Agency, Cooperation, and Oligarchy – The Origins of Colonialism

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ABSTRACTS

Die notwendigen Bedingungen für die erfolgreiche europäische Expansion und Kontrolle sind zahlreich. Eine hinreichende Bedingung für ihren Erfolg besteht indes in einer Kombination von tatkräftiger Initiative, Kooperation und Oligarchie. Zunächst ist Kolonialismus beinahe nie die Folge eines Masterplans einer bestimmten Regierung, sondern vielmehr der individuellen Initiative von Entdeckern, Händlern, Missionaren oder Banditen. Weiterhin haben koloniale Herrscher aus geographischen, politischen und nicht zuletzt finanziellen Gründen keine andere Wahl, als Soldaten, Verwalter und Bedienstete aus der einheimischen Bevölkerung zu rekrutieren. Schließlich ist Kolonialismus in vielen Fällen das Resultat einer gemeinsamen Machtausübung durch europäische und lokale Oligarchien auf Kosten der indigenen Subjekte.

There were plenty of necessary conditions for successful European expansion and control. But the sufficient condition for success involves a combination of agency, cooperation and oligarchy. Colonialism is almost never the consequence of a master plan formulated by a particular government, but, as a rule, results from the initiative of individuals, such as explorers, merchants, missionaries – and bandits. Furthermore, for geographical, political and – last but not least – financial reasons colonial rulers had no choice but to recruit soldiers, administrators and servants from the indigenous population. Finally, in many cases, colonialism resulted in the combined domination of European and indigenous oligarchies at the expense of native subjects.

Notwithstanding today's inflationary memorial culture, the year 1519 may well serve as a starting point for our discussion. It is worth recalling the intrusion of Spanish conquer-

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ors into the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan which started in that year.[1] As early as 1511, shipwrecked Spaniards began arriving among the Maya following rumours that beyond the recently occupied Island of Cuba, countries even richer than the notorious Golden Castile of Panama were to be discovered. Accordingly, the governor of Cuba Diego de Velazquez prepared further *entradas.* These were "multifunctional" expeditions of discovery and commerce, which, if necessary, could however be extended to privateering, slave hunting or even to conquest. After two attempts had failed, Velazquez sent another fleet there under the command of Hernán Cortés.

This petty nobleman of modest origins not only profitted from his legal expertise, but also became a wealthy *encomendero* first on Española, then on Cuba – wealthy enough to equip seven of the ten ships of his fleet from his own pocket. Because Velazquez did not trust him, Cortés ultimately decided to start off on his own. He became the greatest of the *conquistadores,* a courageous leader with strength of mind, a natural talent for politics with outstanding tactical capacities and, above all, a complete lack of scruples. He was able to outmaneuver Velasquez, to win over the forces the latter had sent to replace him, and even to gain the favour of Emperor Charles V, despite the fact that Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca, a leading figure in the field of "Indian" policy, happened to be a friend of Velazquez'. The foundation of the city of Veracruz and his election as *capitan general* of this city made Cortés, in a semi-legal way, an independent player who was now able to begin his march on Tenochtitlan.

Cortés did not take on the role of Quetzalcoatl, the deified ancient ruler of the former leading tribe of the Toltecs, as an established legend has it. But he quickly learned how to use the advantages provided by the repressive structure of the Aztec system of governance. As the liberator of peoples who had suffered under Aztec tyranny, he was able to win new allies, while, at the same time, shamelessly outplaying the different factions. Native allies were necessary when the disappointed Aztecs – no longer concerned about their ruler Moctezuma, who was kept in Spanish captivity – almost exterminated the fleeing Spaniards during the *noche triste* of 30 June 1520. A year later, Cortés returned, along with an anti-Aztec coalition, and conquered Tenochtitlan – which in the meantime had suffered a smallpox epidemic – transforming it into a Spanish colony. As the first imperial governor, he managed over the course of the following years almost to double the extent of the former Aztec empire.

