated how anti-imperial nationalist struggles at the antipodes of European empire – Cuba and the Philippines – achieved their goals by relying on the fruits of ‘European’ technologies and radical social movements, embodied in the telegraph, print newspapers and international anarchist networks. The ‘Europe’ that emerges from the lost continent of trans­continental and vertiginous polyglot networks Anderson meticulously heaves into view is but
one node in a globe-girdling exchange of anarchist actions and ideas, with France, Spain and Italy as vital – though by no means exclusive – mediating conduits.

In a parallel gesture of spatial détournement, Gouda (2005) revealed how nineteenth century interactional histories between Metropole and Colony – or between Occidental and Oriental landscapes – relied on a range of vectors and/or contact zones which transmitted biases not only concerning political authority and racial superiority but also confirmed prejudices about appropriate family structures and gender roles back and forth across the colonial divide. Focusing scrupulous attention on the gender-based discursive practices of European imperialism in Asia in general, and colonial culture in the Dutch East Indies in particular, informed as they were by notions of femininity and masculinity, motherhood and fatherhood, Gouda remapped the prevailing view that Europe evolved organically and autonomously from non-Western influences.

Gouda’s contribution also provided a strong and important reminder that not all colonial subjects, whether living in the metropole or in the core, effected and were affected by colonialist-imperialist processes in identical ways. The production of ‘local’ imperialisms and colonialisms, as the performed effects of institutionalised subjectivities, as well as the production of subjectivities ‘regulated’ by imperial-colonial processes and norms, were strongly influenced by a multiplicity of positionings related to gender, class, status, age and race, as well as by territorial location.

Jacobs (2006a, b), focusing on an architectural rather than a corporeal artifact, ‘the avant-garde modernist high rise’, made a similar point. Locating her analysis in Singapore and combining insights from Deleuze (1994) and Latour (2005), Jacobs suggested that the residential high rise, invented in the ‘core’ and as an emblem of modernity mainstreamed into state building programmes across the globe, was indigenised differently in each of its locations. What interests Jacobs is neither what is different nor the same but how the two inhabit one another; in other words, the ways ‘little differences’ are extracted from the ‘stereotypical repetitions’ of the mechanically-produced globalised form, and how the ‘secret’ and ‘disguised’ repetitions inhabit performances of difference (Jacobs 2006b).

A further important re-worlding of EU-ropé was accomplished by Bórócza (2006) who re-embedded concepts of imperialism and coloniality in their continental settings, reminding us that not all Western European imperialism was conducted offshore and that current processes of EU enlargement replicate earlier practices of continental imperialism. Bórócza (2005) specifically pointed to the racist and cultural-supremacist values underpinning the ‘moral geopolitics’ of contemporary EU practices.

**Difference-in-itself:** The work of an invigorated spatio-temporal optic – It is by now a truism, one to which we and our invited scholars adhere, that to deconstruct hegemonic binaries, one does not engage in a reversal, privileging the formerly dominated term but leaving the binary in tact, or attempt to explain difference in terms of the same. In attempting to think in terms other than territorialised notions of centre and periphery, model and copy, past and present, what is desired, in the words of Deleuze, is an attempt to think ‘difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative’ (Deleuze 1994, p. xix). Nonetheless, in taking on the analysis of related global processes such as imperialism, colonialism and modernity, Deleuze’s axiom continues to prove difficult to enact. How is it possible to engage in a political critique of the powerful, sometimes deadly, structuring effects of modes of domination which operate globally, if albeit unevenly, while at the same time remaining cognisant that these effects are constituted locally through the agency of novelty and difference, and that there is no structuring force other than the myriad constituting locals? How, in short, does one untangle the interactive, co-constitutive complexity of here and there, now and then: a spatiotemporal ‘localisation’ that one conceded in advance is not only analytically undesirable but impossible to determine ‘in fact’ with any degree of certainty but still finds necessary if the desire is to critique the actions and effects of a named and thus localised imperial or post-colonial power. This conundrum, perhaps aporia,
haunted our inquiry at the beginning and remains at the end.

