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Part 4: Europe's globally effective form of existence European Expansion and Colonialism

The general consciousness of the significance of imperialism and colonialism in the world history of the 19th and 20th centuries has recently grown considerably, as demonstrated by its wide coverage by historiography. As a result, Europe is increasingly conceived as a shining and absorbent civilisation with open boundaries, rather than as a hermetic 'insiders' club'. The view of European expansion not as a minor matter but rather 'Europe's globally effective and unique form of existence' (Jürgen Osterhammel) has become increasingly established. Europe has asserted itself in the world and negotiated its position with other societies beyond its own boundaries. These external relations certainly have not always carried the same weight, and they have not always affected the same areas. And yet European expansion abroad has been a formative component of modern history. It has changed the world and with it, Europe. Furthermore, modern Europe is hardly conceivable without colonialism and imperialism. Experiences within the non-European world have been inscribed into European landscapes, bodies and ideas. The societal history of European states, especially Great Britain, Portugal and the Netherlands, as well as – in a variety of aspects – Russia, France and ultimately Germany too, remain incomplete or even incomprehensible when they are distilled out of their imperial and colonial contexts. Recent scholarship on imperialism and colonialism is primarily marked by two points of emphasis that are otherwise completely unconnected. One of these looks towards Europe, not so much with a view to the 'driving forces' behind expansion, as has been the case in the classical history of imperialism, as it were, but rather in terms of the repercussions of colonial experience on the European 'Motherlands'. Many historians see in the colonies nothing less than the 'laboratories of modernity', a place where central categories of identification such as race, nation and gender have been developed considerably and a place where missionaries, teachers, doctors and engineers were able to 'experiment' free from the various restrictions imposed by the European social order. Colonial expansion in the 19th and 20th centuries thus played a significant role in reconfiguring European science and culture; equally, forms of social discipline as well as discourse on sexuality within middle-class European social order originated from models and inspiration from colonial projects. At the same time, the topic of colonial violence has attracted a great deal of attention in the last few years, often in terms of the extent to which brutal excesses in the colonies may have led to brutalisation tendencies within European societies. A particularly controversial thesis under discussion in this context is the link identified by some historians between the genocide inflicted upon the Herero in the former colony of German South-West Africa (today Namibia) and the Holocaust. Ultimately – and this is the second point of emphasis – a comprehensive area of specialised scholarship has been established for the formerly colonised areas over the last few decades. This research field examines with great

intensity the changes to African or Asian societies induced by European colonial rule. On the whole, it is striking that particularly more recent studies addressing the long-neglected field of German colonialism demonstrate a certain preference for examining colonial imagination and discourses. Within this context, some authors tend to wallow without inhibition in their penchant for self-indulgent over-theorising, ignoring tangible realities of colonial rule as well as the direct experiences of colonised peoples. Yet many recent empirical studies have also focused on a colonial history orientated around a centre and which have shown little interest in matters within the colonies themselves, to say nothing of the people living in them (other than in terms of their function as a projection screen). Regardless of how illuminating it can be to examine the repercussions of colonial experiences and colonial fantasies of the 'Motherlands', it is equally important to bear in mind the history of the colonised peoples.

The sections dedicated to the topic 'European Expansion and Colonialism' in Part Four of the book are primarily concerned with a perspective that investigates the motives of European colonialism as well as the meaning of imperialism and colonialism for the international system of the 19th and 20th centuries. The emergence of a European hegemony in the world and the doubt increasingly cast upon it by other powers are an important focus here. At the same time, other local practices of colonial rule as well as the experiences of the colonised peoples themselves are certainly addressed. It is not until the summarising and concluding section entitled 'The Franco-German Change of Perspective' that indications as to current conflicts regarding the colonial past in France and Germany eventually come to light. This touches upon an important point: the repercussions of colonialism and the continued influence of the imperialists on post-colonial Europe are beginning to occupy a significant space in history writing and public debate. The memory of colonialism is closely tied to the development of current relations between Europe and its former colonies. The diverse connections between Europe and the formerly colonised world – on the levels of trade, diplomatic relations, national security and 'development assistance' – are considerably shaped by contemporary concepts of the imperial past. The striking discrepancies revealed in 2003 between the attitudes of European states regarding the issue of an armed intervention in Iraq, for example, point towards diverging ideas regarding Europe's role in a post-colonial world. Debates on Europe's boundaries, democratic shortcomings in countless former colonies or the role of the European Union in supporting welfare and democracy in developing countries are equally influenced by the 'colonial heritage'. But first an initial and fundamental point of critique: the sections to be commented on here – with their successfully didactic presentation and almost too lavish illustrations – certainly do suffer from an acute lack of space. In each case, extremely complex developments and constellations must be summarised in only a few lines. The ratio between introductory or summarising texts and source extracts is much too uneven – in favour of the latter – for many topics. This occasionally leads to confusing statements and assessments.