After successful plotting and lobbying, his first visit to Spain in 1529 led to his appointment as commander-in-chief, along with the awarding of the title of *marqués* and a feudal property of 11,000 square kilometers containing approximately 200,000 inhabitants. But he did not remain governor of New Spain. He was considered simply a much too powerful competitor to the crown. Instead, on the basis of his *encomiendas*, he became

1 For this paper in general, see W. Reinhard, Die Unterwerfung der Welt: Globalgeschichte der europäischen Expansion, 4th edn, München 2018; for the Spanish conquest, see V. Huber, Beute und Conquista: Die politische Ökonomie der Eroberung Neuspaniens, Frankfurt am Main 2018 and V. Huber, Die Konquistadoren: Cortés, Pizarro und die Eroberung Amerikas, Munich 2019.

the greatest entrepreneur in the Americas, engaged in lucrative mining and agricultural operations, the production of silk, cotton and sugar, trading in sugar and slaves and running workshops, inns and shipyards – in short, he represented a paradigmatic case of effective colonialist agency based upon individual initiative, whereas institutions and political authorities did not react immediately, but rather late or not at all.

It was not only in the case of Cortés that agency proved its value through successful cooperation. Cooperation, however, quite often started with information gathering. In 1519, Geronimo de Aguilar, one of two survivors of the 1511 shipwreck, escaped to Cortés' Spaniards, whereas his companion preferred to stay with the Maya. For this reason, Aguilar became the prototype of the intercultural broker, who provided Cortés with the necessary information about the unknown country. Subsequently, however, one of the twenty female slaves presented as a gift to the Spaniards at Tabasco became a key figure of the Conquista not only because of her knowledge of Nahuatl, a language that Aguilar himself did not know, but also in her capacity as Cortés' lover and advisor. Her name was Malinali Tenepal or Malintzin, hispanized as Malinche and baptized as Doña Marina. The details of her political activity are unknown, but some suggest that she used her influence to settle accounts. But no indigenous source documents negative feedback and her continuous presence in the "Lienzo de Tlaxcala" and other pictorial manuscripts demonstrates competent intercultural cooperation. In 1525, she was officially married to one of Cortés' companions, whereas Cortés himself married a lady from the high Spanish nobility. Each of his two matches produced a son called Martin, which was the name of Cortés' father.[2]

The agency of Doña Marina was an outstanding, although not unique case of cooperation between Spaniards and indigenous women. This was self-evident in the most basic sense. This does not refer to female cooks as some pious authors would have it. A modern historian even proposed a kind of alternative history of the Conquista and claimed the Spaniards conquered the new world not so much with the sword but – *sit venia verbo* – with their genitals![3] Cortés' men did indeed father numerous children. Cases of brutal rape are documented; love affairs are not – which does not mean that they did not exist. Neither the anticolonial paradigm of the Amerindian woman as a "tortured victim" nor the legend of the Indian as an "ever-willing prostitute" reflects historical reality. In America, as well as in Europe, women could be taken as booty, as a prize for the victors, or as a symbolic token when alliances were confirmed. Active political agency, however, was usually restricted to men.

From the indigenous perspective, alliances with powerful new overlords were no problem, because the political systems were not radically different. At the same time, the Spaniards needed indigenous allies for their conquests and for the establishment of colo-

2 C. Wurm, Doña Marina, la Malinche: Eine historische Figur und ihre literarische Rezeption, Frankfurt am Main 1996.

3 R. C. Padden, The Hummingbird and the Hawk: Conquest and Sovereignty in the Valley of Mexico, 1503–1541, Columbus 1967, pp. 229–230.

nial rule. Without his Amerindian troops, Cortés might have been able to conquer a city or two, but not more. Today, the defeat of Tenochtitlan is considered to be the result of a coalition of anti-Aztec forces. It was stabilized by military success, on the one hand, and by Cortés' clever diplomacy, on the other. The technical superiority of Spanish arms did not last very long, because both sides rapidly learned from each other. The battles were no longer transcultural wars in the true sense of the word. With their crossbows, guns and stabbing steel swords – instead of Aztec-style cutting swords – the Spaniards could launch shock attacks. Their Amerindian allies did the rest, killing and probably also cannibalizing their adversaries after the victory.[4]

As the first allies of Cortés, the people of Tlaxcala remained in a privileged position. They were exempt from the obligation to pay the general tribute required of Amerindians, they were not subjected to the exploitation system of the *encomienda* and their settlements were only cautiously adapted to the new rules of government. Apparently, their social order remained intact. With good reason, they considered themselves not mere allies, as other Mexicans were, but even co-victors. Spanish encroachments were met with expansive embassies addressed to the crown, but also by careful self-hispanisation. As early as 1540, they had the documents of their council, the *cabildo,* printed and in 1549 they bought a clock for one of their towers. But eventually they also fell victim to the demographic catastrophe and continuous Spanish expansion.

