# EUROPEAN ENTANGLEMENTS

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Since the 1990s, a growing number of historians and academics in related disciplines have carved out innovative paths in illuminating the diverse ways that Europe and other parts of the world have 'entangled histories', or *histoires croisées* [Werner and Zimmermann 2006]. From the early modern era onwards and gathering further momentum in the nineteenth century, Europe's evolution became increasingly intertwined with far-flung transoceanic regions as maritime empires expanded and transformed. For Western and Southern European colonial powers like Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Germany, a burgeoning scholarship insists that the domestic histories and cultures of European metropoles be recognised as inseparable from those of the Americas, Africa, and Asia together with islands large and small scattered from the Caribbean to the Pacific. 'Home' and 'away'

were—and indeed in many respects continue to be—mutually constituted arenas, not hermetically sealed 'separate spheres', with Europe itself transformed through unequal geopolitical power relations, an increasingly globalised economy, and mobile peoples and cultures [Stoler and Cooper 1997]. Global flows of people (whether enslaved, indentured, or voluntary), goods, capital, and ideologies linked European colonizing countries with overseas possessions and spheres of influence during an extended age of empire; today, these complex colonial legacies and heritage remain central not only to postcolonial societies overseas but also still echo resoundingly across Europe itself.

Recasting Europe 'at home' as colonial or postcolonial, however, is still a patchy and incomplete endeavour. Comparative and transnational studies of Europe's colonial entanglements are few and far between when set against research concerned with discrete national experiences. Just as Anglophone scholars were long at the vanguard of postcolonial studies, so too were historians of modern Britain and the British empire prominent in the early stages of conceptualising a 'new imperial history'. Britain-focused work remained overly represented, even as Portugal's entanglements with Brazil and Africa, France's with its vast empire, Belgium's with Central Africa, and Italy's with Northern Africa (to name but a several) gradually received closer attention, as did their postcolonial

resonances [Hall and Rose 2006; Buettner 2016; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo (eds.) 2015]. Invigorating and necessary though this single nation/empire research literature has been, countless themes and places long continued to be understudied at best if not virtually ignored.

Although some historians of Europe have yet to be fully convinced of the centrality of imperial history to the internal evolution of specific European countries, even those who have eagerly observed or participated in this 'imperial turn' still have blind spots of their own. Just as many histories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe tend to leave little space for Northern Europe while focusing on manoeuvres by the 'great powers' in and outside Europe, World Wars, fascism, totalitarianism, the Holocaust, communism, and East-West dynamics during and after the Cold War, Nordic histories of colonial and global entanglements are still largely neglected by all but a handful of specialists [Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012]. Scandinavian regional and national histories, not to mention contemporary culture and society, have rarely been reframed with an eye to their imbrications with colonialism or empire, even though Sweden too once had an East India Company just as Britain and the Netherlands did (albeit a far less successful one!). Denmark, for its part, did not just historically encompass far more contiguous territory within continental Europe than it currently does but

also claimed territories in India, West Africa, and the Danish West Indies. With its 'tropical' possessions having been transferred or sold to other Western powers well before widescale decolonization gathered pace in the mid-twentieth century, ongoing Danish control over territories in the North Atlantic and Arctic region has seldom been viewed through colonial/imperial lenses. Recognising the enslavement of Africans until the nineteenth century as part of Denmark's history as well as that of the leading European overseas powers and acknowledging that Iceland and Greenland have effectively counted as Danish colonies simultaneously yields a different national narrative and a fuller transnational history of empire, whether within continental Europe or across today's Global South or Global North.

Looking North is only part of the process of Europeanizing the colonial past and its lingering postcolonial ramifications. Extending the remit to include cases like Denmark's that have largely been repressed in public and academic awareness comes alongside manifestations of 'colonialism without colonies'. If 'Europeanization' can be understood as 'a variety of political, social, economic and cultural processes that promote (or modify) a sustainable strengthening of intra-European connections and similarities through acts of emulation, exchange and entanglement and that have been experienced and labelled as "European"' [Von

Hirschhausen and Patel 2010, p. 2], then the extent to which countries that held no territories of their own on other continents were nonetheless shaped by broader continental and global histories of empire becomes clearer. Modern Sweden and Switzerland count among societies that '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' [Lüthi, Falk, and Purtschert 2016, p. 1]. Individuals' involvement in other powers' colonial projects as explorers, missionaries, and scientists; profitable trade and overseas investments; colonial commodities and artistic and literary cultures; racial understandings of their majority populations as 'European', 'white', 'civilised', and 'superior' when contrasted with black and Asian 'others': all count among the ways that Europeans across national lines could become complicit and 'entangled in the colonial endeavor' in what were often empowered ways, whether they hailed from London, Paris, or Antwerp or from Stockholm or Zürich.

