

PART II:

The Modern World
(1800 CE <)

INTRODUCTION PART II

The Modern World (1800 CE <)

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“It is easy to cut down the tree of liberty, but not easy to restore it to life”
—Toussaint L'Ouverture



Image II. 1 Toussaint L'Ouverture on horseback



Image II. 2 Napoleon on horseback



Image II. 3 Simon Bolívar in Carabobo

The periodization of World History into pre-modern times and the modern era has a very obvious meta-historical and Eurocentric connotation. The concept of the modern state, i.e. the liberal democratic-state, being the pinnacle of human progress, neatly fits with the persistent teleological view of history moving towards a clear end goal. We can see these assumptions not only in historical scholarship but even more prominently in the social sciences, think for instance of publications like Seymour Lipset's *Some Social Requisites of Democracy*, Francis Fukuyama's *End of History and the Last Man* or Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*.^{*} This understanding of history as being finite and purposeful also has an obvious normative element, in that it

^{*} Seymour Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy; Economic Development and Legitimacy', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (1959), pp. 69-105; Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*.

assumes that the dominance of 'Western' civilization since the mid-nineteenth century is not random nor temporary but rather the logical result of progress and the universal standard to aspire to. In this light, other (non-Western) societies who were perceived to not yet have reached this state of modernity were consigned to, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted, "the waiting room of history."^{*} Such a reading of 'modernity' and its perceived inevitability has received much criticism over the past decades, from among others post-modern and post-colonial theorists. Yet, to reject the concept of modernity all together, one ignores some very fundamental changes which occurred in the recent past that have certainly sped up progress, from for instance a technological perspective, as well as brought about considerable social changes. Indeed, the American historian Richard Wolin stated that "the evidence for modernity's obsolescence as an analytical concept for historical study is both overwhelming and overstated".^{**} Considering the weight scholars place on either advocating, criticizing or understanding the concept, 'modernity' remains an important idea, not an ideal, to consider when trying to understand historical change and the historiographical discussions on the interpretation of the past.

But what is modernity anyway? While the concept has already been introduced in the opening chapter, the term 'modern' can mean different things, depending on the context or discipline. In colloquial usage, 'modern' is used to denote something in the present or recent past. It thus first and foremost signifies a break with the past, more specifically a break with traditions and a past deemed static or cyclical and therefore unchanging. Yet, a linear perspective of time did already exist long before this supposed break with the unchanging traditional past and, moreover, existed in almost all literate societies both Western and non-Western, as it is a logical and 'intrinsic part of life histories'^{***} as the historian Jack Goody has shown. Instead historians today recognize a difference between a monotheistic linearity perspective and a 'liberal teleological' view of history. The 'modern era' or 'modernity' can therefore also refer to the historical period itself in which this break with 'tradition' or break with a monotheistic teleological perspective of history is believed to have occurred. In the Western scholarly tradition this is sub-divided into the 'early modern' period (ca. sixteenth to eighteenth century) and the 'late modern' period (ca. nineteenth to mid-twentieth century). This periodization is based on certain historical processes, all of which occurred in Europe, which are seen to have contributed to a set of qualities that are considered 'modern', i.e. technological innovation, rationality, secularization and democracy. These qualities were believed

^{*} Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2007) p. 8.

^{**} Richard Wolin, "'Modernity': The Peregrinations of a Contested Historiographical Concept", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 116, No. 3 (2011), pp. 241-251, p. 241.

^{***} Goody, *The Theft of History*, 18.

to have found their origins in the Renaissance (ca. 1400-1600 CE), Enlightenment (1600-1800 CE), and Industrial Revolution (ca. 1700-1900 CE).

Within this context, modernity in the Western world was thus characterized by the qualities of progress, the progression away from an *ancien regime* with its traditional values, and the questioning of the supposed natural and eternal order in the world. Max Weber, the nineteenth century German historian and early sociologist remarked that the shift to the modern era was predominantly a shift in thinking, not per se a shift in modes of production (as for example Marxists would argue). As such, rationality was seen as an important characteristic: the idea that societies made choices based on scientific methods (that were predictable and replicable) and based on logic (think of for instance Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*, 1637). This process of rationalization did not lead immediately to a process of secularization but it certainly paved the way, as almost all forms of traditional power and their legitimacy were questioned. Consequently, the role of religion and that of the church changed fundamentally in modern societies from an all-encompassing force and institute of authority to a practice and organization with a particularly defined space within society. Traditional hierarchies, such as church and crown, were broken down and the individual now played a central role. Moreover, modern societies were self-aware of being modern and attached identities and principles to it such as for example 'peoples' sovereignty' and nationhood. Indeed, the historian Christopher Bayly has noted that the modern age was modern "precisely because a considerable number of thinkers, statesmen, and scientists who dominated the ordering of society believed it to be so".*

