Comparing Colonialism: Beyond European Exceptionalism. Introduction

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Many of our interlocutors, when they first heard that we were preparing a special issue titled "Comparing Colonialism", presumed that we intended to compare, once more, the various colonial endeavours of the European powers in the period roughly between Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean and the last wave of decolonization that set in after World War II. When we then mentioned that the issue's subtitle would read "Beyond European Exceptionalism", they often assumed that we wanted to further "provincialize" Europe – as good, liberal Western academics regularly do – by criticizing the Eurocentric perspective on modern overseas empires, which implicitly perpetuates the "imperial episteme" as still hegemonic today. Both assumptions are not entirely false, but the thrust of our undertaking is a different one: the contributions presented in this volume aim at moving beyond an understanding of colonialism that revolves exclusively around the European overseas empires.

This endeavour has three main aspects. The first and presumably most obvious one is that it also considers non-European empires that, like their contemporaneous counterparts in Europe, pursued colonial policies. Japan's expansion into Taiwan, Korea, and China starting from the late nineteenth century, Qing rule in Southern China, and the United States' annexation of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War are all examples of this phenomenon.[1] But this is only one dimension of the intended enlargement of scope, namely the geographical one. The second, temporal aspect requires us

1 Already more than twenty years ago, the issue of the International History Review 20 (1998) on Manchu colonialism was paradigmatic for such an undertaking. See, in particular, the programmatic essay by Michael Adas, Imperialism and Colonialism in Comparative Perspective, ibid., pp. 371–388.

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to include pre-modern forms of colonialism as well, both within and beyond Europe. Apart from the Greek and Roman colonialism in antiquity, one could mention in this regard the medieval expansion of Northern Italian cities onto Mediterranean islands and coasts, the English conquest of Celtic lands, and, arguably, the Germanic colonization of North-Eastern Europe. Moreover, one could inquire whether the Persian and, still earlier, Mesopotamian empires acquired, possessed, and administered colonies. Outside of Europe and the Fertile Crescent, ancient India comes to mind as another test case for pre-modern colonialism, as do the West African empires of Mali and Songhai, the Inca realm, and, last not least, the Eurasian steppe empires. The third aspect is that broadening our perspective in this way, in turn, opens up new vistas on the European overseas empires. Not only did the majority of them maintain internal empires, sometimes with steep civilizational hierarchies, but they also encountered indigenous empires overseas, as was the case in various regions of the Americas or Africa.[2] In this respect, too, the history of European expansion was a history of imperial competition and elite cooperation. By refraining from taking European expansion as the standard model, or even exclusive form, of colonialism, we share, in a sense, what is widely held to be a postcolonial perspective, which challenges binary modes of thought that posit an insurmountable divide between "us" (in the West) and "them" (virtually everyone else).[3] Some adherents of postcolonial theory might, nonetheless, reproach us for epistemological Eurocentrism, or worse, accuse us of trivializing the harm and suffering that Europeans have caused to others by raising the question of how exceptional their colonial ventures were. However, we understand our endeavour rather as a quest for culturally neutral or translatable concepts, suitable for clarifying empirical questions not because they spring from a particular geographical or social background, but because they allow us to detect common traits in things that, at first glance, might appear to belong to different categories. To be sure, this is not a one-way road. Concepts developed for making sense of events outside of Europe can prove to be superior to supposedly universal notions that, in reality, apply only to certain aspects of European history at best.

Without the assumption that we as human beings are capable of distancing ourselves from our particular historical backgrounds and social identities in order to collectively construct more reliable and comprehensive knowledge of our common world, there could be no sociology or other social sciences, and no historical science as we know it. Even purely narrative historiography cannot proceed without theoretical concepts that, to some extent, abstract from the specific case under consideration. If we persist in our

2 Some authors argue that a family resemblance between state formation in Europe and overseas expansion exists. Both could be described as colonial projects, albeit with different trajectories. For two now-classical accounts, see M. Hechter, Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, Berkeley 1975; E. Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914, Stanford 1976. Medievalist R. Bartlett (The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350, Princeton 1993) even maintains that "Latin Europe" as such was born out of various colonization movements in the High Middle Ages. The continent that later set out to conquer and colonize the world was already a product of internal conquest and colonization on this view.