European imperial entanglements also extended to European places and peoples that were themselves tantamount to having been 'colonized'. Ireland's history was both one of 'internal colonisation' at home by an England-dominated Britain and also of participation in British imperial conquest and governance, whether as administrators or as the soldiers

upon whom the British army relied so heavily across its empire. Internal colonialism could apply to unequal (and often racialized) power relations within European nation-states that had acquired overseas colonies (whether of Ireland within Britain, or Italy's South by its North) as well as in countries without empires that embarked upon 'civilising missions' at home among ethnic minorities who were scored as 'primitive' and 'backward' candidates for 'improvement' or assimilation. The treatment of the indigenous Sámi of northern Sweden, Norway, and Finland provides an example of this, as do the histories of continental land empires further South and East.

Central and Eastern Europe's history, in this reading, can be cast in colonial and postcolonial terms, with small states in the region having undergone a series of internal colonisations by larger adjacent powers like the Habsburg empire and Tsarist Russia followed by the Soviet Union [Feichtinger, Prutsch, and Csáky 2003; Głowacka-Grajper 2019]. Modern Germany offers examples both of short-lived overseas colonialism until 1918 and a protracted history of encounters with Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, that were tantamount to colonial power relations and involved widespread understandings of its populations as racially inferior [Conrad 2012]. The Third Reich's targeting of Eastern European spaces for conquest and settlement and of

Jews, 'Slavs', and other ethnic groups for merciless suppression, removal, or outright annihilation extended from longer histories of regional domination, to be sure. Yet they also drew upon widely-shared European colonial mentalities and practices recurrent on other continents, not exclusively from Germany's own history of genocidal war in early twentieth-century South-West Africa [Mazower 2009]. The entanglement of Nazi occupations and the Holocaust within Europe with colonial oppression and violence outside Europe was set to continue into the age of decolonization, with memories of atrocities under Hitler informing responses to European brutality while combatting anti-colonial insurgencies in French Algeria and other theatres of conflict in Asia and Africa after 1945 [Rothberg 2009].

Viewing intra- and extra-European forms of European colonialism as candidates for comparative treatment and potential cross-fertilisation rather than splendid isolation allows empire to be examined as a common European heritage that defines the continent as much as it defines the wider world [Burbank and Cooper 2010; Leonhard 2016]. Decolonization in this sense did not just occur outside Europe as Western and Southern European nations were pushed out of most of their Asian, African, and Caribbean possessions in the decades following the Second World War. With the dissection of the Tsarist and Habsburg empires

after the First World War, Eastern Europe indeed became the first 'site of decolonization' of the twentieth century—only to find itself under Nazi and then Soviet occupation as communist satellite states during the Cold War [Mark and Slobodian 2018]. Situating Eastern Europe within global histories of colonialism and decolonization during the Soviet empire illuminates important ideological solidarities and material interconnections linking the 'Second World' of state socialism with the 'Third World' fighting for decolonization and against Western-dominated neocolonial arrangements. As such, it connects Europe's East as well as its 'First World' West with wider global transitions as overseas empires drew to a close.

Rethinking late colonialism and decolonization as a transnational European and global history alike also extends to their links with the European integration process since the European Economic Community/European Union's origins in the late 1950s [Hansen and Jonsson 2014]. The multifaceted and often contentious forms of colonial heritage and decolonization experiences that mark so many EU member states today are now increasingly, albeit unevenly, re-emerging in public culture and politics at the local and national levels. Their inadequate Europeanization to date, however, is matched by the ongoing neglect—which might arguably qualify as active or unthinking

repression—of empire as an EU history with lingering consequences. Fully reckoning with the EU's global engagements past and present is long overdue, both at the official EU level and among scholars and wider publics. Doing this comes hand in hand with recognizing the Europeanness of Europe's millions of ethnic minorities, most of whom are EU citizens, whose families often hail from the ex-colonies of so many EU countries [Buettner 2016]. The EU's much-lauded aspiration to embody 'Unity in Diversity', as its motto celebrates, demands that greater attention be paid not only to national diversity but to its multicultural diversity that long-standing colonial entanglements have made an irrevocable part of postcolonial EUrope.

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