A more Marxist, that is historical materialist understanding of modernity, rather sees the rapid changes in the economic system as the most profound break with the past. Several historians have argued that the rapid progress Europeans experienced from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century onwards was made possible only by their extractive business overseas, and that colonization was thus at the heart of the emergence of a 'global industrial order'.** In this light, the process of modernization was fundamentally unequal, with a center (Europe) and its periphery (the non-Western world) and the perceived inability to modernize or 'develop' was explained, in the words of Gunter Frank "not due to the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage in regions that remained isolated from the stream of world history" but seen as the consequence of "the same historical process which

* Christopher A. Bayly, *The Making of the Modern World, 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p. 10.

** See for instance: J.M Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993) or Immanuel Wallerstein (ed.), *The Age of Transition. Trajectory of the World-System 1945-2025* (London: Zed Books/Pluto Press, 1996).

also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself".* Yet, such an understanding of the nature of the historical rupture we call modernization is nevertheless Eurocentric at heart, as it continues to see Europe as the source and motor of change.

Indeed, what is considered 'modern' is, as said, often fundamentally associated with nineteenth century Europe and the ideas and institutions and economic structures that were developed by Europeans in the early modern and modern period. This way of defining the modern dismisses the possibility of modernity existing in other parts of the world before it occurred in Europe as well as ignoring the global exchanges of ideas which enabled a process of modernization. For example, Samir Amin has convincingly argued the crucial role Islamic scholars played in the scientific revolution in his book *Eurocentrism***; Paul Gilroy famously demonstrated the pivotal role of the African diaspora on the emergence of modernity in the Atlantic World in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* and Francis Fukuyama has argued in his multiple volume work *The Origins of Political Order* that the Chinese bureaucratic system that was implemented in approximately the eleventh century shows many characteristics that, according to sociologists such as Max Weber, occur in modern bureaucracies.*** Although several scholars have criticized all Eurocentric views of modernity and argue for an approach that allows for multiple modernities,**** Carol Gluck points out that 'the modern possesses commonalities across time and space' that make it impossible for these modernities to be genuinely alternative. She identifies that the 'grammar of modernity' always includes the legal-rational state, urbanization, disrupted communal life, national political participation, 'subjection to the forces of capitalism and industrialization' and the 'incorporation into the reigning geopolitical world order.'***** These are therefore characteristics that cannot be ignored in discussions of the modern.

Where the first part of this book narrated the onset of the 'modern' world, this second part will focus on the historical processes which came to define the 'modern' era. Some of the key historical processes which have profoundly shaped this period were the democratic revolutions, imperialism, the ensuing World Wars and the Cold War. Traditionally, historians situate the turning point from the 'pre-modern' to the

* Andre Gunter Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment", *Monthly Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1966), pp. 37-51. Cited in: Timmons Roberts & Amy Bellone (eds), *Globalization and Development Reader: Perspectives on Development and Global Change* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 80.

** Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989).

*** Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), p. 21.

**** See for example: Dominic Sachsenmaier and S. N. Eisenstadt (eds) *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) or Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, 'On Alternative Modernities', *Public Culture* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1999), pp. 1-18.

***** Carol Gluck, 'The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now', *The American Historical Review* Vol. 116, No. 3 (2011), pp. 676-687, p. 676-7.

‘modern era’ at the end of the eighteenth century, with the advent of the Democratic Revolutions, notably the American Revolution (1775-1783 CE), the French Revolution (1789-1799/1815 CE) and the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804 CE), which later inspired the Spanish American wars of independence (ca. 1808-1833). From the perspective of seeing the ensuing of the modern era as one of mostly ‘a revolution of the mind’*, locating its commencement with the effective struggle over ideas of political order and representation indeed seems logical. Yet, it should also include the onset of this struggle over ideas, which was predominantly fought with the pen as opposed to the sword, beginning with the publications of certain ‘radical’ works by Enlightenment thinkers. Think for instance of John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689/90) which stressed toleration and the natural and inalienable rights of man; or Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *On the Social Contract. Principles of Political Right* (1762) which coined the concept of the ‘general will’; or Immanuel Kant’s *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) which outlined the universality principle.