The concept of the 'glocal' and of a 'variable
geometry' has been two widely invoked solutions
to these difficulties. Appadurai (1996) has sug­
gested, both as a critique of centre-periphery
models and in recognition of the complex, dis­
junctive and ‘fractal’ effects of globalisation,
that difference and sameness ‘cannibalise’ one
in his essay on alternative modernities, argues
that no culture or society can escape the
reach of Western discourses on modernity and
that one can only ‘provincialise’ it by thinking
through and against its universalist pretensions.
He emphasises not a convergence of moderni­
ties but a localised ‘creative adaptation’ which
evidences both ‘the pull of sameness and the
forces making for difference’ (Gaonkar 1999,
p. 15).

Ross (2005) and Harootunian (2005) addressed
these issues through the lens of space and time,
thus introducing an important problematic for
negotiating the complexities and difficulties of
difference-in-itself – whether what is of concern
is globalisation, modernity, colonialism, or
imperialism. While all of our guests implicitly
addressed space and time, Ross and Harootunian
made the spatial and the temporal an explicit
and central focus of their own contributions
and also introduced differing methods of
spatiotemporal analysis borrowed from Lefebvre

Ross, drawing upon Henri Lefebvre’s concepts
of the everyday and social space and continuing
an emphasis upon the co-constitutiveness of
metropole and colony and the phenomeno­
logical (the subjective) and the structural (the
objective) (Ross 1988, p. 9) begun in earlier works
(Ross 1988, 1995), in her lecture on contempo­
rary European crime fiction, or ‘Mediterranean
noir, expanded the present urban geography of
the metropole to a geography informed by the
unfinished or past-but-still-present ‘crimes of
colonialism,’ thus mixing here and there, now
and then – as well as discourse and event – in
suggestive ways.

Harootunian (2005a, b), thinking in terms of
capitalist modernity, critiqued a certain privileg­
ing of spatial categories of analysis (by which he
means geographical categories), which func-
tions to localise and naturalise, as the ‘afterlives
of area studies’ (Harootunian 2005b, p. 2), the
time of modernity in fixed, asynchronous
geographical centres and peripheries. This
approach, which has been imported into post­
colonial and cultural studies as a ‘preoccupa-
ction with space and place’ (Harootunian 2005b,
p. 12), hypostatises the unity of the ‘West’ and
‘Europe’ as the site of modernity and reduces
the rest of the world to the status of a second
term (Harootunian 2005b, p. 13). Postcolonial
analysis is then doomed to a ‘comparative’
approach through which societies are marked
in the linear, developmentalist terms of their
spatial distance from the Western model of
modernity (Harootunian 2005b, p. 8) and ‘peo­
ples outside of Euro-America are forced to live
lives comparatively by virtue of experiencing
some form of colonisation or subjection enforced
by the spectre of imperialism’ (Harootunian
2005b, p. 4): a life that is, in the words of Jap­
anese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro, a ‘layered’ or
‘double life’ (Harootunian 2005b, p. 4). What
is foreclosed by this ‘spatial turn’ is a more
complex analysis which deploys a spatiotemporal
problematic, one that reintroduces time into
the analysis and emphasises the multiple
moments, temporalities, and differing forms of
temporalisation existing in a single space and
across spaces. Harootunian specifically cri­tiques ideas of an alternative modernity which
reinforce the temporal difference between an
alleged original and its alternative (Harootu­
nian 2005b, p. 14), and Anderson’s ‘spectre of
comparison’ which localises the site of doubled
vision – namely, the necessity of thinking simul­
taneously about Europe and its outside – in
the periphery, thus maintaining not only the
centre-periphery binary but the spatial distance
between them as a signifier of asynchronous
development (Harootunian 2005b, p. 16).
Harootunian suggests several differing modes
of analysis which rejoin and disrupt concepts of
space and time. Of particular relevance are
Lefebvre’s rhythmanalys is (Lefebvre 2004),
which recognises co-existing temporalities
within a single space, and everydayness (Lefeb­
vre 2002), a concept emphasising the space-
time of the present that is unsettled by uneven
intensities, discordant rhythms and thus calls
attention to difference (Harootunian 2005b,
p. 19); Bakhtin’s chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981)
which essentialise neither time nor space but bring them together in ‘the moment of everydayness’ (Harootunian 2005b, p. 21); and Bloch’s ‘contemporaneous non-contemporaneity’ (Bloch 1990) in which fragments of the past ‘suddenly rise up to impinge upon the present’ (Harootunian 2005b, p. 20).

