

## Colonialism without colonies: examining blank spaces in colonial studies

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In 2007, Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter Perdue asked in the introduction to their volume on 'Imperial Formations' whether one could study European and non-European forms of empire in the same analytical frame (Stoler, McGranahan, & Perdue, 2007). They rightly addressed the limits and possibilities of understanding colonialisms and empires as well as their workings in past and present. In a similar vein, this special issue calls for a more nuanced understanding of what we refer to as *colonialism without colonies*, thereby adding another dimension in thinking about imperialism and colonialism. Its main aim is to discuss and probe the epistemic value and the heuristic reach of the concept of 'colonialism without colonies'.

*First*, we examine countries that were close to the metropolises without having been classical colonial powers (Iceland, Sweden and Switzerland). These societies had an explicit self-understanding as being outside the realm of colonialism, but nevertheless engaged in the colonial project in a variety of ways and benefitted from these interactions. How were these places entangled in the colonial endeavor, how did they manage to profit from it and in what ways did their involvement in colonialism differ from those of the 'official' colonial powers? How do narratives of having been 'outside of colonialism' influence and complicate contemporary debates on the postcolonial heritage in these places? *Second*, we look at a country that was not colonized in the proper sense of the term but was adjacent to colonies (Liberia). How was this place affected by colonialism, in what way can Liberia be seen as 'quasi-colony' and thus as part of the colonial constellation? How did this situation differ from the neighboring colonies? How can we best interpret the position of Liberia: Was it an US-American colony, an independent republic, the imagined center of an African Empire or everything in one? This leads us to the *third* point, the question of whether a country belonged to the colonial regime or not is itself an object of debate: Does the fact that Iceland was a Danish dependency mean that it needs to be identified as a colony; or does it need to be contextualized within the European colonial metropolises? *Finally* it challenges the assumption that 'the only *true* forms of colonialism were European ones' (Stoler, McGranahan, & Perdue, 2007, p. X).

Unearthing the cultural components of colonialism and according them a formative role in the construction of identities is one of the goals of this new approach guiding this special issue. The structural continuities of a colonial matrix in politics,

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culture and economy also after decolonization and the Second World War left few countries untouched. Increasingly, such processes are understood as entangled, reciprocal histories of the so-called West and the non-European regions and no longer as a one-way development of Europe affecting the 'rest'. This also serves as an attempt to reconfigure all these spaces as a source and product of (post)colonial entangled histories.

It is precisely here that postcolonial theory comes into the picture. With the emergence of a postcolonial critique in the 1980s, postcolonial theory has found attention in contexts which at first sight seem less appropriate. Despite expressions of concern about the conceptual utility of the term 'postcolonial' expressed by many scholars, the suspicion about the entrenchment of postcolonial scholars in Euro-American universities, and attacks on the field for its insufficient attention to material and economic dimensions<sup>1</sup> (Jefferess, McGonegal, & Milz, 2006), scholars inspired by postcolonial theory have generated new and productive debates with a special focus on what we call 'colonialism without colonies' (Purtschert, Falk, & Lüthi, 2015; Purtschert & Fischer-Tiné, 2015). Without doubt, postcolonial theory has allowed us to expand the framework of historical and theoretical understanding in several ways.

*First*, such a re-figuring of the framework addresses the persistence of colonial structures and power relations in countries that have never been regarded as or understood themselves as official colonial powers. These countries often showed multi-fold entangled histories with colonial powers.<sup>2</sup> To move beyond reductive national-historic and Eurocentric perspectives, such a focus concerns itself with trans-local, transnational and transcultural linkages that also characterized the history of supposedly non-colonial countries (Hoerder, 2005; Randeria & Conrad, 2002). These links were not one way but reciprocal. People, ideas, knowledge and capital moved back and forth. Such transnational histories recognize the ways in which history has been one of connections across the globe, even though in the context of unequal relations of power (Hall & Rose, 2006, p. 5; Tyrell, 2007, p. 8).