Pedro de Alvarado, a former leading companion of Cortés, was also only able to conquer the highlands of Guatemala with the assistance of several thousand Nahua warriors who had been hired by Alvarado's brother. The survivors settled in what is now Antigua and immortalized their exploits in a new pictorial manuscript.

Successful colonial expansion results, first of all, from the individual agency of men like Cortés or Alvarado and, second, from their cooperation with indigenous partners. But the decisive factor was a third one, namely, *who* these partners were. Not only did Cortés have three of his "bastard children" legitimized by the pope, among them Martin, the son of Doña Marina. In addition, Moctezuma's first daughter, *Tecuichpochtzin* (cotton flower), was baptized in 1521 as Doña Isabel. She was initially compelled to marry the two Aztec successors to her father, before then being married twice to followers of Cortés – in the meantime, in 1527, having an illegitimate daughter with the latter. Finally, having been widowed twice, she married another Spaniard in 1532. In addition to the son from her first marriage, she had five children with him. Previously, she had been Cortés' concubine, along with two of her sisters, and in 1529 she had a daughter with him. As the daughter of a *rey natural*, she received a hereditary *encomienda* which ultimately became the largest in Mexico. Tremendously rich, she became a self-confident member of colonial Spanish society, an exemplary wife and a pious benefactress.

However, Doña Isabel was not an exceptional case. Francisco Pizarro also kept an Inca princess as concubine, who ultimately married his half-brother Hernando. As soon as

4 See R. Hassig, Mexico and the Spanish Conquest, Norman 2006.

power relations had become clear, indigenous and Spanish elites were ready to establish arrangements to their mutual advantage. Native elites were quickly integrated. Without any problems, the Mexican *altepetl,* the traditional urban community, was able to adopt the constitution of Spanish cities. Perhaps the former native prince had to be removed after the nomination of a Spanish *gobernador*. Other than that, the established oligarchy of the local *pipiltin,* the Mexican nobility, remained in position, but was gradually hispanized. In the Inca Empire, local or regional chiefs, the *curacas,* were established as general authorities. In addition, the traditional scattered settlements were forcibly replaced by 614 closed villages containing 1.5 million people. When, in 1555, the Peruvian Spanish elite offered 7.6 million pesos to the crown to make the *encomiendas* heritable, an assembly of the *curacas* increased the offer to 7.7 million. The crown avoided taking a decision, but the power constellations were obvious: The lords of the land were and remained the allied indigenous and Spanish oligarchies.

Thus we arrive at a threefold, preliminary conclusion: First, the European expansion began with private, rather than governmental initiative; Second, success depended on cooperation with the natives; Third, this cooperation resulted in an alliance between the indigenous and the European elites at the expense of the indigenous lower classes. From the perspective of theoretical logic, all three activities can be summarized as three varieties of *agency.* In addition, our conclusion is applicable beyond the period of 1519, because it can be generalized and therefore amounts to a kind of general explanation of the entire process of expansion.

Concerning the first argument, we can – with good reason – assume that even in the nineteenth century and even in the case of the leading expansionist power, Great Britain, politicians neither followed a master plan nor took the initiative, but simply reacted to challenges as they arose. As a rule, European expansion was the consequence of the informal activity of individual agents and not of the formalized action of national power politics. European powers normally reacted afterwards and rather tardily. Nevertheless, in remarkable contrast to this realist conclusion, colonial powers managed – and to some extent still manage – to present their historiographies in terms of deliberate national expansion. Therefore, our critical approach may additionally help to deconstruct the still-dominant paradigm of nationalist historiography.

Private agents acted as individuals, families, groups and networks. Where necessary, they created their own organisations. Profit-seeking was an essential, but not the sole motive of expansion. And profit-seeking as a rule remained socially and culturally embedded. The individual agent as such might qualify as an "entrepreneur", if this category were not already occupied by a narrow economic perspective. Instead, I want to speak of enterprising and adventurous people in general who are able and willing to independently take advantage of any economic or social opportunity. We meet such people in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, long before the great European Expansion. *The Odyssey* describes the early Phenicians accurately. Greeks and Scandinavian Vikings, merchants from the Hanseatic towns and medieval Italian cities belonged to the same tribe as Portuguese seafarers and the participants in Castilian *entradas.* The latter were able to practise their

various activities, however, already during the Iberian Reconquista, not to mention the medieval English conquest of Ireland.