PERFORMING THE POSTCOLONIAL DILEMMA

Perhaps the most interesting result of our public events was that the interactions between the guest lecturers and their audiences performed a variant of the perennial core/periphery dilemma regarding knowledge and voice. Because our invited guests have operated predominantly in an Anglo-American, English-speaking academic environment – perceived in this context as the global knowledge production hegemon – and the audiences were largely composed of continental Europeans – in this instance perceived as the knowledge-production periphery – a minor coloniser/colonised dynamic unexpectedly emerged that brought to the fore a subtle, obliquely articulated, but nonetheless persistent anti-colonisation effort on the part of our audiences. This became apparent not only in relation to the content of the lectures but vis-à-vis epistemological and methodological issues. Proceeding in the bullet-point tradition which we do not admire but find useful in an essay of this length, we report the following critical interventions.

• **Querying the message.** There was a marked reluctance, both on the part of senior social scientists and other members of the audience, to think of contemporary Europe and contemporary imperialism in the same context. This reaction – for whom one individual’s question, ‘How can you claim Europe is an empire today?’ is representative – suggested that for many the words ‘Europe’ and ‘empire’ in juxtaposition appeared incongruous at best, and at worst a fundamental misreading of Europe’s contemporary geopolitical rationality.

• **Querying of scientific and practical value effect.** The lectures and workshops were judged by many as esoteric, overly theoretical, and/or non-objective and as such they did not add to knowledges that were relevant, scientific or practical. Querying the scientific value, rigour or validity of particular discourses, is, of course, the move historically made to marginalise potentially disruptive knowledges: for example, feminist, anti-colonialist, Marxist, and so forth. It is also suggestive of the continuing effect of the ‘legitimation crisis’ and ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’ that began in the late 1960s and still reverberates in the academy with frequently rancorous contestations concerning what counts as knowledge, what counts as science and scientific evidence, and so forth. The reading of the lectures as non-scientific (subjective, interpretive, not sufficiently empirical) and disembedded from the kinds of research that are useful (policy oriented, etc.) can be attributed partially to the increasing hegemony of the performativity criteria. However, it also suggested a dissatisfaction with a perceived ‘elitist’ poststructuralist/postmodernist positioning (in the ‘core’) which minimised the value of practical knowledge (in the ‘periphery), thus reinstating an older mind/body, intellectual labour/manual labour hierarchy that has been characteristic of Western relations of domination and subordination since at least the classical Greeks.

• **Inverted hermeneutics of suspicion effect.** Somewhat contradictory to the charges levelled above of not being sufficiently scientific, our guests were indicted for pushing an ideological agenda under the cover of scientific analysis. Many of the lecturers were called to account for speaking in the dominant language of empire, engaging in suspect moral practices, or of being silent on their own subject-positions and intellectual positionings. These ‘calls’ were particularly apparent in the repeated demands that guests legitimate methodological choices, as well as in equally frequent questionings regarding the validity of postcolonial ‘methods’ more generally (how are they ‘new,’ what do they ‘add’, etc.). Thus, rather than question the ideological bias of knowledges which, as the effects of power, marginalise the subaltern, what was questioned, as indicative of ideological bias, was the move to de-legitimise and thus marginalise institutionalised power.

