

# Afterword

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This collection of articles amply fulfils the goal of expanding the horizons of the study of colonialism, both in space and in time. In covering a time period of over 2000 years and spanning the globe from East Asia to South America, it answers some important questions and raises others that deserve reflection.

The editors are aware of the sensitivity of the topic, concerned that they could be accused of “trivializing the harm and suffering that Europeans have caused to others by raising the question of how exceptional their colonial ventures were”. The study of colonialism is necessarily fraught with ethical and political issues. As Krishan Kumar notes in his article, the terms colony or colonial are old, but the addition of an “ism” dates to the second half of the nineteenth century, marking the process of acquiring and maintaining colonies as an identifiable object of criticism and defence.<sup>1</sup> Just as the horrors perpetrated in the Shoah are in no way mitigated by recognizing the genocides of Southwest Africa (1904), Armenia (1915–1917), or Rwanda (1994), the specificity of European colonization in sixteenth-century South America or twentieth-century Africa is if anything underscored by situating it in relation to a larger history. Otherwise, one risks reproducing Eurocentrism by the presumption that only Europeans produced actions with consequences. It has taken a great deal of effort, by activists as well as historians, to gain widespread acceptance that colonization was an intrinsic part of European history, and now that “global” or “world” history is getting so much attention, the importance of colonization in such a context deserves the kind of examination it receives in these pages.

1 Not that this was the first time colonization had come in for criticism, resistance, and rebellion. In the European context, Diderot and other Enlightenment figures were notable for denouncing the human devastation of French colonial rule and citing it as evidence of the monarchical regime’s unfitness to govern. See S. Mathu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, Princeton 2003; J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*, Princeton 2005.

The contribution of this collection of articles leads me to three types of remarks: 1. What the articles amply demonstrate, 2. The zones of ambiguity they bring out, and 3. The conceptual problems in the texts themselves.

The first contribution is easily conveyed. Whatever the complexities of definition—amply discussed in these essays, if not with perfect agreement—editors and authors have made a persuasive case that there is a phenomenon to be studied more widespread than something done by European powers to other parts of the world from the fifteenth century onward. The broadest consensus is that colonization entails the establishment of some form of domination of a political entity over societies that are in some way distinct and that this process entails the long-term denigration of the people being colonized. Invidious distinction-making against the outsider, the barbarian, or the “other” is not a phenomenon of recent history.<sup>2</sup> When invidious distinction becomes a, if not the primary, basis of a mode of governance, we can speak of a “colonial situation”.<sup>3</sup> That these criteria are met in such varied contexts as the Inca Empire of the fifteenth century, Russia under the Tsars, and the precolonial kingdom of Rwanda expands our thinking about the range of ways in which political power and social distinction-making operate historically. As these articles move beyond the “is it or isn’t it?” question, they provide even more revealing insights.

That Ottoman Syria wasn’t colonial (James Reilly) and parts of Tsarist Russia were (Michael Khodarkovsky) are defensible propositions, but more interesting is the way the Ottomans combined rule over Syria as a province with a more colonial tendency in other parts of the empire<sup>4</sup> and the capacity of Russia’s Tsars to rule all its peoples, ethnic Russians included, in autocratic ways, even employing non-Russians in high positions, so that its colonizing tendencies existed within a broader politics of difference. The Qing dynasty, of non-Han origin but ruling through a combination of Manchu, Mongol, and Han “banners” as well as a largely-Han bureaucracy, incorporated some territories fully into its system, kept others in a more distant form of subordination, and refrained from “colonizing”, in the sense of incorporating into a formal apparatus of administration, a wider region in East and Southeast Asia in which Han Chinese had established “colonies” in the sense of ethnically defined enclaves (Matthew Mosca). Kate McDonald shows that Japanese empire was neither an anomaly among colonizing powers nor engaged in mimicry of them, but perpetrated a shifting variety of colonizing practices in Korea, Taiwan, Hokkaido, and Okinawa that fall within the range of subordinating and racializing strategies of other empires around the globe. Félix Acuto and Iván Leibowicz

2 Racial distinction in particular is not new. It takes many forms, but a key question is how such distinctions shape and are shaped by politics. Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Race Is about Politics: Lessons from History*, L. Vergnaud (trans.), Princeton, NJ, 2019; F. Bethencourt, *Racisms from the Crusades to the Twentieth Century*, Princeton 2014.

3 A pioneering and still-valuable analysis (as the editors note) of what constitutes a “colonial situation” is G. Balandier, *La situation coloniale: Approche théorique*, in: *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 11 (1951), pp. 44–79.