Maritime republics such as Venice organized navigation and practiced a policy of conquest, but always in a symbiotic relationship with private economic interest. The fourth crusade from 1202 to 1204 was transformed into a Venetian raid and the booty was distributed among the Venetian dynasties. Colonies of the Republic remained an exception. Genova, the notorious rival of Venice, also conquered her colony of Chios using the resources of a trading company. The shareholders had to fit out the ships and, in return, participated in this *mahona*. Because the Giustiniani family dominated among the shareholders, Chios finally became their family colony. Even the Republic of Genova itself was controlled by the Banco di San Giorgio belonging to the leading families, with the consequence that other Genovese colonies also fell under their administration.[5]

It is certainly an unusual perspective to consider medieval urban republics in general as nothing other than the result of aggregate economic self-interest. But the postmodern outsourcing of state responsibility was a self-evident practice in premodern history. Just remember the flourishing business of military enterpreneurs between the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century.

The Portuguese and Spanish crowns were in a strong position, at least insofar as their competence to legitimize private achievements was concerned. This was the intention of the papal bulls in favour of Portugal issued between 1452 and 1456, as well as of the so-called "partition of the world" between Spain and Portugal by the pope in 1493. As in the days of the Reconquista, the Spanish kings were subsequently obliged to confirm conquests in the New World which, however, were performed without the engagement of the crown. Nevertheless, the kings were able to appropriate the results. In contrast, in the case of Portugal the monarchs were running businesses and ships, in particular, by themselves. But the "crowned capitalists" of the sixteenth century despite their political competitive advantage still resembled private entrepreneurs, because their armed fleets in the Indian Ocean did not fight for territorial conquest but for commercial strongholds. In addition, their aggressive monopolistic policy resembles a mere interim of state engagement between a half-century of private activities on the coasts of Africa, on the one hand, and, on the other, the re-privatisation of the spice trade after 1570 – and definitively after 1642, when it was no longer profitable.

Even the achievements of Prince Henry, unjustly called "the navigator", who was the driving force of the enterprise until his death in 1460, were authorized by a crown monopoly in 1441, but remained his private affair. As grand master of the Order of Christ, he possessed the necessary means to finance his activities. A strictly limited crowd of Portuguese and foreign investors, Italians in particular, only appeared when the first slaves from Africa were put on the market. After the discovery of and trade in Africa had turned profitable, they were rented out for the first time to private enterprise in 1469.

5 See P. Feldbauer et al. (eds.), Mediterraner Kolonialismus. Expansion und Kulturaustausch im Mittelalter, Essen 2006.

Seafarers from outside Iberia managed to partake of the booty as pirates, either with letter of marque or without one. The French pirate Jean Fleury stole the treasure of the Aztecs on his corsair cruises. His English successors the Drake, Hawkins and Raleigh even achieved the status of national heroes. John Hawkins entered the slaving business to please his investors, among them Queen Elizabeth I, as a quasi-private profit seeker.

The Portuguese empire of trade in the Indian Ocean was first undermined through spontaneously created small companies from Northwestern Europe. But around 1600 a new organisational pattern was invented, a privileged society or "chartered company" which would subsequently demonstrate the superiority of private over public enterprise. In 1602, with some political support, the Dutch founded the United East India Company, the V.O.C., to establish a monopsony on spices. A monopoly in Asian trade was also included, but, nota bene, of Dutch trade with Asia along with autorisation for the necessary subsidiary political and military activities. Originally, the company's privilege was limited to a fixed period of time. But, in the end, the V.O.C. became the first great, permanent shareholding company in history. The English East India Company was founded as early as 1600, but its transformation into a permanent organisation took more time. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch were stronger, but in the eighteenth century the positions were inverted.

This recently invented self-organisation of capital proved extremely successful. Therefore, new companies sprang up everywhere. In the beginning, however, policy was not only engaged in the service of capital, but apparently capital had to serve political interests as well, because the first settlement colonies in French and English North America were also organized as privileged shareholding companies established by the respective crowns. The English monarchy was strong, but nevertheless lacked the necessary funds for an active expansionist policy. Therefore, once again individual or collective private interest took the lead and was legitimized and privileged by the crown, but in the end the settlers took over.