But far from the actual ‘revolution’ itself, i.e. a forcible overthrow of a social order, being “the locomotive of history”, as Karl Marx famously argued, most of the above mentioned revolutions did not, in fact, lead to a complete change in power dynamics. Where the American revolutionaries sought to break with the control of the British aristocracy and protect their private property (from British taxation), they did not manage (nor aspire) to seek absolute social equality through, for instance, a redistribution of wealth. Likewise, the French Revolution made an awkward U-turn with the crowing of Napoleon to first consul (1799) and then Emperor (1804) thereby undoing the aspirations of the Third Estate, i.e. the common people, when they declared themselves in 1789 to be the only legitimate National Assembly. Indeed much of the social change which we today consider to have been truly emancipating in the short and long run, were often gradually enacted through, ironically, sometimes semi-democratic states.

As such, understanding the true legacy and revolutionary nature of the so-called ‘Democratic Revolutions’ continues to be hotly debated by scholars. Some see its main triumph in the conceptualization of certain political philosophies, like the opening of a political Pandora’s box, such as the concept of the people’s ‘general will’ as the only legitimate authority, and the brazen expression of this concept in the opening lines of the American constitution written in 1787 (“We the People”).** Others consider the notion of the universality of human rights as outlined and articulated in the 1789 *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* as having the most enduring impact.*** Otherwise, the belief that “Equality cannot exist

* Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind. Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

** See for instance: Shigeru Akita (ed.), *American Empire in Global History* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

*** See for instance: Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2008).

without liberty”^{*}, as proclaimed by the Haitian leader of the revolution Toussaint L'Ouverture, who fought for the complete abolition of slavery and all forms of human bondage, is seen to have been most ground-breaking.^{**} There are also those scholars who question the validity of a dialectics of ideas perspective of history, and reject the whole assumption of the democratic revolutions being a true turning point in world history. The historian Jürgen Osterhammel, for example, has noted that the impact of the French Revolution on the world in immediate terms was very small, as most people in Asia or Africa at the end of the eighteenth century had not heard nor were troubled by the beheading of Louis XVI. Instead he sees the true impact of the democratic revolutions in “expansion abroad by military means”^{***} and thus places Imperialism at the heart of the process of historical change.

It is indeed important to remember that while these changes in political and moral thinking were unfolding, the world became increasingly connected through innovations in communication technologies (telegraph) as well as by improved modes of transportation (steamships, railways, etc.), which allowed an ever faster dissemination of ideas. More importantly, large parts of the world were under direct political control or part of a sphere of influence of only a handful of new ‘super powers’, including Great Britain, France, Russia, the United States and Japan. The age of New Imperialism, or ‘Modern Imperialism’, which began roughly in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until the mid-twentieth century, distinguished itself from earlier forms of colonialism in that it more rapidly and very forcibly brought non-Western peoples into the new industrial, capitalist ‘modern’ world order. Military innovations like the invention of machine guns (for instance the Gatling gun, 1876; Maxim gun, 1884) or steel armored steamships, as well as medicinal improvements (like quinine and antibiotics), allowed Europeans to venture much further away from the coastlines into the interior of Africa and Asia and sweep away any local resistance. It was this rapid ‘scramble for territory’ in the quest for glory and expansion of the empire, which profoundly shook-up and re-arranged the world order. The defeat, for those who were on the losing side, was made more bitter by the patronizing and injuring ‘civilizing missions’ which were part of the belief system of the modern imperialist, who often equated defeat with a lack of ‘modernity’. In the wake of this civilizing mission, the revolutionary ideals and ideas of equality, liberty and people’s sovereignty were also introduced, but of course used not to enable local subjected populations to gain political liberty, but rather paradoxically used as an excuse for colonization. Several counter-modern movements arose to fight not only

^{*} Toussaint L'Ouverture, *Proclamation*, 29 August 1793, Camp Turel, Haïti.

^{**} See for instance: David P. Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia SC.: University of South Carolina Press, 2020).

^{***} Jürgen Osterhammel, translated Patrick Camiller, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 53.

imperial control but also the modernization fever which had swept across the world (see chapter 8).