4 Reilly’s discussion of Syria might be read alongside M. Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz*, Stanford 2016 and T. Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849–1919*, Leiden 2011.

on the Inka and Axel Paul on Rwanda bring out revealing cases of polities that eventually became the victims of European colonization after have produced in their own pasts structures of political domination, economic exploitation, and institutionalized distinction. As with the Aztecs (Wolfgang Reinhard) European colonizers could in some instances exploit in the process of conquest the distinctions within empires they were conquering, and it only became clear over time that the new distinctions that European empires were imposing would be even more invidious and would institutionalize and racialize hierarchy on a wider scale than the imperial formations they replaced.

The second contribution of these essays pushes on these insights. The collection brings out the ambiguous and changing relationship between different forms of imperial power. The specific place of “the colonial” within the more all-embracing category of “the imperial” is discussed throughout this special issue, and most authors bring out the overlap, ambiguity, and, most important, the dynamic tension between the two categories. The concept of empire entails the expansion of a political entity across space and it entails differentiation among the components of the enlarged political entity. If expansion ends up reducing difference – through cultural blending, assimilation to dominant patterns, or extermination – the result is a large but relatively homogeneous state; calling it an empire serves little purpose. But distinction, even durable distinction, is not necessarily invidious distinction. The rulers of empire are not always a “people” or a “society” – they could be a dynasty or a self-perpetuating elite within a wider social category. For this reason, the definition of empire of Michael Doyle – much cited, including in the introduction – is misleading, for it presumes the prior existence of separate societies and then arranges them in a dominant-subordinate relationship, when those social boundaries might themselves be the products, not the prior basis, of empire-building.<sup>5</sup> The concept of “colonial” becomes most useful when accentuating the sharpness of distinction between two categories of people that are historically produced – often with considerable effort and uncertainty.

In these terms, empire-building entails the possibility of producing a colonial situation, but does not necessarily do so. If empires exercise power over space in multiple ways, the temptation to expand entails the temptation to subordinate. Colonization becomes part of the repertoire of power of an empire. For reasons that Kumar explains, colonization might entail settlement, but defining it in such terms misses out on the varied nature of imperial repertoires: encouraging settlement may be one form of extending power—based on intermediaries with a close social relationship to the power elite back home—but imperial rule may also entail the annexation of territory, the extraction of material resources, the subordination and exploitation of indigenous peoples, and the co-optation of indigenous elites into administering “their” people. Both the colony of

5 The definition I prefer puts the accent on the reproduction over time of distinction within an incorporative polity: “Empires are large political units, expansionist or with a memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people.” J. Burbank/F. Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton 2010, p. 8.

settlement and the colony of exploitation can produce the invidious distinctions that are the hallmark of a colonial situation. Both may exist side by side within a single empire, alongside other forms of differential governance as well.<sup>6</sup> As McDonald shows in the case of Japan, colonization as settlement was not exclusively directed to colonies of Japan, but to the colonies of other powers or independent states, fulfilling similar objectives of spreading Japanese influence and easing population pressure in the home islands. Such was also the case in late nineteenth century Germany: German settlers were more likely to “colonize” territory (at the expense of indigenous peoples) in Brazil or Argentina as in Germany’s newly acquired colonial territories.<sup>7</sup>

On the edge of the line between the imperial and the colonial were possibilities for incorporation that did not amplify invidious distinction even if it did not produce equivalence or equality. The Roman Empire, as Martin Mauersberg demonstrates, brought in people by violence and looked down on “barbarians”, but it also provided access to citizenship through various mechanisms (after 212 AD to all male and non-slave inhabitants of the empire), established pathways for selected members of conquered societies to gain high positions, and created a structure of provinces quite different from a metropole-colony binary. The Arab empires were incorporative in quite a different way, designating, as Robert Hoyland shows, a recognized place for Jews and Christians but not as equals to Muslims. Different as these examples are, they suggest the possible persistence of inclusionary mechanisms in empires, even when they do not produce equality or assimilation. On the colonial end of the spectrum, the sharpness of distinctions produced a political form that was more unstable than that of long-lasting empires like that of Rome (nearly two millennia if one combines its eastern and western manifestations) or the Ottomans (600 years), or the succession of Chinese dynasties that kept claiming the Mandate of Heaven of their predecessors (two millennia). Colonial rule could evolve, sometimes rapidly, in three directions. 1. If the colonizing powers made an effort to integrate incorporated territories or undertook seriously a civilizing mission, colonization became in theory self-liquidating. Looked at collectively, the colony might become an imperial province equivalent to others; looked at individual by individual, assimilating the colonized could result in a relatively homogeneous polity. 2. If a colony-metropole distinction was accentuated, the polity risked rebellion and secession. In a colony of settlement, the settlers might decide that the rulers of their territories of origin were extracting more than they were providing and that the colony should secede – the pattern of the Americas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Where colonial rulers