In contrast, Asia's strongest trading companies, the Dutch on Java and the British in India, rather coincidentally – but very successfully – moved from trade to territorial dominance. And whereas the Dutch Indies became property of the Dutch state in 1816, British India remained company property until the catastrophe of 1857. In the meantime, soldiers in the service of the company, but acting on their own initiative, had extended company government over the entire sub-continent. First, in Bengal, robbery on a massive scale took place. John Parry once called this generation "the new conquistadores" of India. In the nineteenth century, it was still possible for an adventurer like James Brooke to acquire the principality of Sarawak on Borneo, which became a British protectorate but was still governed by his family until 1946.

In theory, the modern nation-state which has achieved its final perfection since the eighteenth century could not tolerate such private agency. The state became the most powerful invention of mankind, superior to any of its competitors, including even the great empires of Asia which until recently had ranked as an equal match for Europe. The

increasing space-time contraction produced more conflict, more violence and ever more imperialist expansivity. The regular outcome was obvious:

> *Whatever happens we have got*
> *The Maxim-Gun and they have not.*[6]

Nevertheless, there was little change so far as the usual sequence of events and the key role of private initiative and activity were concerned. This amazing situation is explained by the fact that colonial policy led to financial losses for most state budgets, whereas profits were made by private agents. If politicians dared to risk colonial engagement and annexation, the expenses at least needed to be kept as low as possible. Thus, Bismarck, for example, tried to use chartered companies as a means to make profiteers pay for the cost. But this provided them with additional chances, which they would not have had before. As was previously the case, the expansion of Europe was promoted by individuals who were interested in economic and social profit or by their respective networks. Take the case of the Opium War. From a macro-economic point of view, Britain needed the export of opium from India to China to pay for tea exports and, in this way, to equalize the balance of exchange. When China finally started to fight the established corruption of the opium traders and had Indian opium burned, the British opium merchants resorted to their well-provided political "war chest" and asked for a micro-economic compensation of GBP 22 million, because the British agent at Kanton had no choice but to hand over the opium. Since the Melbourne cabinet did not have this money, they started a minor war instead, because China had violated the sacred principles of private property. Via Lord Palmerstone the opium merchant Jardine had a ready-made plan for war presented to the cabinet. Opium was not even mentioned; instead the opium business even expanded, because the Chinese market was now open and, via the acquisition of Hong Kong, Britain had a means of keeping the door open in the future – a paradigmatic case of private problems at the periphery which, through private intervention in London, were resolved by violent political expansion.

Quite often, private expansive initiatives turned violent right from the beginning. A famous example of this was the private pseudo-development of the Congo basin initiated by King Leopold II of Belgium. Starting from 1878, following the king's instructions, the adventurer and traveller Henry Morton Stanley had used dubious contracts and ruthless brutality to establish control over the country on the Great River. The subsequent atrocities in Leopold's private colony in Congo are well known. Less well known is the exploitation of the French Congo and of parts of German Cameroon which was not much different.

On a smaller scale, but with comparable brutality, the philosopher and historian Carl Peters showed off as colonial pioneer and member of the German master race. All German colonies began on the basis of private initiative, but in no case were the initiators

6 H. Belloc, The Modern Traveller, London 1898, p. 42.

able and willing to secure peace and order. Their chartered companies also failed. In contrast, conflicts increased, quite often because of the activities of these pioneers. Thus, the imperial government was finally compelled to take over. But even in those cases where self-organizing interests ultimately precipitated government takeovers, the basic impulse of the expansion of Europe originated from various forms of private agency and not from the calculation of the power politics of central governments.

Having replaced nationalist historiography by the paradigm of individual agency, our second argument concerns cooperation. Both arguments derive from the epistemological replacement of systems theory by the theory of action or, more concretely, by the replacement of the history of structures by a new history of events. As a result, the traditional binary epistemological code, which left no alternative between all-powerful, colonialist perpetrators and helpless, colonized victims, has become outdated. Even the classical theory of dependency was exposed as a racist construct, because it did not trust in the creative agency of the subjugated.

Even before the "peripheral turn" of David Fieldhouse in 1973, Ronald Robinson had, in 1972, suggested for a second time a fundamental change in historiography, when he published his study "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration".[7] This impulse, however, did not bear fruit before the 1980s because of a kind of moral blockade. First of all, the notion of "collaboration" had to be translated neutrally as "cooperation".