*Second*, such continuities of colonial structures and power relations have diverse repercussions in the present also with regard to understanding the perseverance of notions such as race.<sup>3</sup> Race has played an influential role in the rise of colonialism because of the division of human society or human beings in order to establish a dominance of colonialists over subject peoples and thereby also legitimized colonial enterprises. It quickly turned into one of imperialism's most supportive ideas. In this issue, Kristín Loftsdóttir and other scholars have pointed to the need to make visible the more concealed involvement with colonialism, pointing to the historical specificities of such engagements such as the creation of different racial subjects and categories. Intellectuals as well as ordinary people from countries without colonies reproduced the racialized, gendered, sexualized and classed images so prevalent in Europe at the time, which aligned them with the colonizers as opposed to the colonized. Thus they frequently participated in colonialism through the replication of a racist and dehumanizing worldview, thereby complying with one of the most effective means of colonial power.

*Last*, but not least, the framework of historical and theoretical understanding has also been extended by including a broad variety of actors. Not just intellectual and economic elites, but also missionaries, tradesmen, explorers, settlers, mercenaries and the more have traversed oceans and engaged in colonial enterprises (e.g. Harries, 2007). These diverse actors need to be scrutinized not only concerning their

plain activities and understood as historical objects of history, but also in view of their agency and share in negotiating meanings and classifications, in creating powerful colonial (and colonizing) imaginaries as well as transferring ideas, goods and people across boundaries.

Postcolonial theory therefore has helped shed light onto questions and themes which so far have been neglected or consciously left out.

### **The different degrees of colonialism**

Despite their entanglements and interdependencies, it may still seem important to ask about differences and similarities between diverse colonial formations, as Stoler, McGranahan and Perdue point out. Without trying to establish a (futile) classification, it may be helpful to point out to recent research on colonial formations in order to understand subtle differences, but also the difficulty of pulling a clear line between these formations analytically. The flourishing of different colonial histories can be seen in the shift in patterns of historical writing. Without going into details, only a few examples from a rich body of scholarship can be addressed here.<sup>4</sup>

So-called classic colonies – such as Britain, France or Belgium – have often been homogenized within the field of imperial history and described as colonies where indigenous people in ‘colonies of occupation’ remained in the majority but were administered by a foreign power such as it was the case in British India. Until the end of the 1980s the rather traditional historiography on the history of colonial empires, respectively, the dissolving empires, concentrated on topics such as colonial structures, colonial administration, the economic penetration and exploitation of conquered territories or diplomatic history.<sup>5</sup> During the past decades the *new imperial history* has demonstrated a definite effort to turn away from the ‘institutional and high political traditions’ of imperial history writing and focus more on the social and the cultural questions (Hall & Rose, 2006, p. 12). This body of scholarship has paid more attention to colonial cultures and the entanglements between metropolises and colonies (Cooper & Stoler, 1997; Fischer-Tiné, 2009), the repercussions of colonial culture on the metropolises (Hall, 2009; Hall & Rose 2006), the agency of colonized peoples (Gilroy, 1999) as well as new transcolonial or transimperial spatial formations (Kramer, 2003; Lindner, 2011).

In comparison, *settler colonialism* (which includes countries such as Argentina, Australia, Canada and the USA) is a newer term and constitutes a relatively new field of research. Settler colonies show specific characteristics: settlers represented a population moving from the metropolises to ‘occupy a territory and fashion a new society in a space conceptualized as vacant and free’ (Batemen & Pilkington, 2011, p. 1; Veracini, 2010). Typically, after a certain period of time, the invading Europeans (or their descendants) annihilated, displaced or marginalized the indigenes. Such colonial settlements veil their annihilating drive by drawing on the societal structures and making use of the culture of the former homeland and renaming territory after familiar places or personalities. The disputes and extreme violence necessary to create these empty spaces in the colonialists’ imagination are frequently concealed (McClintock, 1995).

The situation regarding scholarship becomes even more complicated when one turns the attention to ‘colonies at the margins’ and includes countries which at first sight are not connected to colonial enterprises. Examples include Iceland,

