Colonialism and Imperialism, 1450–1950
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The colonial encirclement of the world is an integral component of European history from the Early Modern Period to the phase of decolonisation. Individual national and expansion histories referred to each other in varying degrees at different times but often also reinforced each other. Transfer processes within Europe and in the colonies show that not only genuine colonial powers such as Spain and England, but also "latecomers" such as Germany participated in the historical process of colonial expansion with which Europe decisively shaped world history. In turn, this process also clearly shaped Europe itself.

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See also the article "Travail et migrations forcés dans les colonies européennes" in the EHNE.

**Introduction**

In world history, no continent has possessed so many different forms of colonies and none has so incomparably defined access to the world by means of a civilising mission as a secular programme as did modern Europe. When Spain and Portugal partitioned the world by signing the Treaty of Tordesillas on 7 June 1494, they declared a genuine European claim to hegemony. A similar claim was never staked out in this form by a world empire of Antiquity or a non-European colonial power in the modern period, such as Japan or the USA. The extraordinary continuity of Chinese colonialism or that of the Aztecs in Central America before the Spaniards arrived is indeed structurally comparable to modern European expansion. But similar to the Phoenician and the Roman empires, the phenomenon of expansion usually ended with colonisation and not in colonial development. The imperial expansion since about 1870 was not a colonial method of rule European invention but its chronological and spatial dimension was as unique as the variety of colonial methods of rule. It is characteristic that the impetus for colonialism was often derived as an answer to European history itself. This includes capitalist striving for profit, the colonies as valves for overpopulation, the spirit of exploration, scientific interest, and religious and ideological impulses up to Social-Darwinistic and racist motives. Colonialist urges of this type do not explain the expansionistic economic, military and other forces in the periphery that compelled the governments of the mother countries into a defensive pressing forward.

What is now understood as globalisation has a critical background in the world historical involvement of the non-European sphere from the Early Modern Period up and into the period of decolonisation. No European country remained exempt – all directly or indirectly participated in the colonial division of the world. The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) put global power thinking into words that perceived of colonial possessions as a political, economic and cultural right, last not least even as an obligation to a civilizing mission that was only definitively shaken with the independence of India in 1947. These two dates mark the start and decline of a key problem in the history of Europe, perhaps even its most momentous, that the always precarious colonial rule caused complex competitions among Europeans just as much as among the indigenous population in the colonies, that it was able to simultaneously create cooperation and close webs of relationships between conquerors and the conquered, and that it was never at any time free of violence and war, despotism, arbitrariness and lawlessness. This turns the simultaneity and multitude of European colonialisms and imperialisms into a border-bridging experience. Few transnational specifics of European history illustrate the diversity of a European consciousness this clearly.

But what was colonialism? If one looks back at the essential elements in the thought of the
Unlike in earlier periods, a broad European public for the first time participated politically, the unsystematic and overly hasty intervention of Europeans in the entire African continent. But brought under European rule as was the "Scramble for Africa" that became synonymous with 18th and early 19th nation state as well as the USA and Japan participated in acquiring territories outside Europe. During the phase of High Imperialism between 1870 and World War I, every larger European ideologically loaded and overall imprecise, but probably irreplaceable historiographical concept.

When, during the course of the 19th century, the Italians, Belgians and Germans raised a claim to monopolising the slave trade as a most lucrative long-distance business. South America so, too, was the result different in the end. Spain, for example, was not able to cultural superiority of the "Self". As different as the spread of Christianity proceeded with the colonization, the Spanish empire can hardly be imagined without Belgians, Italians and Chinese, while commerce and administration in the Portuguese empire was shaped to a significant degree by Germans, Flemings, Moslems and Jews.1

Colonialism and Imperialism

According to Wolfgang Reinhard, colonialism in terms of a history of ideas constitutes a "developmental differential" due to the "control of one people by an alien one". Unlike the more dynamic, but also politically more judgmental and emotionally charged form of imperialism, colonialism as the result of a will to expand and rule can initially be understood as a state that establishes an alien, colonial rule. It has existed in almost all periods of world history in different degrees of expression. Even after the official dissolution of its formal state in the age of decolonisation, it was possible to maintain it as a myth, as in Portugal after the Carnation Revolution in 1974, when the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970) was debated but hardly ever the colonial past in Angola, Mozambique, Goa, Macao and East Timor. Already in 1933, the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre stated the thesis that the Portuguese as the oldest European colonial nation had a special gift for expansion in his controversial book Casa-grande e Senzala (The Masters and the Slaves). It consisted of peacefully intermingling the cultures without racism and colonial massacres. Using the example of Brazil, he rationalized colonial paternalism with the allegedly successful relationship between masters and slaves.2