Chapter 9 ('Europe and the World in the Age of Imperialism') briefly discusses the significant causes of Europe's cultural advancement. The details on 'Europe's Cultural Charisma' (p. 160) are, however, somewhat ambiguous.

They claim, for instance, that 'in colonial countries without a standard national language, the language of the colonial rulers was adopted as the official language'. In fact, there were no colonies with one national language because the majority were extremely diverse cultural entities with many different languages; above all, however, they were almost without exception not nations at the time of colonisation. This was especially the case for Africa. In many places, the boundary lines drawn by the colonial rulers completely ignored historically established structures. To give only two examples, large sections of the Emirate of Adamaua, which belongs to the caliphate of Sokoto, came under German rule; its political centre, Yola, however, was taken by the British to become part of Northern Nigeria. Similarly, the Ewe-speaking societies in Volta, West Africa, found themselves allocated by the boundaries to two different colonies: the German Togo and the British Gold Coast. Geographical constellations equally emphasised this arbitrariness. The territory of the state of Senegal, for instance, was cleanly cut in half by Gambia, which is around 300 km long and a maximum of 50 km wide, surrounded on all sides by Senegal. Similarly, the so-called Caprivi Strip separates Botswana and Angola, creating obstacles for economic integration in the region. Equally problematic for economic development are the boundaries of Benin (formerly Dahomey) and Togo. Each of these West-African states has an extremely thin strip of coast 'like two handkerchiefs placed next to each other' (Leonhard Harding) and an elongated hinterland. The colonial rulers erected the capital cities of Cotonou and Lomé on the coast, which further impeded the integration of all parts of the territory into a modern state. The rise of the 'non-European powers' of the United States and Japan is an important chapter in the age of imperialism, thus correctly being included here. Perhaps the section on Japan (p. 162) could, firstly, add that the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904/05) did not found the myth of the 'Yellow Danger'; rather, it reinforced it. Secondly, the Japanese victory was an important beacon of hope for many political activists in the non-European world, encouraging the spread of political movements such as Pan-Asianism. China (Dossier, p. 164f.) is a good illustration of how – alongside the establishment of formal European colonial rule – the capitalist Western powers also gained economic and political power on an informal level. Nevertheless, this extremely brief portrayal does not sufficiently clarify the dimension of this example. China found itself in great difficulties as early as at the beginning of the 19th century, when an ecological crisis met with a state emergency and also a serious economical downturn. Soon, the weakened Qing Empire would no longer be able to resist the militarily supported demands from western powers, especially Great Britain, for partial access to the – as it was hoped – huge Chinese market. The Chinese were also obliged to accept the establishment of trade strongholds and freedom of movement for missionaries. Consequently, the empire became the scene of 'rivalry between the greater imperialist powers'. As a result of the Boxer Uprising in 1900, when over 200 foreigners as well as thousands of Chinese Christians lost their lives, China was forced to accept the draconic punishment and terms of atonement dictated by international powers, including 'Boxer Compensation' of 67.5 million pounds sterling – a huge sum at the time – spread over 39 years, which brought disastrous consequences for the Chinese economy. Chapter 10 focuses on colonial rule and initially investigates the causes of the