Sweden or Switzerland – which were not in a strict sense colonizing powers (even though Sweden owned overseas colonies in West Africa and the Americas before the era of ‘high imperialism’ in the late nineteenth century) and claimed to be standing outside the colonial project – as well Nepal or Siam/Thailand, which were never colonized in the literal sense, or Abyssinia/Ethiopia, which was colonized very late and came to represent a space of resistance within colonial Africa. Such countries mostly fall off the radar when trying to understand colonialism as one of the most significant events structuring the world since the rise of Europe to global dominance since 1500.<sup>6</sup> In this context, it is important to insert these spaces into the analytical frame by addressing their specific involvement in, and support and profit, of colonial endeavors. Despite the sometimes gradual, sometimes major differences concerning their involvement, the potential of violence or the ‘degrees of tolerance, of difference, of domination and of rights’ as mentioned above, we believe that it is worthwhile to analyze the accelerated circuits of knowledge production and imperial exchange also affecting such countries. How did imperial formations influence the practices and thinking in everyday life, and how were they embodied in forms of citizenship or narrated in histories in countries without formal colonies? The multifarious networks of economic, scientific and political actors as well as institutional constellations, cultural formations and political strategies, commercial interests, capital flows and knowledge production allow us to rethink empires as reaching beyond Europe (Randeria, 2015, p. 296). Not to mention the *longue durée* of ‘epistemic violences’ affecting and legitimizing the varieties of colonialisms. Early racialized and sexualized discourses, for example, constituted the necessary preconditions for centuries of discrimination and denigration of the ‘abject Others’ in their multiple conceptualized forms (El-Tayeb, 2011; Mbembe, 2013).

However, like all such designations, these different terms – classical colonies, settler colonies, colonialism without colonies and others – provide the abstract poles of a continuum rather than paradigms or precise descriptive categories. But importantly, such reconfigurations have allowed for a ‘decentered perspective on European colonialism’ from its internal and external margins, thus shifting debates in postcolonial studies away from the predominant preoccupation with the great European colonial powers (Randeria, 2015, p. 298).

### **Colonialism without colonies**

‘Colonialism without colonies’ is not just a buzzword adding to new terms evolving during the past decade to describe the complexity of colonial realities. Through the lens of postcolonial analysis, for example, similar terms such as ‘colonial complicity’ point to participation in hegemonic western discourses and their universalistic modes of thought and practices of dominance. As Vuorela states, especially for countries outside western centers, complicity presents a means of approaching the ideal set by these centers of powers and a desire to ‘belong’ (2009). Likewise, the term ‘colonialism at the margins’ provides an opportunity to ‘concentrate on those instances where the line dividing colonial subjects and colonialists is blurred or even controversial’ (Loftsdóttir, 2012). Such notions are helpful in asking to what degrees states without former colonies and their inhabitants (as well as states which were not formally colonized and their populaces) were an integral part of the colonial relationships (Purtschert & Fischer-Tiné, 2015).

Similar to ‘colonialism without colonies’ such concepts point out the presence and perseverance of colonial structures and power relations in countries that, according to the hegemonic (self-)representation, have not been part of the colonial projects (Purtschert, Falk, & Lüthi, 2015). The concept expresses the need to analyze the present in a way that takes colonialism into account. Furthermore, the focus of post-colonial studies on culture makes it possible to study the relations that go along with economic and political entanglements and are linked to everyday culture, by paying special attention to imagination, the discursive and the visual representation. In this special issue, we specifically focus on the production and reproduction of colonial knowledge, representations and discourses. This explicit postcolonial understanding of the concept ‘colonialism without colonies’ distinguishes our use of the term from Jürgen Osterhammel. He defines ‘colonialism without colonies’ as

situations in which dependencies of the ‘colonialist’ type appear, not between a ‘mother country’ and a geographically remote colony, but between dominant ‘centers’ and dependent ‘peripheries’ *within* national states or regionally integrated land empires. The theoretical construction ‘internal colonialism’ was developed to categorize such cases . . . . (Osterhammel, 2010, p. 17)

Thereby, Osterhammel goes beyond the traditional definition of colonialism as a relationship of domination between ‘metropolis’ and ‘colonies’ by pointing out the spatial and power dimension of colonialism as also occurring within a nation-state or regionally integrated land empires. The colonial history of extraterritorial jurisdiction – for example, of the history of the U.S. Court for China – has also been defined as a form of ‘colonialism without colonies’ (Ruskola, 2008).

In contrast, we accentuate the cultural effects of colonialism by examining the ways in which colonial images and perspectives influenced and still do affect political, popular as well as scientific discourses in countries without formal colonies. A strong emphasis is put on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, nation and class.