Ironically, the fervent 'scramble for territory' and the fierce competition between European states over colonies, eventually brought destruction and loss to Europe itself. Many scholars consider the 'imperial paranoia' to have significantly contributed to the onset of the First World War.* When the first modern World War then began in 1914, it brought about a level of destruction that had not been anticipated or ever imagined. The shock of the horrors of the trenches shook the confidence of Europeans, as well as put doubt into the minds of those who were trying to emulate European civilization. It gave some of the former 'losers' of imperialism new fervor to either cling on to and seek a place amongst the super powers (see chapter 9) or otherwise radically challenge the new world order completely. One such challenge to the dominant world order was the communist revolution of 1917 in Russia (see chapter 7). Other challenges came from fascist parties in among others Italy and Germany. Paradoxically, those totalitarian movements were fundamentally modern in their positivist outlook on societal change and the role of the state in achieving a paradisiacal 'end state of history'.** International cooperation in the form of the League of Nations (established in 1920) hoped to prevent further conflict, yet external causes such as the stock exchange crash of 1929 and the ensuing inflation continued to feed social unrest and insecurity, and allowed a build up to yet another world war of total destruction.

Interestingly, the end of the Second World War did not lead to a deepening of cultural pessimism per se and rejection of **Modernity** which had so profoundly marked the interbellum period***; instead, it can be seen as a period of advancement, characterized by a widely felt enthusiasm to rebuild. The rebuilding of a new world order certainly did not shy away from coming to terms with the extreme excesses of modernity, most obviously in the form of the Holocaust. War criminals were prosecuted and tried for committing crimes against humanity, and this 'old' ideal of universal human rights was laid down in the Universal Declaration of **Human Rights** in 1948 by the newly established United Nations (see chapter 10). Moreover, the imperialist project of the former modern powers, was globally rejected predominantly in the so-called Global South, but also in the imperialist heartlands itself. This triggered fundamental questions about **Identity** and positioning. There were two dominant ideological beliefs as to how best rebuild a stable and peaceful society: a liberal ideology dominant in the so-called 'first world' and a communist

* See for instance: Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

** See among others: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1951); Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and The Holocaust* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000).

*** Think of for instance publications like: Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. And: Austen Freeman, *Social Decay and Regeneration* (New York: Read Books, 2013).

ideology, dominant in the ‘second world’. This ideological discord, nicknamed the ‘Cold War’, frustrated and in several cases greatly delayed development and security; nevertheless, the world witnessed a ‘Great Acceleration’, the likes of which the world had never seen before.* The world population rose from ca. three billion in 1960 to almost eight billion in 2022; made possible by great improvements in health care and agricultural production; the number of people living in cities rose dramatically, illiteracy rates dropped significantly, indeed almost on all aspects of our socio-economic lives the world population felt its effects. Yet, on the downside, the effects were also felt on the global **Environment** as for instance the emission of toxic gases or production of plastic increasing, leading, among others, to a prompt rise in CO₂ levels in the atmosphere and clear changes in the world’s climate (see chapter 11).

This global climate change might prove the largest and most profound challenge humanity faces, but new and completely unforeseen challenges and changes of course remain possible. As we deter a determinist perspective on the process of globalization, we remain attentive to developments which might signal profound divergences from the current world order. Indeed, several scholars have questioned whether our almost complete dependency on digitalization and information monopolies, the disconnect between the financial world and real economies, and growing disappointment with democracy, have in fact already enforced a break with the ‘modern era’ into a ‘postmodern world’.** Exploring what this postmodern era entails, is a tentative yet exciting enquiry which further unites the historical discipline with the social sciences as they seek to understand the present, as shaped by the past.

* J.R. McNeill, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

** See for instance: Jean Baudrillard, translation Iain Hamilton, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 2017), originally published as: *L’échange symbolique et la mort*, 1976; Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World: and the Rise of the Rest* (New York: Penguin, 2011); Donette Murray and David Brown (eds) *Multipolarity in the 21st Century. A New World Order* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

CHAPTER 7.

War: Disordering and Ordering

ISAAC SCARBOROUGH



Image 7.1 Catherine II of Russia, 1782, by Vigilius Eriksen



Introduction

The Prussian Princess Sofia August Frederika moved to the Russian imperial capital of St. Petersburg in 1744 to marry the future tsar of Russia, Peter III. The daughter of a field marshal and successful military strategist, Sofia quickly felt at home in this expanding empire beginning to flex its military strength as a growing power in Europe. Emerging a century earlier from the early seventeenth century ‘Time of Troubles’ (*smutnoe vremia*), which had seen the nascent Muscovite state invaded, temporarily ruled by outsiders, and left ruptured, the imperial house of Romanov tsars had since built an increasingly solid edifice. Facing vast swaths of northern