3 For a concise discussion, see J. Go, Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory, New York 2016.

scientific endeavour, if we keep trying to illuminate hidden structures and processes, if it is indeed structure and process – and not the mere reproduction of our subjective sensations and experiences – that we are aiming at, we must generalize and objectify, even if there is no timeless truth and no knowledge that is not tainted by power. To be aware of this fact, does not mean giving up science altogether. On the contrary, it can encourage us and is, indeed, a prerequisite for improving our understanding of the world.

As historical sociologists, we therefore still deem it desirable to develop generalized theories – not, however, in the sense of a theory that claims to be able to encompass all of human history or the entire modern world, but in the sense of middle-range theories centred on specified topics. It is in this regard that the present volume brings together sociologists and historians, as well as other social scientists and area specialists to gauge the possibility of a theory of colonialism that includes, but also goes beyond, European expansion. Although no generally accepted theory of colonialism has yet been developed, a couple of conceptual building blocks exist that are more or less uncontroversial.[4] Moreover, recent years have seen a remarkable revival of general interest in empires, creating a vibrant field of inquiry and scholarly debate across various disciplines.[5] Both strands of research converge and substantially intersect without being identical.

The term "colony" can, for one, refer to a newly founded settlement, that is, the permanent occupation of formerly unclaimed or undefended land by a group of people coming from elsewhere.[6] But a colony can also be a dependent territory inhabited by an indigenous population that is subdued, governed, and economically exploited by a foreign power. Moreover, the usually smaller colonizing group displays a strong sense of superiority over the usually more numerous native "others", which can be expressed in terms of civilizational hierarchies or outright racism. In the colonizer's gaze, it seems legitimate, if not downright imperative, to pressure, marginalize, and even destroy the indigenous groups and cultures using various means ranging from educational campaigns to genocide. The colonial subjects are typically made to submit through a combination of outright violence and credible threats to use force. The excessive abuses in many of the European overseas territories should, however, be understood, in many cases, as a

4 J. Osterhammel, Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview, Princeton 1997; T. v. Trotha, Was war Kolonialismus? Einige zusammenfassende Befunde zur Soziologie und Geschichte des Kolonialismus und der Kolonialherrschaft, in: Saeculum 55 (2004), pp. 49–95; F. Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History, Berkeley 2005.

5 E.g., A. Pagden, Peoples and Empires: A Short History of European Migration, Exploration, and Conquest, from Greece to the Present, New York 1998; D. B. Abernethy, The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980, New Haven 2000; D. Lieven, Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals, New Haven 2001; J. Darwin, After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405, London 2007; H. Münkler, Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States, Cambridge 2007; J. Burbank and F. Cooper, Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference, Princeton 2010; W. Reinhard, Die Unterwerfung der Welt: Globalgeschichte der Europäischen Expansion 1415–2015, München 2016; K. Kumar, Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World, Princeton 2017; G. Paquette, The European Seaborne Empires: From the Thirty Years' War to the Age of Revolutions, New Haven 2019. See also M. Middell, Empires in Current Global Historiography, which is the opening text of a special issue on Empires Reconfigured (ed. by M. Middell and Alessandro Stanziani), in: Comparativ 29 (2019), pp. 9–22.

6 For the history of this term, see the discussion in M. I. Finley, Colonies: An Attempt at a Typology, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 26 (1976), pp. 167–188.

result of the colonizer's lack of effective control on the ground, rather than their alleged absolute power.[7]

Taken together, these attitudes, practices, and social dynamics constitute what Georges Balandier called the "colonial situation".[8] Although Balandier coined the term to describe the European presence in Africa, it can be used as a conceptual framework for colonies in general. Apart from, or rather because of, the structural "apartheid" between the two groups, the colonial situation is, in principle, shaped by both: strategies of resistance on the part of the population (to be) subdued, including what James C. Scott calls "state evasion", and, at the same time, various forms of cooperation and alliances between the two groups.[9] For former elites who wish to retain some influence or, conversely, for the losers of the *status quo ante* who now see their chance, working with the new rulers, or at least not against them, can seem to be an option worth pursuing. The same holds for ambitious individuals seeking to improve their situation. By the same token, the newly arrived colonizers, who have not yet established themselves and often possess only limited resources and instruments of power, rely heavily on cooperation or alliances with local elites and leaders.[10]