colonisation wave at the end of the 19th century, which primarily affected Africa and also some parts of Asia. The various motives for the colonial victories are – justifiably – emphasised. This could have been given more weight: The driving forces behind colonial expansion differed from country to country, from period to period and from place to place. In some cases, strategic motives went hand in hand with financial aims; in other cases, economic opportunism was combined with political megalomania. In no cases, however, is a specific interest identified as the driving force from which all other motives derived. Furthermore, the emergence and design of the European colonial empires in the long nineteenth century were marked by coincidence and chance. The textbook thus proceeds with a short presentation of the 'Types of Rule' in the colonies. Here we find the old argument that each 'Motherland' developed its own colonisation method: France with a more 'direct administration', the British, on the other hand, pursued their famous system of 'indirect rule'. Research has shown, however, that these doctrines were only seldom relevant to actual colonial practice. Administration was highly dependent on the specific local relations and constellations of colonial rule. Essentially, however, all colonial powers conducted a kind of 'indirect rule' in that – due to the thin numbers of ruling personnel – all local colonial administrators were dependent on the cooperation of the natives. The section on 'economic exploitation' (p. 176) could further explain that, as a result of the World Economic Crisis of the 1930s, not only did the dependence of individual colonies on Europe increase as a result of customs procedures; soon – during the Second World War – the European powers would equally become dependent on their colonies for resources.

Lesson 3 of this chapter concentrates on the 'Peoples under Colonial Rule' and paints a highly dichotomised picture. It is not sufficiently explained that the establishment of colonial rule was a long-winded, uneven process, marked by a complex network of competing entities in which it was not uncommon for Europeans to find themselves fighting against Europeans and natives against natives. In many places there was resistance to the colonial victors; however, there was also a significant amount of arrangement and cooperation. A central aspect of colonialism was, however, the violence, which was by no means an expression of the European colonists' strength; rather, it demonstrated their weakness. Colonial rule always remained precarious. At the same time, the relationship between the colonists and the colonised was ambivalent. Colonial societies essentially followed the principle of distance. The higher levels of the colonial state and the economy were by definition European; spatial segregation, paternalism and arrogance towards native cultures and attempts to systematically exploit the latter were more the rule than the exception. Nevertheless, these boundaries were repeatedly stretched, with the result that colonial societies can be characterised – to some extent at least – by a simultaneity of division and alliance. These alliances were to be found, for example, in the form of sexual relationships between male colonisers and native women – which of course were still of a hierarchical nature. Recent research has emphasised the certain amount of agency available to colonised peoples and described the colonial situation as a process of conflicts that were as diverse as they were contradictory. Colonised peoples thus made use of all available resources offered by the presence of Europeans. At the risk of trivialising the violence and exploitation that were without any doubt a

consequence of colonialism, it does seem necessary to point out the efforts of and possibilities available to the colonised peoples to uphold their own ways of life in and with colonialism. The claim that Africans were forced to introduce certain cultures, such as cocoa farming, is therefore misleading (p. 178). It was often precisely so-called 'cash crops' such as cocoa – in other words, products destined for export – that were a result of African initiatives. Ultimately, the picture painted by the text of 'local elites straddled between cultures' (ibid) requires some clarification. For it was generally not these elites who were torn between cultures, as older studies tend to insist; rather, they would often use the opportunities presented to them by this 'space in-between'. As Frederick Cooper has put it, 'In-between is as much a place to be home as any other'.

The dossier on the colonies and the First World War addresses a crucial period, as in many respects the War marked the end of the 'Age of Imperialism'. An end to the European colonial empires, however, seemed as unlikely as ever before. American president Woodrow Wilson may have emphasised the people's rights to self-definition at the Versailles Peace Conference; independence of the colonies as a result, however, was not to be observed. The recently founded League of Nations strikingly expressed the former paternalism of the Western powers, as documented by the illustration of Article 22 of the League of Nations Mandate in the textbook. The disappointed hopes expressed widely following a period of initial enthusiasm for Wilson's famous Fourteen Points were a direct impulse for the formation and dynamics of anti-colonial movements, primarily in Asia; less, however, in Africa. The introductory text on this dossier deserves somewhat more substance. Unfortunately, the interwar period, especially the world economic crisis, which was so important for the further development of the colonial project, is not addressed in the portrayal; the literary references for further information also make a rather arbitrary impression. As a whole, however, the authors' achievement – the careful presentation of an extremely diverse and complicated topic – deserves a great deal of respect.

[Übersetzer??]