Long before Vichy France, collaborators were considered criminal traitors of their nation. But this simplistic distinction between bad and good characters is rather dubious and, historically speaking, completely anachronistic. Nevertheless, because of this taboo, it is all but easy to study the cooperation between indigenous people and Europeans without bias. Of course, the relationship between Cortés and Malinche was unequal and problematic, but it was nevertheless a case of successful cooperation and therefore correctly preserved as such in subsequent history. One of Mexico's highest mountains bears her name. But as a result of fragmentary sources, Malinche became largely disconnected from her historical reality and ended up being portrayed either, positively, as the paradigmatic founding mother of a people of *mestizos* or, negatively, as the paradigmatic traitor to her people. "*Malinchismo*" became a term for any kind of foreign alienation, including critics of the Mexican oil company PEMEX.[8]

However, she was never accused of being a traitor before the nineteenth century. Obviously, this kind of accusation is, in every case, a product of nationalism and the modern state. Traitors to a nation simply cannot exist before the age of nations, because national treason is a modern category, and therefore obviously anachronistic when applied to most of the European expansion.

7 J. Gallagher / R. Robinson, The Imperialism of Free Trade, in: Economic History Review 6 (1953), pp. 1–15; R. Robinson, Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration, in: R. Owen / B. Sutcliffe (eds.), Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, London 1972, pp. 117–142.

8 Wurm, Doña Marina, pp. 164, 195–198.

Of course, treason was always prosecuted by law, but laws can change and are quite often just a matter of definition. Even Judas Ischariot, the biblical prototype of a traitor, has had his defenders. At the same time, to accuse somebody of treason has always been much too easy. Just remember the term *Volksverräter* (traitor of the nation) which was chosen as the *Unwort* (non-word) of 2016.[9] Certainly, some traitors are uncovered, but more often they are simply produced artificially through the employment of the media. Obvious cases of treason are rare whereas the role of the media is continuously increasing.

The cooperation of indigenous people with Europeans was not largely qualified as treason until decolonization. It was created retrospectively, because in most cases the point of reference, the modern nation-state, did not exist and needed first to be invented. Namibians and even British Indians needed first of all to realize their new identity as Namibians or Indians. This change in discourse simply happened at different points in time. During the wars of the nineteenth century, a native New Zealander was identified as a *kupapa* when he was able to avoid engagement. In the meantime, such a person has come to be considered a traitor to the established Maori nation.[10]

People were loyal neither to the state, which still did not exist, nor to an empire, which perhaps existed but did not matter, and was quite often considered repressive and exploitive. They were loyal to their families and, in addition, to the smaller and larger social groups of people to whom they were related. This is the meaning of the controversial debate on the so-called African "tribes". People behaved correspondingly and used the European expansion to further their interests. They reacted following power relations by cooperation or, if necessary, even by assimilation. This behavior was not only reasonable but – to use a deliberately anachronistic term – also politically correct. Nevertheless, the consequences might remain ambiguous, in particular when indigenous people and Europeans had different concepts of cooperation.

However, the problem of cooperation was limited to colonies of domination, because mere strongholds, as well as colonies of settlement, were by definition under exclusive European control. But Latin American colonies stood for a mixed type characterized by a larger or smaller numbers of white settlers together with a more or less "silent" majority of *indigenas*. Under the conditions of early modern Iberian monarchies this was the only possible arrangement, because complete colonies of domination presuppose the complete modern state which, however, did not reach its final stage of development before the eighteenth century. It is not by coincidence that British rule in India started at that time.

Modern British India was controlled by not more than several thousand European officials, in British and French Africa by a few hundred. And most of them held no permanent position, but were appointed for a limited period of time. This practice was

9 Cf. www.unwortdesjahres.net (accessed 10 August 2020).

10 V. O'Malley, Uncle Toms and *Kupapas*: "Collaboration" versus Alliance in a Nineteenth-Century New Zealand Context, in: T. Bührer et al. (eds.), Cooperation and Empire: Local Realities of Global Processes, New York 2017, pp. 144–168.

possible, first, because steamships, telegraph cables and the Suez Canal had reduced communication time to some days or weeks, whereas earlier it had taken years. Second, everyone involved knew that the reduced number of European administrators corresponded to the readiness for action of European military, which could be called in at any time. Third, it was only under these two conditions that the overwhelming number of indigenous personnel and, at the lowest level, even indigenous self-administration became the normal practice in colonies of domination.