If understood as a form of domination, that is, a specific relationship of power and control, colonialism does not require the large-scale settlement of members of the ruling group. But they need to make their presence felt by the colonial subjects, if only through symbolic means such as deterrent punishments. In historical reality, however, the distinction between the two meanings of the word – settlement and dependency – was often blurred. Even in the first case, settlement was often preceded or accompanied by informal subjugation, as well as the expulsion or extermination of autochthonous inhabitants of the "new found" lands, a phenomenon of which the Phoenician and Greek colonization of the Mediterranean provides numerous examples.[11] For practical purposes, we therefore plead for a broad understanding of the term "colony", which includes not only formal dominions, but also organized and often only seemingly non-violent settlements, as long as there is some form of political or economic connection and support from the homeland.

Despite these general features of colonial rule, there are also traits that are unique to modern colonialism, or its historical consequences. The first trait can be found in the global spread of the idea and, if not the reality, then at least the pretension that the

7 Dierk Walter, Colonial Violence. European Empires and the Use of Force, New York 2017.

8 G. Balandier, The Fact of Colonialism: A Theoretical Approach, in: CrossCurrents 2 (1952), pp. 10–31; See also M. Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism, Princeton 1996; J. Vansina, Being Colonized: The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880–1960, Madison 2010.

9 J. C. Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia, New Haven 2009, chaps. 5 & 6. See also R. Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, Durham 1999.

10 For a reappraisal of R. Robinson's (Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration, in: R. Owen and R. B. Sutcliffe (eds.), Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, London 1972, pp. 117–142); for the theory of collaboration, see T. Bührer et al. (eds.), Cooperation and Empire: Local Realities of Global Processes, New York 2017.

11 Frank Bernstein, "Ionische Migration" vs. "Große Kolonisation der Griechen", in: Historia 68 (2019), pp. 258–284.

natural, self-evident unit of political organization and representation is the territorially bounded nation-state. As John Breuilly suggests, in "modern" empires, in contrast to their "pre-modern" counterparts, the imperial centre is constituted by a separate national state.[12] When the former colonies gained independence, they adopted this political form, which gradually became the new global norm.[13] It is hardly necessary to dwell on the conflicts and misery that this principle of global order has caused since then.[14] Whatever the realities on the ground, with only a few exceptions, the surface of continents is now neatly divided into nation-states, each of them ruled in the name of a particular people. This was, most certainly, not the intention when Great Britain, France, and the other European powers set out to build their overseas empires.[15] Although it was a widely held belief that only colonial dependencies would guarantee the security, prosperity, and political prestige of the nation, this did not imply that the colonial subjects should form national states of their own. But the result was precisely this.

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to assume that the flow of influence was a one-way street, which can be described in terms of a linear diffusion, without any "creative" adaptations to local conditions or complex interactions or feedback loops between core and periphery. Contrary to this view, the colonies served, in many ways, as laboratories for testing new forms of surveillance, administration, and business organization, and they provoked legal and political debates in Europe around issues of citizenship, the status of the oceans, and international order in general, to name just a few aspects.[16] Moreover, decolonization was not a linear application of Western models of how to organize political communities. It led instead to various modifications of notions concerning nationhood and international order.[17]

A second, closely related, trait that distinguishes "modern" from "pre-modern" forms of colonialism is the fact that starting from the "long" nineteenth century at the latest, there was an entire system, or meshwork if you prefer, of colonial powers vying for global dominance.[18] Of course, conflicts and even clashes between empires occurred in earlier times, too. But what distinguishes modern Europe's imperial history from the trajectories of pre-modern, non-European empires is the fact that, in Europe, the constitution

12 J. Breuilly, Modern Empires and Nation-States, in: Thesis Eleven 139 (2017), pp. 11–29.

13 E. Manela, The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism, New York 2007; S. Pedersen, The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire, Oxford 2015.

14 A. Wimmer, Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World, New York 2013.

15 They conceived of themselves as imperial nation-states, separating citizens from subjects. See J. M. Fradera, The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish, and American Empires, Princeton 2018.