But other colonial powers also claimed this for themselves. Even the harshest critics of expansion policies – starting with Bartolomé de las Casas (1474–1566) to the Marxist-Leninist criticism of the 20th century – did not doubt the civilising mission that justified colonial hegemony.3 Similar to the abolitionists, they criticised the colonial excesses that could mean mismanagement, corruption and, in the extreme case, genocide. However, that the colonies became an integral part of the mother country, that therefore the colonial nation is indivisible, at home on several continents and, thus, incapable of doing any fundamental evil, can be shown to be part of the European colonial ideology since its earliest beginnings. Intellectual transfer processes had already taken place at this time, in the Age of Enlightenment most noticeably in the mutual influence of Adam Smith (1723–1790), Denis Diderot (1713–1784), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and their contemporaries.4 They agreed on a moderate critique of colonial expansion and a simultaneous enthusiastic, cosmopolitan exuberance for appropriating the world outside of Europe. Though slavery and cosmopolitanism could theoretically not be brought to a common end, Spain, for example, was not able to use Latin America for a profitable export economy, but by contrast the British succeeded in monopolising the slave trade as a most lucrative long-distance business.5

When, during the course of the 19th century, the Italians, Belgians and Germans raised a claim to their share of the world in addition to the old colonial powers, the term "Imperialism" became an ideologically loaded and overall imprecise, but probably irreplaceable historiographical concept.6 During the phase of High Imperialism between 1870 and World War I, every larger European nation state as well as the USA and Japan participated in acquiring territories outside Europe. That is what makes this period so unique in European history, though measured against other criteria, such as time and space, it was not more spectacular than previous ones. Thus, the European conquest of North and South America in the 16th and 17th centuries or of India in the 18th and early 19th centuries was no less incisive in its spatial dimension or the number of people brought under European rule as was the "Scramble for Africa" that became synonymous with the unsystematic and overly hasty intervention of Europeans in the entire African continent. But unlike in earlier periods, a broad European public for the first time participated politically,
In 1772, when governor Warren Hastings (1732–1818) strove not only for economic but also...
South Africa, since the 17th century developed by the Dutch as a settlement colony and since 1815 of importance to the British because of its gold and diamond mines, is exempted from this.

1. In the beginning, Portugal and Spain (in personal union 1580–1640) were primarily interested in overseas trade to Brazil and the Philippines and inspired by Christian missionary zeal. With few exceptions, they managed to avoid colonial overlap.

2. By contrast, competition heated up in the 17th century, when the English, French and Dutch pressed forward, initially not in the territories of the Spaniards and the Portuguese, but in neighbouring regions. This is demonstrated in exemplary manner by the North American Atlantic coast between the French possessions in modern Canada and the Spanish claims in the South.

3. When it became impossible to avert the crisis of the Ancien Régime in Europe any longer, the colonial empires also lost their cohesion. The British won against their French rival in North America and India, against the Dutch in Southeast Asia and against the Spanish in South America. The independence of the United States was substituted with supremacy in India, in South Africa and especially on the seas with the almost peerless Royal Navy and modern free trade.

4. The colonial incorporation of Africa on a large scale began with France’s conquest of Algeria in 1830, which at the same time more than before released Europe’s internal economic and industrial tensions as colonialist forces and peaked in High Imperialism between 1870 and World War I.