This issue on *colonialism without colonies* connects the past with the present and joins scholarship from various fields such as anthropology, history, philosophy and cultural studies. The following articles each engage with the concept in their own way.

*Gunlög Fur*’s perspective on ‘colonialism without colonies’ draws attention to the ways in which Sweden was caught up in European expansion and how this expansion was brought into the realm of local and regional social polities. Her essay addresses the enduring legacy of popular culture, and how it conjoined with the process of emigration to implicate Swedes in the colonial expansion of the USA, with profound consequences for immigrants, American Indians and the formation of the nation. She analyzes the Uncle Barkman’s stories, and other articles from the *Svenska Familj-Journalen* in order to argue that they framed the perceptions of America, and of American Indians for Swedish settlers. The articles from the *Svenska Familj-Journalen* were widely available to American public and instilled Swedish immigrants with fear and prepared them for aggression in their encounters with American Indians. These settlers thereby became an important part of a politics of displacement and sometimes one of ‘ethnic cleansing’.

The second essay of this collection by *Kristín Loftsdóttir* focuses on colonial memory in late twentieth century and shows how during times of massive economic prosperity Iceland’s past relationship with Denmark became relevant, as the Danes

were now widely seen as the former colonial rulers who were ‘jealous’ of Icelanders’ success. Moreover, she shows how the relationships to other European countries were closely aligned with racist notions of non-European colonial subjects and how the term colonialism was used positively in the boom period to underline the extensive internationalization of the banks. The concept ‘colonialism without colonies’ is applied to the Icelandic situation by considering the contradictory desires and subject positions of colonialism. Iceland’s ambivalent role as reflected within colonial discourses as both an object of colonialism as well as perpetrating colonial ideologies and racism needs to be recognized.

*Patricia Purtschert* shows how colonial discourses were closely linked to self-representations of Swiss masculinity. Taking the Swiss Dhaulagiri expedition of 1960 as starting point, she examines how in the discourse surrounding this expedition, the colonial trajectories of mountain climbing was closely linked to the use of technology. By examining the nexus of technical skills, Swiss national identity formation and colonial discourse, the author points to a specific instance of ‘colonialism without colonies’, which she calls ‘techno-colonialism’. Technology developed into a decisive force for the construction of the image of the Swiss pioneer conquering unknown territories and thereby ascribing Switzerland narratives of modernity and of colonial Europe also vis-à-vis the native as the colonial other.

In the final essay, *Christine Whyte* critically analyzes American Imperialism and Pan-African Colonialism in Liberia against the background of the assumption that both the USA and Liberia have always deliberately situated themselves outside imperial power systems. She questions this assumption by looking to the imperial and colonial histories of both nations while asking about their respective differences. Whyte thereby proposes a particular type of American imperialism which implied an expansionist and incorporative scheme supported by a vision of a moral empire. This imperialism was implemented by strategic military and economic means and the incorporation of some key areas, such as Alaska and Hawaii, into the American republic.

The articles on ‘colonialism without colonies’ broaden our views of colonial history and its postcolonial present, and show that states without former colonies as well as states that were not formally colonized were part of colonial relationships in myriad ways.

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## Notes

1. Such early critique is voiced, for example, by Dirlik (1997) and McClintock (1992).
2. This also counts, for example, for Scandinavian countries (see Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009).
3. The example of race has no exclusive status but rather points to the necessity to explore the intersections of several other categories such as gender, sexuality, class and religion.
4. In this context, it is important to point to the early phase of colonialism with its main actors Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. Just as well, the growing debate on postcolonial studies in and concerning Latin America have brought forth a productive body of literature. See, for example, Morana, Dussel, and Jáuregui (2008) and Mignolo (2005).
5. See, for example, the British example where a differentiated empire studies developed under the *Cambridge History* producing monumental histories such as Rose, Newton, Benians, (1929–1968), Lonsdale (1975), and Mungeam (1966). In France the *histoire coloniale* starting off early twentieth century partly took a more critical stance towards imperialism and colonialism after 1945, yet only had a marginal position within French historiography. See, for example, Julien (1931), Brunschwig (1960) and Brahm (2010).
6. The volumes edited by Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue (2007) or Lüdtkke, Kraft, and Martschukat (2010) also point to ‘non-classical’ and/or non-European empires – such as Japan, China and Russia – which often are also forgotten from a European perspective.

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