16 See A. Escobar, Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World, Princeton 1985; A. Anghie, Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law, Cambridge 2005; M. Duffield and V. Hewitt (eds.), Empire, Development & Colonialism: The Past in the Present, Woodbridge 2009.

17 P. Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, Princeton 1994; W. Reinhard (ed.), Verstaatlichung der Welt? Europäische Staastmodelle und außereuropärische Machtprozesse, München 1999; A. Getachew, Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination, Princeton 2019.

18 J. Osterhammel, The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century, Princeton 2014, chap. 8; B. Buzan and G. Lawson, The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations, Cambridge 2015, chap. 6.

of empires itself was essentially driven by the rivalry between nascent imperial powers and, later, a multitude of empires, that, before clashing in deadly wars, externalized their competition on a global scale. One might say that the scramble for Africa was only the last round in a race between European powers for political self-assertion. It was Europe that ruled large parts of the globe in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, but unlike in earlier cases no one imperial power dominated the area that, from an imperial point of view, constituted the world or the ecumene.

The third characteristic of modern colonialism that appears to be unique is its close links to capitalism. One does not have to advocate for a Marxist theory of imperialism, which, arguably, draws on all too simplistic notions of economic forces (or even "laws") and political expansion and control, to acknowledge that for the first time in history a truly global economy emerged, as both a result and a motor of European expansion.[19] If it did not obfuscate the fact that all of the empires generally subordinated the prosperity of their colonies to their own needs, one might be tempted to state that modern European imperialism was characterized by many empires, but only one economy. Paradoxically, pre-modern empires benefited directly from their colonies; if they did not, they gave them up or began to disintegrate. The European overseas empires, in contrast, typically did not start as politically planned projects, but rather as economic adventurism, which only after the fact led to formal empire-building.[20] But even then, it was by no means certain that the colonies paid off for the centre, which is not the same as saying that private profits were meagre. Similarly, to emphasize the global economic nature of modern colonialism is not to imply that it can explain what Kenneth Pomeranz calls "the Great Divergence".[21] To the extent that our current knowledge already allows us to decide this question, it appears that colonies did indeed play a role in safeguarding the economic supremacy of the European powers. But ultimately, internal factors, and primarily political ones, proved to be decisive.

As the preceding considerations demonstrate, it is almost impossible to reflect on defining features of colonialism, or rather colonies, without making repeated use of another key term: empire. As a first approximation, empire can be understood as "a system of interaction between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts political control over the internal and external policy – the effective sovereignty – of the other, the subordinate periphery", as Michael Doyle suggests in his highly acclaimed study, which develops no less than a conceptual framework for studying both

19 J. Kocka, Capitalism: A Short History, Princeton 2006, pp. 54–94; F. Lenger: Globalen Kapitalismus denken: Historiographie-, theorie- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien, Tübingen 2018, pp. 1–48.

20 R. Robinson and J. Gallagher (with A. Denny), Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism, London 1967; D. K. Fieldhouse, Economics and Empire 1830–1914, London 1973.

21 K. Pomeranz, The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy, Princeton 2000; P. O'Brien, The Formation of States and Transitions to Modern Economies: England, Europa and Asia Compared, in: L. Neal and J. G. Williamson (eds.), The Cambridge History of Capitalism, vol. 1, The Rise of Capitalism: From Ancient Origins to 1848, Cambridge 2014, pp. 357–402; P. Vries, What Do We Know and Do Not Know About the Great Divergence at the Beginning of 2016, in: Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft, 28 (2016), pp. 249–298.

pre-modern and modern empires.[22] Empires that acquire and govern only one periphery are, however, rare, if they exist at all. Even Belgium, which might come to mind here, maintained several smaller possessions alongside the Congo (especially Ruanda-Urundi and a concession in Tianjin, China). Many empires throughout history encompassed a plethora of subjugated territories and peoples. They formed a kind of solar system, in which the centre is the sun and its dependent territories are the planets. Accordingly, empires are generally not enclosed by clear-cut borders, but form a field of forces, whose ordering effects diminish with growing distance from the core.[23] Moreover, in contrast to modern nation-states, they usually do not seek to build a unified identity. Instead, they tolerate cultural pluralism or reinforce, if not invent, ethnic differences in order to secure political fragmentation among the subjugated majority.[24] Empires manage, instrumentalize, and balance diversity without necessarily wanting to annihilate the particular identities of the various populations inhabiting their extended realms. As Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper put it, it is loyalty, not likeness that empires seek to achieve.[25] When loyalty crumbles, however, cultural differences can release centrifugal forces that lead to the formation of new states or nations along imperial fault lines.