5. Since the origins of a pluralistic colonial system during the course of the 19th century, not only the Europeans were involved in dividing the world but also Japan and Russia. The USA is the prototype for a successful linkage of continental internal colonisation in the form of the...
westward shift of the Frontier and maritime colonial policy in the Asian sphere, while paradoxically being the most successful model of anti-colonialism. At the latest around 1900, the European system of great powers stood before the challenge of global competition. In the controversial interpretation of Niall Ferguson, it was logical that the USA would assume Britain's role as the "global hegemon" in the 20th century and marginalize the formal and informal colonialism of Europe but also continue globalization as "anglobalisation".39

Forms

Since the 16th century, genuine European colonial powers such as Spain, Portugal, France and Britain were distinguished by developing a concept of their world rule and basing it on the legacy of Rome.37 This does not mean that stragglers like Italy, Belgium and Germany did not produce their own forms of imperial thought and had specific colonial systems with which they caught up to the great historical empires. German colonial officials, pragmatists such as Heinrich Schnee (1871–1949) and Carl Peters (1856–1918), saw German colonialism in the light of and in delimitation against British and French colonialism as well as in the context of world politics. They also participated in the virtually Europe-wide debate about the possible model function that the Roman Empire had for Europe. However, unlike the empires of the late 19th century, Spanish world rule was characterized by being pre-modern, and British colonial rule no later than 1750 held a geographical away without example, which makes a thorough concept of empire and expansionism a precondition. Their shared reference frame was the Atlantic world, which as a historical concept for determining colonial practices had gained acceptance.51 In this case, "imperiality" and "globality" were one and carried by a Christian universalist, almost messianic claim to leadership. However, the price that Spain came to pay for its position as world-empire was high and due to the European constellation of powers. Its global superiority was offset by rejecting the claim to the imperial title of the Holy Roman Empire as a consequence of the division of the Habsburg inheritance.

The empires of the modern nation state were not exposed to a loss of unity associated with the global dimension. Their expansion drive was primarily conditioned by worldly factors such as profit and prestige, in any case not a concept of universal monarchy indebted to Christian salvation, peace and justice. The world empire thought of Charles V (1500–1558) survived to the extent that the civilising mission of the modern European imperialisms became a transnational, but not primarily religious motor. Their driving forces were very different, not necessarily ideological but, in the French case, they constituted a part of the cost/benefit calculation. In 1913, Albert Sarraut (1872–1962), the governor general of Indochina, defined the leitmotiv of "mise en valeur" (development) and based it on the concept that the colonies are merely an exterritorial component of a "Greater France" or a "France Africaine".36 There already were similar considerations in Victorian England with regard to the white settlement colonies, such as Canada and Australia. For the historian John Robert Seeley (1843–1895) and before him Charles Dilke (1843–1911), the empire signified the "expansion of England" into a colonial world, in which cricket would be played just as in Oxford.57 Nation and expansion were conditional upon each other without relinquishing diversity. James Anthony Froude (1818–1894) warned that whoever overemphasized the value of India and the African colonies also underestimated that of the "white settlements". His book Oceana, or England and her colonies (1886) was an attempt at staging the British empire as the legitimate heir of the Roman republic: The former followed the principle of politically wise forms of government when it subordinated colonialism and republicanism to reason and with it attributed more weight to the code of the virtue of good government than to the authority of military or economic monopolies of violence in the African and Asian colonies.58 Winston Churchill (1874–1965) invented for this the exclusive term "English-speaking peoples".

That this rule could apply to the overseas empires but would be different for continental ones like that of the Habsburgs was discussed by contemporary observers in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy's sphere of influence and especially in delimitation against the pulsating German empire. Austrian imperial history was formulated in imperial terminology – after all, the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was officially accepted at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. However, the Habsburg Empire was not centralistic but multinational in concept and tolerated local independence up to the confirmation of regional and religious diversity. Habsburg's deficit of not being able to provide a national identity was partially compensated by strengthening the local independence up to the confirmation of regional and religious diversity. Emperor Franz Joseph (1830–1916), was not equal to the extreme High Imperialism of the turn of the century. The empire was governed in a nostalgic rather than modern manner. Where similar backward tendencies appeared in other European monarchies, a balance was sought using political and cultural measures. One of the best known examples is the crowning of Victoria (1819–1901) as the empress of India in 1876, which was in a manner an imitation of the Bonapartist succession practice of the Spanish monarchy in South America. Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) pushed Victoria's imperial title forward because he saw a crisis coming toward Britain and the empire with the monarch's Germanism and obliviousness to duty after the death of her prince consort Albert (1819–1861).