6 What is called “settler colonialism” stands out most clearly when separated from the rest of the repertoire of an imperial power, notably when settlers cease to be part of a colony, that is when they break free of the metropole, establish themselves as a territorial state, and take into their own hands the task of subordinating the indigenous population, as in the United States after 1783 or Israel after 1948. This strategy was also attempted in vain by Rhodesians in 1965, when the imperial power would no longer guarantee white domination and only a declaration of national independence – taking Rhodesia out of the British Empire – might preserve the dominant power of white settlers.

7 S. Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, S. O’Hagan (trans.), Cambridge 2010.

exercised power through a small and rotating bureaucracy and army and the co-optation of indigenous intermediaries, there was the risk of an uprising of the oppressed or an effort at creating a new type of polity by those intermediaries who had a measure of power but were blocked from achieving more and were in a position to take advantage of any faltering in the external basis of colonial authority. This pattern resulted in the collapse of European colonial empires after World War II. 3. If the colonizing power could stave off the second alternative, it might claim to be following the first alternative but defer it indefinitely, that is claiming to be preparing people for self-rule and continuing to insist that they were not ready for it. This was the claim of British and French rulers in much of the twentieth century, until they found that the power to defer was not in their hands. The usefulness of a concept such as colonialism lies not just in helping us to place historical instances into categorical slots, but also in enabling us to see how forms of power move in different directions. These essays have presented us with a set of examples of the ambiguous and changing relationship of empire and colony, as well as of the relationship between the settlement and exploitation of colonized territory. There are some differences in perspective among the authors, but much more important is the accumulation of examples of historical change. Reinhard points out that in the time of Cortez (early sixteenth century) it was not clear that there was a specific Spanish project of colonization. Cortez and other conquistadors operated to a large extent on their own, using the recruitment of indigenous allies and marriage alliances as well as their own ability to inflict violence to destroy an existing imperial structure and gain power. Only with the Spanish crown's ability to "appropriate the results" (Reinhardt's phrase) did the process produce what one might call a colonial empire. Janne Lahti provides a stimulating discussion of warfare and enslavement involving Apache, Comanche, and Spanish polities in a turbulent situation where borders were unclear and contested, and where it was for some time uncertain where dominant power lay. Whether all the forms of arrogant assertion of power and superiority, going as far as the enslavement of people, should be considered "colonial" is questionable, but in the case of Spanish rulers, the consolidation of power slowly developed, so the nature of that power became less ambiguous. The label colonial in this case then provides the useful service of underscoring the long-term reproduction of relations of social superiority and inferiority. Matthias Leanza also reveals a history of colonization that didn't begin with a colonizing project – Germans in Southwest Africa – but became one in the context of rivalry among rival powers with an interest in the region. The early ambiguities of power did not lessen the importance of violence; on the contrary the limited means Germany had to impose a colonial order on this region was a factor behind its turn to genocidal violence. By insisting that the category of colony applies to a range of situations, the editors and authors have shown that we have a useful conceptual apparatus not only for classifying political forms, but for examining how they change in different directions.

My third set of remarks focus on issues that these texts open up, but where I don't think the editors and some of the authors have gone as far as they might in pushing their own insights. The first and most important concerns the well-worn distinction between

“modern colonialism” and its “pre-modern counterparts” that makes its way into the introduction (p. 227), a distinction also made in Kumar’s, Reilly’s, and McDonald’s chapters but not particularly important to the other authors. We certainly need tools to understand change, but why should our conception of change be defined in binary terms and why should this distinction, both banal and problematic in regard to Europe, be applied all over the world in a text that is trying to get beyond Eurocentrism? Let us recognize the significance of the concept of “modern” in relation to colonialism is best seen not as an analytic descriptor but as a claim, an assertion first of European superiority, then an insistence by colonized people that they too could be “modern” and were therefore entitled to equal consideration.<sup>8</sup>

Social scientists and historians have a tendency to pin down processes in time and space—the age of revolution or the age of empire, modern Europe vs late-developing Africa. What the study of empires over time reveals is how phenomena overlap and coexist. Empire as a political form survived as long as it did because imperial rulers could shift among different elements of a repertoire without being tied to the idea that a uniform set of political practices should apply. That also meant that different forms of empire shared historical space into the twentieth century, competing with each other, influencing each other, maintaining different strategies of rule among themselves as well as within each one.<sup>9</sup> The once-conventional “from empire to nation-state” narrative no longer reflects a consensus among historians of either empires or nationalism and cannot account for the range of political possibilities that were in play into the second half of the twentieth century, if not the present.<sup>10</sup>