At the same time, many empires integrate themselves by projecting a unifying idea or pursing a historical mission, which appears to justify political expansion and the domination of foreign lands and peoples. In some cases, examples of which might include the Mesopotamian and much later Eurasian steppe empires, the imperial idea consisted of little more than a practical claim to supremacy over the known world. In the Roman Empire and its European heirs, but also in empires outside of Europe, such as China, the political elites developed more elaborate notions of imperial order, which, of course, was closely linked to the existence of written culture and scholarly discourse.[26] These ideological framings led to situations that were not so different from those in early nation-states, in which the cultural gap between the national heartland and its various provinces was gradually bridged, without ever vanishing entirely. Thus, as Krishan Kumar notes, empires and nation-states partly blend into each other, despite retaining structural differences.[27] This proximity between the two models of political organization is also evidenced by the fact that citizenship was not an invention of modern nation-states. Its genealogy – in the European context – can rather be traced back to antiquity.[28] Like all other imperial troops, the Roman legions used brute force to conquer foreign

22 M. Doyle, Empires, Ithaca 1986, p. 12. See also G. Steinmetz, Empires and Colonialism (2014), in: Oxford Bibliographies, DOI: 10.1093/obo/9780199756384-0090.

23 C. S. Maier, Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500, Cambridge, MA 2016, chap. 1.

24 As is often the case in colonial empires. See again Mamdani, Citizen and Subject, with regard to the European colonies in Africa.

25 Burbank and Cooper, Empires in World History, p. 12.

26 Münkler, Empires, chap. 4.

27 K. Kumar, Nation-States as Empires, Empires as Nation-States: Two Principles, One Practice?, in: Theory and Society 39 (2010), pp. 119–143.

28 F. Cooper, Citizenship, Inequality, and Difference: Historical Perspectives, Princeton 2018.

lands and to assert their claim to power. Roman citizenship was, however, a status that did not have to be forced upon the free, male inhabitants of the empire but was attractive in itself. It allowed one, or at least promised, to make claims on governments and authorities through participation in public affairs, and it provided a framework to settle private conflicts by recourse to impersonal law instead of sheer power. Later, the Roman emperors made Christianity into the state religion. The emperor thus became the political patron of a universalist and, in itself, expansionist religion, which could be adopted by anyone, man or woman, free-born or slave alike. In addition to bringing civilization to the world and leveraging the rule of law, the empire could now claim to back and advance the mission of the church. This missionary, universalistic pretension survived not only the Roman Empire but also Christianity's substitution for other beliefs, ideologies, and practices. Many of the modern empires, too, had a quasi-religious sense of mission.[29]
Yet, even if an empire relies on a universal idea, it makes a fundamental difference how this idea is "lived" and put into practice, including the conditions under which subjects are deemed worthy of being human and allowed to become imperial "citizens", or at least not structurally disadvantaged denizens of the empire. To the degree that they do, we can speak of imperial rule; to the degree that they do not, a colonial situation emerges, which implies not only politically ascribed differences in formal status, but also civilizational hierarchies between "masters" and their "subjects". Colonial "lordship" is a special kind of domination, not least due to its disregard for internal differences within the subdued group, concerning for example wealth, social prestige, or gender, which are considered secondary to its presumed and, in fact, politically enacted "inferiority".
It is beyond dispute that empires existed long before the dawn of the modern era, and that they shaped the course of history outside of Europe and the Fertile Crescent, too. Colonialism, by contrast, is often thought of as being a specifically modern phenomenon, one, moreover, that was restricted to the European overseas empires. But on what grounds can such a distinction be made? And what would an alternative framework look like that extends our understanding of colonialism without running the risk of overburdening this term? These are the questions that *Krishan Kumar* discusses in the first contribution to this volume. Through a careful examination of Moses Finley's seminal article on the typology of colonies, *Kumar* discusses whether or not the distinction between imperialism and colonialism is meaningful and at what costs it can be drawn. Although *Kumar* concedes to Finley that his narrow definition of a colony – which requires large-scale settlement from people of the metropole – allows us to pinpoint the distinctiveness of modern colonialism, this comes at a high price. For all of their unique features, the European overseas empires were situated on a continuum with ancient and non-European empires, a fact that, on Finley's account, falls out of sight.
As *Martin Mauersberg* illustrates, however, colonialism can be traced back in the European context at least to antiquity. The so-called Greek colonization of the Mediterranean