Subsequently, British imperialism became even more unrivalled and the centrality of Europe in the world of the 19th century became even more clearly an economic, military and maritime centrality of Great Britain. Based on the Royal Navy and world trade, the Pax Britannica symbolized this programme of a pacifist colonialism. In the concept of a peace-making world empire, there could be several global players but only one global hegemon. This idealisation of maritime rule was reflected in Alfred Mahan's (1840–1914) classic The Influence of Sea Power upon History (1890), a manifesto of the triumphal "anglobalisation", that is the earth-girding and people-uniting expansion of the Occident.

The overseas as well as the continental colonial empires of Europe were together characterised
by constructing their imperial rule over a developmental differential against the "Other" and, thus, significantly contributed to a changed self-perception of Europe in the world. Essentially, it was more about self-image than the image of others. Rule was alien rule over peoples perceived as being "subject". It had to be achieved with violent conquest and secured with colonial methods to guarantee economic, military and cultural exploitation. Therefore, the European claim to superiority legitimised the logic of the unequal interrelationship between colonial societies and a novel capitalism in Europe, especially the British "gentlemanly capitalists", whose global reach came to bear in a particularly pronounced form as the slave economy. Nowhere was the ambivalence between ruthless hegemonic ambition on one hand and concepts such as world citizenship, cosmopolitanism and human rights, which were derived from the Enlightenment, more clear than in slavery on the other hand.

Slavery, which made use of the idea of the different natures of people, culminated in the race theories of High Imperialism. Probably no European colonial power remained aloof from this discussion, which with the help of medicine, anthropology, ethnology etc. was founded on pseudoscience, guided by practical benefit and brought the contradictions and perversions of imperialism to a climax. French debates from Arthur de Cabanneu’s (1816–1882) *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines, 1853*) to Georges Vacher de Lapouge’s (1854–1936) *Race et milieu social: essais d'anthroposociologie* (1909) profited in the same way as the British controversies involving, for example, Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) from the stereotypical ideas that colonial officials brought back to the centres of power from their every day experiences. The genocide of the Germans against the Herero and Nama in *German Southwest Africa* (1903–1907) is one of many testimonials, the reign of terror of the Belgian king Leopold II (1835–1909) in the *Congo* another.

Outlook

Therefore, the concept of a "Europeanisation of the world" signifies the dilemma. On one hand, there are positive achievements, such as modern statehood, urbanisation, rationalism and Christianity, European thought systems such as Liberalism, Socialism and Positivism, which was received with great enthusiasm in France and England as well as in Brazil and Japan. On the other hand, there are negative legacies, such as Caesarism, racism and colonial violence. It can also raise the question whether European history between about 1450 and 1950 cannot be predominantly read as a history of expansion, especially if one treats the history of the empires beyond Eurocentrism as world history but without underlaying it with a universal theory and without constructing it as a historical unity. With the treaty to divide the world of 1494, a more intensive interaction of nation, expansion and "Europeanisation of the world" began that was not a unilateral creation of dependencies but a process of give and take with reciprocal influences beyond fixed imperial boundary drawing. According to this multipolar dynamic, Europe was not decentralised or provincialised, but Europe is equally unsuitable as the only perspective in the interpretation of the global modern period.

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Appendix

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Notes

10. Seeley, Expansion 1883.

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Indices

Colonialism and Imperialism, 1450–1950. von by Benedikt Stuchtey Original aufOriginal in German, angezeigt aufdisplayed in EnglischEnglish. deDeutschGerman. This turns the simultaneity and multitude of European colonialisms and imperialisms into a border-bridging experience. Few transnational specifics of European history illustrate the diversity of a European consciousness this clearly. But what was colonialism? Like colonialism, imperialism also involves political and economic control over a dependent territory. The etymology of the two terms, however, provides some clues about how they differ. The term colony comes from the Latin word colonus, meaning farmer. Given the evil history of imperialism and colonialism in international relations, it is important to understand these terms, and also to always speak out against this history, and any modern attempts to push these ideas. As the video above discusses, notions of race and racism have been a part of colonial and imperialism actions in history. Imperialists and colonialists have attempted to justify their behavior, all the while citizens in these countries continue to fight to resist these racist and ethnocentric ideas.