The arguments made by Paul and Leanza work better if one gets away from insistence that colonialism as *practices* of rule constituted a new form of colonial empire in the nineteenth century, and focuses instead on changes in what could be *imagined*. We know – pace Benedict Anderson – that imagined communities in the nineteenth and twentieth century have taken many forms, from the Greater Britain of like-minded white men spread around the world to diasporic imaginings – pan-African, pan-Arab, pan-Slavic--whose relationship to territory was not fixed – to demands for different kinds of federation. The national idea was only one of these ideas, and in imperial capitals and colonial peripheries it was not necessarily the most attractive. By Paul and Leanza’s own

8 One of the most articulate claims to being a modern colonizer, as France is plunging into colonial expansions, is P. Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, Paris 1874. This book went through many editions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

9 It is not clear why Paul and Leanza claim that modern colonialism, as opposed to earlier imperial formations, was characterized by open rivalry among empires. Interempire conflict is an old story – think of the conflict among the Byzantine, Persian, and Arab empires from the eighth century onward. Nor are the empires in conflict in the late nineteenth century similar in their structure or their relationship to national projects. The Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires (old?) were sufficiently engaged with British, French, and German empires (new?) to be part of the dynamic that led to World War I (and earlier the Crimean War).

10 I have written elsewhere about the inadequacies of “modernity” and “nation-state” as analytical concepts. F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley 2005. On the overlap of national and imperial histories see Burbank/Cooper, *Empires in World History*, and S. Berger/A. Miller (eds.), *Nationalizing Empires*, Budapest 2015. This overlap is acknowledged by both Paul and Leanza and Kumar.

admission, the nation-state only “gradually” became the norm of international discourse after colonial rule came to an end—in other words with the death of “modern colonialism” rather than its coming into being.

We come back to the attachment of the “ism” to “colonial”. It was the range of possibilities, not a linear pathway to one of them, that distinguished most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. That included the development of a vocabulary to claim a “not-empire”—a way of criticizing not just the rule or misrule of a particular imperial power but the legitimacy of the empire form itself. Between the imagining of alternatives and the actuality of any of them lies a lot of history, including the rise of imperial powers as different as the Nazis and the Soviets, a wide range of political movements in the empires, and two world wars. The UN only issued its declaration repudiating the legitimacy of colonial rule in December of 1960. Along the way to that general agreement (although it still fell short of consensus), colonialism was slowly being defined as an object of contention by both its critics and its defenders, and both in relation to and in tension with the actual repertoires of rule in colonial empires.

When McDonald contends that Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was constructing itself within an “emerging global order of imperial nation-states”, she makes the valuable move of putting Japan into a wider conversation, but the concept of “imperial nation-state” gives a misleading view of both the nature of the global order, as I have argued above, and the particularities of Japan.<sup>11</sup> Japan, as she demonstrates, was experimenting with varied forms of imperial governance predicated on the fact that sovereignty is not an either-or phenomenon but can be layered, shared, and divided, as in Japan’s protectorate in Korea at century’s turn or France’s protectorate in Tunisia in the same time period.<sup>12</sup> As Japanese ideologues worked with a variety of formulations to portray both the racial commonality of Asians and Japan’s privileged position among them, they were revealing how much the relationship between the imperial and the national and between the ruling and the ruled was manipulable and contested rather than intrinsic parts of a global order.

In short, the historical study of different colonial regimes reveals a range of pathways, some followed, some proving to be dead ends. We need to track, as most of the articles here do, those pathways.

11 McDonald is not the only scholar to use the term “imperial nation-state” in regard to the nineteenth or early twentieth century. The “imperial” makes good sense, but the hyphen in “nation-state” gives an anachronistic fixity to a historical process in which the relationship of state and nation was ambiguous and contested – in France or Britain as much as in Asia. That the relationship was still in question in the 1950s – and that federation and confederation were seen as alternatives to both colonial empire and the nation-state, see F. Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960*, Princeton 2014.

12 International law, as it was evolving at this time, was premised on the non-equivalence of different polities, but recognized that imperial rule did not entail a duality between a totalizing sovereignty and its absence but recognized divided and layered notions of imperial control, including colonies, protectorates, dominions, extraterritorial jurisdictions, spheres of interest, and so on. On the particularities of the protectorate, see M. D. Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia 1881–1938*, Berkeley 2014 and more generally J. Sheehan, *The Problem of Sovereignty in European History*, in: *American Historical Review* 111 (2006), pp. 1–15.