29 A. Pagden, Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800, New Haven 1998.

and Black Sea led to the foundation of independent settlements, *apoikiai*, which, despite certain cities' aspirations for hegemony, constituted autonomous political units, whereas the Romans built and expanded their empire through military outposts, *coloniae*, in newly conquered territories. In contrast to the multitude of Greek city-states, the Roman dependencies were thus part of an imperial formation centred on Latium, which more strongly resembles more recent forms of colonialism. By contrast, the Hellenic self-image formed in the wake of the Persian Wars portrayed neighbouring groups as culturally inferior, establishing a civilisational hierarchy between the Graeco-Roman world and the "barbarians". Roman citizenship law, in turn, gave freeborn men in the newly acquired territories the opportunity to become full-fledged members of the empire. These facts complicate the, at first glance, clear contrast between Greek and Roman expansion and make a more nuanced assessment necessary.

Similar complications must also be taken into account when considering the Muslim Arabs, who conquered the Middle East from the seventh century onward. As *Robert Hoyland* explains, the *muhājir* established in their fight against the "infidels" numerous garrison settlements, such as Basra and Kufa in Iraq, Fustat in Egypt, Ramla in Palestine, and Qinnasrin in Syria. These outposts served both as bases for the Arab armies and administrative centres from which they governed the conquered territories. Over time, the garrisons became thriving cities, shaped by substantial Muslim immigration and settlement. Various restrictions were subsequently imposed on the non-Muslim population and Muslim rule was legitimized by appealing to a divine mission. Taking these aspects together, early Islamic rule in the Middle East might be considered a form of colonialism. But *Hoyland* is quick to qualify this view by pointing to the fact that Islam – not unlike Roman citizenship law – provided the subjugated population with the possibility of conversion, thereby becoming members of the nascent Muslim community. This represents a clear difference with respect to the European overseas empires.

When, after the First World War, national movements of independence gained momentum in the Middle East, Arab nationalists compared Ottoman rule with the subsequent French and British administration, which was part of the newly established League of Nations mandate system. In this vein, the Arab states that subsequently formed projected themselves as successfully emerging from the struggle first against Turkish and then against French and British colonial domination. However, as *James A. Reilly* explains, focusing on the Ottoman Empire's rule over Syria, the polemical notion of "Turkish colonialism" is deeply flawed. Leaving aside the obvious fact that the Ottomans and their empire cannot simply be equated with the Turks, as popular perception has it, their style of governance did not amount to a colonial situation. *Reilly* elaborates on how the Ottomans installed a different kind of rule in Syria, which was imperial, but not colonial. Only in the late nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire became a semi-colony of the European powers and sought to "modernize" itself, did an Ottoman version of the civilizing mission begin to emerge.

The neighbouring Russian Empire, by contrast, did pursue colonial policies in its southern and eastern provinces. *Michael Khodarkovsky* argues that the Muscovite state which

had been expanding into the mid-Volga regions and Siberia since the mid-sixteenth century onwards can and indeed should be analysed within the same conceptual framework as is used for the European overseas empires. For example, state elites deemed non-Christian peoples to be culturally inferior and "other", launched settlement programs in the frontier regions, and forcibly relocated insurgent groups. Not unlike the European overseas empires, the Russian Empire also relied heavily on alliances with indigenous elites who, more often than not, pursued their own agenda. There also existed a significant difference, however. In the Russian case, it was a matter of state-driven colonialism from the very beginning, whereas in the European overseas empires, non-state actors typically initiated colonial ventures and the state only stepped in when the situation on the ground was in danger of escalating. At the same time, the Russian state denied the colonial character of its rule and disguised itself as a unitary state.