Around 1940, 20 million Nigerians were governed by 386 white officials and hundreds of millions of Indians in 1909 by not more than 1,142 members of the Indian Civil Service, who were 95 per cent British. In addition, there existed after 1893 a Provincial Civil Service of Indians, with 1,827 members and, in 1887, 21,466 lower Indian administrators were counted. Whereas British India remained the most precious jewel in the crown, most other colonies belonging to all of the other powers remained lossmaking. Thus, they were to be governed with as little expense as possible, employing financially neutral self-administration. This was the true secret of the famous British "indirect rule" over Indian and African princes, an arrangement which, by the way, had been practiced long before by the ancient Romans, the Spaniards and the French. It was the consequence not of British political wisdom, but of British thriftiness.

Innumerable inferior officials of the former Mughal Empire could simply take over or adopt similar tasks, whereas in Africa this was possible only in exceptional cases, such as parts of Uganda, Nigeria and present-day Ghana. Instead, as a rule, the British, French and other colonial powers governed through authorized chiefs, whom they had confirmed or appointed. Despite all of their differences these individuals were the backbone of European domination over Africa.

The colonial military forces were controlled in a similar way, with the possible exception of European shock troops. Indians remained excluded from the ranks of the officers, but, nevertheless, the esprit de corps of indigenous military units was carefully maintained. During the two world wars, the compulsory cooperation with Indians and Africans expanded to gigantic dimensions. 2.5 million Indians served Great Britain during the Second World War, 180,000 were killed or became prisoners of war. 160,000 West Africans fought for France, 100,000 of them against Germany, 30,000 died. The British employed 374,000 African soldiers together with 165,000 unarmed pioneers and service personnel. Here, at the latest, it became obvious to what extent European rule depended on indigenous cooperation.

Third, it is also clear enough at this point that the cooperation of Europeans with natives, and even with indigenous elites, might have had equal weight, in reality, but must not necessarily be understood to include equal status or to have remain unchanged over time. The lords of Tlaxcala, the Nizam of Hyderabad in the eighteenth century and many others believed they had control over the situation and considered the Europeans to be dependent junior partners – they were mistaken. In India and elsewhere, European domination was established only after a prolonged period of open and indecisive mutual interaction.

In Africa, the final decision did not occur until the nineteenth century. The European slave trade, in particular, was based on reciprocity, because most slaves were bought by Europeans, but caught and sold by Africans. This unambiguous and well-structured mutual relationship amounted to an alliance of African and European elites to exploit the downtrodden of Africa. African kings and businessmen caught the slaves and sold them with – to use modern jargon – 50 per cent collateral damage. But European merchants bought and sold the slaves, European sailors carried them to America, and other Europeans, together with a few Amerindians and Afro-Americans, bought them and kept them on their plantations.

Once again, our findings are obvious, not exceptional. The symbiosis of the indigenous and Spanish elites of Mexico and Peru as a strategic element of Spanish rule has already been mentioned.

Finally, even decolonization follows the same rules of elite circulation and elite convergence. New Europeanized elites learned their overlords' business until – for whatever reason – they were able to take over from them. Decolonization happened through appropriation. However, quite often a hostile takeover became a friendly takeover in the end, with little change for those at lower levels. Sometimes the end was worse than the beginning, when former victims began to become perpetrators. Most probably, it is not an oversimplification to consider Western colonialism in general as a system of alliances between European and indigenous elites at the expense of extra-European and sometimes even European non-elites.

From the perspective of global history, our arguments have produced a sketch of a general theory of European expansion. The general process of expansion history produced a rather long and changing list of necessary conditions of success, which are given but do not explain the entire process. Notable examples include, for instance, the extraordinary maritime penetration of Europe, the notorious transcultural curiosity of Europeans, the activity of Catholic and later also of Protestant missionaries, and the development of the modern power state in Europe. The sufficient condition of success, however, consists in the convergence of three basic factors, which initiated the expansive process and kept it going: 1. The dynamics of individual Western agency; 2. The effective cooperation of European and native agents; 3. The key role of alliances between European and indigenous elites.