Paul and Leanza are surely right that the story of colonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is closely linked to the history of capitalism, but they don't tell us what that link was. Capitalism developed in the context of empire, not the other way around. The sugar and tea that kept early industrial workers going came from slave plantations in colonies, and without the force only empires could deploy over long distances the risk of losing valuable plantation zones to rival empires or to slave revolt would have made the project untenable. It was the fiscal-military regime that empires produced in their rivalry with each other that made it possible to produce and protect the extended linkages that enabled capitalist development. Paul and Leanza comment that European imperialism involved many empires but one economy. If one wants to call it one economy, what capitalism produced was a fragmented and differentiated one. Colonial regimes did much to keep it that way, in their rivalries with each other, their attempts at privileging commerce within an imperial formation, their maintenance of a division of labour between metropole and colony, and their strategies for subordinating colonial labour.<sup>13</sup> The most important point is not that the world economy was one, but that European powers, and the scholars and ideologues connected to them, were able to represent it as one through the apparently universal concept of the market. The combination of the sheer extent of European colonization with the liberal doctrines of economic universality and individualism was a potent one. But the lack of correspondence of the doctrine with colonial practices made for a dynamic situation in which European pretensions to universality were increasingly turned against themselves, by activists within colonies and by elites at home who actually took the ideology seriously. In economic and political terms, what went on in colonies at the beginning of the twentieth century was as varied, complex, and disjointed as in empires of the past, a concatenation of old and new technologies of governance, of shared and distinct habits of rule, of localized systems of production integrated into or distanced from commercial and finance capital to differing degrees. What was beginning to emerge was world-wide debate over political economy, some of it in terms of European liberalism and socialism, much of it in the languages of different places, intersecting with or rejecting to differing degrees the discursive structures that colonization had extended.<sup>14</sup>

13 Prasannan Parthasarathi presents a fascinating argument about how Britain at first used its imperial power to channel Indian-produced textiles into networks of commerce it controlled, then proceeded to destroy the Indian textile industry in the interests of metropolitan producers. P. Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600–1850*, Cambridge 2010. On the connection between empire and capitalist industrialization, see K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton, NJ 2010.

14 U. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-century British Liberal Thought*, Chicago 1999 is right that liberalism and colonialism complemented each other, but so did liberalism and anti-colonialism. Indeed, debates over slavery and colonialism were crucial to allowing liberals to posit a world in which individuals acting in markets, voting booths, and other “universal” institutions would constitute a normative basis for a just society, a stance whose relationship with political practices has been the subject of endless debates. See also A. Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History*, Berkeley 2014.



By the middle of the twentieth century, not only had the decades of critique made the object more definable, but attacking it was becoming an attainable goal. European states emerged diminished militarily, politically, and ideologically from World War II; challenges to colonial rule, beginning in Indonesia, Indochina, and India, were more acute than anything European rulers had previously faced; and two powers with an imperial reach but which claimed to be different from other empires (the United States and the Soviet Union) provided alternative models and mechanisms of support.

Thinking about the problem in these terms helps us understand the problem the scholars who put together this volume face: the object of their study has, since the end of World War II been defined normatively, by a political process that made colonialism both identifiable and excisable. Once the colonial game was up, the colonizing powers – Britain and France most obviously – wanted to see themselves in much more national terms than had been the case before they gave up most of their colonies (aside from periodic bouts of imperial nostalgia). And the liberated peoples of Africa and Asia also wanted to define themselves as something other than the victims of colonization. When, in part because of disillusionment with how the project of decolonization turned out, “post-colonial” critique came into vogue in the 1980s and thereafter, the colonial was still being defined more normatively than sociologically – it was European colonial empire that was held responsible for the present-day after effects of colonial rule. That is why the task this collection of articles has undertaken is both important and a challenge. The editors and authors have made a strong case, in terms of history and as political sociology, for the widespread significance of the category of “colony”, for the importance of variations within the category, and – most interesting of all – for the volatility of the phenomenon in question. They have avoided going too far in the other direction: to find “coloniality” in any relation of inequality, in any form of distinction-making. The most important and the most difficult issues lie in the particulars: how, precisely, is the power to categorize and to denigrate exercised? By whom and against whom? Such questions push us deeper into the study of colonialism, but also beyond, for attaching the label can obscure as well as illuminate. If colonialism is everywhere, it is nowhere. To compare colonialisms is to see the common threads, to recognize the different patterns, and to understand the limitations of the concept, that is to examine the complexities of power as it is actually exercised.