Thus, in opposition to the so-called blue water thesis, according to which a sea (or other discrete geographical boundary) must separate metropole and periphery in order to assign the dependency status of a colony, land empires with a contiguous territory can also be colonial powers.[30] It is the quality or form of domination that is decisive, rather than spatial and environmental features alone. Such an understanding of colonialism can lead to the assessment that even within one and the same empire, certain dependencies are ruled in a colonial fashion while others are not. As *Matthew Mosca* claims, this was also the case in the Qing Empire. Taking into consideration the period from 1600 to 1860, *Mosca* makes visible the internal diversity of this vast and evolving empire. While the Qing expansion into Inner Asia started out as an imperial project that, over time, assumed an increasing colonial character, the rule in southern China leveraged more directly a colonial economic and political order. In Southeast Asia, by contrast, the state shunned away from immediate intervention, despite Chinese merchants, miners, and farmers exercizing a growing influence on various branches of the local economy.

With the Inca empire, *Félix A. Acuto* and *Iván Leibowicz* introduce another case of a land-based empire outside of Europe that pursued colonial policies. Beginning as a small polity in the Peruvian highlands, the Incas expanded their realm across large parts of the Andean region since the fifteenth century. Tawantinsuyu – the Inca realm over the four regions of the world – soon became the biggest empire in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans, encompassing a plethora of peoples. In a way that was not so different from the later Spanish *conquistadores*, the Incas pursued a colonial project that deeply disrupted and reshaped the indigenous cultures they encountered, including frequent deportations to secure political fragmentation. According to *Acuto* and *Leibowicz*, the driving force behind the Inca expansion was not, however, economic interests, security concerns, or the striving for political influence and prestige, as was evidently the case in

30 The phrase blue water, or salt water, thesis seems to have emerged in debates concerning the 1952 U.N. General Assembly Resolution 637 (VII) and the 1960 Resolution 1541 (XV) as a critique against the assertion delimiting the right to decolonization and self-determination to peoples from geographically distinct territories. See also D. Schorkowitz et al. (eds.), Shifting Forms of Continental Colonialism: Unfinished Struggles and Tensions, Singapore 2019.

the European overseas empires. Rather, it was a quest for the sacred. The Incas sought to bring order to chaos by connecting with supernatural forces and beings which were believed to dwell in the Andean landscapes.

When the Spanish conquerors arrived in the Americas shortly thereafter, they were surprised to encounter powerful empires and kingdoms that, to be sure, were different from the states they knew from home, but not beyond reasonable comparison. If they wanted to establish themselves here, they needed to make strong allies on the ground. Taking as an example Hernán Cortés – who vanquished the Aztec empire and subsequently became the most influential entrepreneur in the Americas – *Wolfgang Reinhard* elaborates on how European expansion was driven by a combination of individual initiative on the part of the aspiring colonizers and cooperation with indigenous agents and elites. In this way, oligarchical power networks emerged, at the expense of the excluded lower strata of society. This pattern was not unique to the early modern conquest of the Americas. Instead, it repeated itself, in many variations, throughout the entire history of European expansion, as *Reinhard* illustrates using numerous examples.

A plea for taking local agency seriously is also made by *Janne Lahti* in his paper on indigenous colonialism in the North American "Apache land", which covered large areas along the Rio Grande. *Lahti* puts forward an interpretation of European-Amerindian relations that places both parties on the same analytical plane, that is, treating them equally as actors that shaped their own fate, but also heavily influenced each other. Apache land is understood, on this approach, as a shifting colonial zone, in which competing imperial projects, both European and Amerindian, clashed, but, from time to time, also reached a precarious equilibrium. As the text vividly illustrates, the Apache, Comanches, and Spanish all deemed each other inferior to various degrees. Moreover, they frequently enslaved, but also assimilated, members of the corresponding outgroups. *Lahti* concludes that this reflects the inherent ambivalence of colonialism as a social relationship, which encompasses both various forms of "othering" and close cooperation, if not incorporation.