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These interventions raised valid issues and revealed important differences that might easily have emerged anywhere and within any group. However, the fact that they took on an explicit core/periphery colouration suggested to us something critical, something which was related to the lectures' unfamiliar, perhaps irritating content and the related difficulty of destabilising existing hegemonic analytical frameworks and traditions, and to the operations of 'traveling theory' and the undercurrent of resentment our audiences registered in this regard: the message, unpleasant enough, was being delivered by the bearers of a civilising mission who had come to preach. We found ourselves confronted, then, with barely separable issues concerned with the lectures' content on the one hand, and the geopolitics of knowledge production on the other. What we have learned as a result of engaging seriously with these issues is that there is a continuing need to question, first, the dramaturgy of any given event, including careful consideration of who will 'star,' and, second, the load-bearing capacity of post-colonial and neo-imperial theory when it travels out of an Anglo-American context (that in which all of our guests operate, including the Anglophone ex-colonial territories) into a context that is continental (the context of the audiences).2

As regards the lectures' content, while we suspected in advance that not all Europeans would happily out themselves as imperialists, we were surprised (but perhaps should not have been) by the unwillingness of our audiences to either engage in debate about Europe's imperialisms, past or present, or to express the possible legitimacy of the endeavour. Given continental Europe's past (wars, empires, genocide, and so forth) and the EU's new self-positioning as a morally superior 'soft' power, perhaps there is an understandable reticence to stir the imperial/colonial waters. However, American and British intellectuals, who certainly have equally burdensome pasts and presents to bear, exhibit no such reticence and typically attempt to outdo one another with extremities of condemnation: as do our continental comrades when lambasting British and US imperialisms.

The second issue, the geopolitics of knowledge production, stirs undercurrents which are more familiar as they are a persistent feature of transnational gatherings. The barely articulated, yet strong discontent or discomfort among our continental audiences spoke to oft-repeated suspicions of a peripheralisation and postcolonisation of the continental periphery by the Anglo-American, English-speaking core—a necessary wariness, needless to say, given the dominance of Anglo-American knowledge production. Nonetheless, we must admit that we were caught somewhat off-guard (and perhaps should not have been) by the emergence of such strong core/periphery issues within what we, and no doubt most of the world's inhabitants, certainly consider part of the geopolitical 'core.' While we had not intended to reproduce the global knowledge hierarchy, we unwittingly did. Echoing the recent account of a fellow Anglo-American geographer navigating similar straits (Pickles 2005), we believe that the discontent of our audiences raises once again the nettlesome— but necessary— disciplinary concerns regarding hegemonic framings within postcolonial theory today. These tend to draw exclusively upon the Anglophone experiences to the neglect of other colonial, postcolonial and imperial traditions, and fail to recognise the ways in which critical human geographical praxis is bound by its own embedded legacies and contextual truth effects (see also Mignolo 2000). Indeed, and paradoxically, it may be through our audiences' responses that a complex (and often counterintuitive) settling of accounts with Europe's colonial present may indeed have been in the process of being worked out. We must only have the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

In light of the foregoing, and perhaps reflecting our Janus-like status as foreign border scholars of Europe, we hope our lecture series has been doubly unsettling: both as tiny pin prick to the all-too-complacent domain of what passes for mainstream social science and policy planning in EU-rope today; and as a modest conduit for mainland EU-rope to 'talk back' to Anglophone postcolonial scholarship, reminding it to continuously question its own assertions, especially when visiting the continental European 'tropics.' It is only through such continuous self-questioning and critique, we believe, that we may avoid falling (again and again and again) into the trap of 'comprador analytics' (Appiah 1992, p. 336).
Notes

1. For a full description of lectures and related events see the Radboud University human geography website at <http://www.ru.nl/socgeo/content/currentprogramme.html>.

2. It bears mentioning at this point that the ‘continental’ nature of the audience for the lecture series was not circumscribed to the Dutch but included participants from throughout Western as well as East-Central Europe (e.g. France, Germany, UK, Spain, Sweden, Poland, Hungary) and, in some instances, further afield (e.g. Indonesia).

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