The fact that the distinction between colonizer and colonized was often blurred, or at least possessed multiple historical layers with shifting positions in the dominance hierarchy, is also evident in the case of Rwanda. Even though the European colonizers treated Hutu and Tutsi as different ethnic or even racial groups, these were, initially, political and socio-economic categories with more or less fluid boundaries. Nonetheless, if one wanted to date the beginnings of colonialism in Rwanda in the late 1890s, when the Belgians and Germans came to the region, this would result in a biased, if not outright wrong understanding. As *Axel T. Paul* explains, the stratification between a cattle-breeding Tutsi minority that ruled over a mainly Hutu peasantry can itself be regarded as a form of colonial or quasi-colonial rule. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, Rwanda became an imperial power that gradually extended its realm beyond its homeland in Nduga. In the frontier regions, the nascent Rwandan state tried and tested new modes of power and control, which the European colonizers then further exploited and enshrined.

Accordingly, colonialism is a dynamic relationship, encompassing various historical layers. In this vein, *Matthias Leanza* traces the divergent trajectories along which the German protectorate of Southwest Africa – the precursor of modern-day Namibia – evolved from the early 1880s until the First World War, when the troops of the Union of South Africa took over effective control. Arguing that the development of Southwest Africa ran through various stages, each with a distinctive character, *Leanza* elucidates how what is now Namibia initially became a German "sphere of influence" that, after having passed a critical turning point, gradually morphed into an "imperial borderland", shaped by internal frontiers. After the war against the Herero and Nama, which caused a deep rupture in the German colonial project leading to far-reaching reforms, Southwest Africa was, then, on its way to becoming an "imperial province", in which a core region crystallized and the civil administration further expanded. With each step, the protectorate's character profoundly changed, which is why – *Leanza* concludes – it is crucial to understand colonial rule as a dynamic process that can take different paths.

In a similar vein, *Kate McDonald* emphasizes that colonialism is an evolving and multi-layered phenomenon. Surveying recent trends in English-language scholarship on Japanese imperialism and colonialism, she argues that the Japanese Empire was not a monolithic object, but a layered social formation, made up of multiple expansionist projects. Earlier historiography on the subject operated within a framework of Japanese exceptionalism. According to this view, Japan not only entered the "imperial game" comparatively late, but was also unable to appeal to racial hierarchies in the way that the European overseas empires did. As an Asian power ruling over other Asian nations, it was compelled to develop alternative forms of legitimation for colonial conquest and domination. As *McDonald* explains, this narrative has increasingly been called into question in recent years. More recent scholarship regards Japanese expansionism as part and parcel of a broader global trend – the emergence of imperial nation-states – and not as a historical outlier or "anomaly". Equally important is the fact that Japanese colonialism was not restricted to (outlying) dependencies, such as Taiwan and Korea. The making of a Japanese nation-state can itself be seen as an imperial endeavour. This can be seen most clearly in the settlement of Ezo (present-day Hokkaidō) and the subjection of the Ainu people. *McDonald* regards another strand of research as even more promising: the historical investigation of liminal subject positions and border zones that transgressed colonial order.

Our tour of more than two thousand years of world history ends with an afterword by *Frederick Cooper*. He highlights the milestones reached, points out some of the detours taken along the way, and – most important – suggests promising destinations for future research.

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Is colonialism then perhaps nothing more than a particularly pronounced form of imperial rule? Should we understand the distinction between the two to be a matter of degree

rather than of categorical difference? Despite all disparities and the diversity of viewpoints, the contributions to this volume, taken together, allow us to make the following generalizations: First, colonialism is not limited to modern overseas empires. Throughout history, within and outside of Europe, empires existed that pursued colonial policies. This should not lead us, however, to overtax our understanding of colonialism by equating the term with imperial expansion and rule as such. If the boundary between the indigenous and the ruling population is permeable, if the local cultures are tolerated and perhaps elements of their institutions and belief systems even absorbed into the centre, and – in connection with this – if the ruling people's sense of superiority is not absolute, but progressive integration is possible, then no colonial situation will arise. Conversely, this implies that a colonial relationship emerges whenever an alien group dominates a local society, pressures, marginalizes, or even destroys its culture, and, moreover, establishes a sense of superiority that seems to necessitate a strict separation of "masters" from "subjects". This distinction is obviously meant as an ideal type in the Weberian sense of the word, which implies gradual transitions and intermediate forms in social reality. Nonetheless, it allows us to make sense of the diverse phenomena we encounter in this broad field of inquiry and opens up new vistas of comparison and scholarly investigation.