permafrost, local resistance, and even imperial Chinese opposition, their armies and Cossack irregulars had pushed outwards, conquering Western Siberia and large portions of the Far East by the early eighteenth century. In the south, Russian soldiers and settlers alike were moving into the Caucasus mountains and the borders of what is now Kazakhstan. Wars fought by Peter the Great around the turn of the eighteenth century with Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, and other European powers had expanded Russia's influence and borders westward, as well as establishing the Russian Empire as a military force to be reckoned with. Further southwest, the Russian military had fought a series of inconclusive but increasingly aggressive territorial wars with the Ottoman Empire, demonstrating further its capacity to grow at the expense of its neighbors. Military expansion was accompanied by military and civilian reforms, from Peter's famous institution of European-style dress amongst the Russian nobility to the creation of European-style tables of ranks and military units.

For Sofia Frederika, St. Petersburg would have inarguably seemed the capital of a growing empire. By 1762, moreover, Sofia had converted to Orthodoxy, the official religion of the Russian Empire, taken the name Ekaterina Alekseevna, married the heir to the Romanov throne, Peter III, led a palace coup against her husband, and been crowned Empress Ekaterina II. The coup that had brought her the throne had also been partially the product of war. With time, she would also become Russia's longest ruling female leader, overseeing enormous territorial expansion: by the end of her reign, the Russian Empire stretched from present-day Poland to Alaska. At the same time, her rule was associated with domestic reform, modernization, and even ideas from the European Enlightenment, including the education of women. In many ways, Ekaterina's rule embodied the tension that many historians have identified between conflict as a force for destruction and conflict as a catalyst for change and development. In the case of the Russian Empire, however, conflict undeniably drove both imperial expansion and imperial development, and this chapter uses the case study of Russia to show the intimate links between imperial formation and war.

Ekaterina was an undoubtedly powerful imperial ruler, and one for whom gender norms seemed almost irrelevant: she sought territorial gain and military victory as strenuously as any of her male predecessors or successors and pursued personal (and love) affairs without regard for eighteenth century propriety. This has led to the temptation in popular Russian literature to see her as something of a proto-feminist, leading the way for future reforms in the twentieth century. Although understandable, this is essentially anachronistic*: it applies the conceptual lens of the early-twenty-first century to Ekaterina's actions in the mid-eighteenth century, when feminism did not yet exist as such. While many of the reforms that Ekaterina pursued did have some positive impact on women's lives and livelihoods, Russia under her rule remained a highly patrimonial and patriarchal state, with government

* This concept has been introduced in chapter 4.

ministries, soldiers in battle, and peasant households all led by men. Ekaterina was the exception to the rule, not a forebear of changing rules.

The Russian Empire, like many states before and after, had been built through the application of violence and war, as its armies and colonists spread outwards from the centre of Muscovy, building roads and towns and the very fabric of statehood. Its collapse following the February and October revolutions of 1917 equally gave rise to numerous new states born in war, from those recognizable today, like independent Finland or Poland, to those more ephemeral and largely forgotten, such as the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. Imperial rebirth in the guise of the Soviet Union during the years of civil war to follow (1918-1921) was just as much a process of war and the application of violence. The widespread destruction of the Civil War, along with its attendant massacres, uprisings, social upheavals and epidemics, took nearly five years to recede. By 1923, 15-20 million people had died since 1914, making the period, as Nikolai Kremmentsov has put it, a 'decade of death'.*

This was in part no accident. In fact, the USSR made the use of state-driven violence central to its methods of state formation, applying apparently indiscriminate executions, forced grain acquisition, and 'red terror' across the territories the Red Army tenaciously regained from breakaway republics, 'White' Imperial formations, and Western interventionist forces. Except that this terror was anything but indiscriminate: it was planned, bureaucratically organized, and executed in an order overseen in detail by the architects of Soviet state power, Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) and Yakov Sverdlov. During efforts to overcome a rebellion by Don Cossacks in southern Russia in January 1919, for example, Sverdlov issued an order for all Soviet soldiers 'to conduct mass terror against the rich Cossacks, exterminating them totally'.** Lenin, Sverdlov, and their Bolshevik supporters made explicit the principle that had long underpinned Russian state development: violence and war bind states together.

This chapter uses the example of modern Russian statehood in the period since 1750 to consider how state development is often closely linked to war. From the nascent beginnings of the Russian Empire in the Grand Duchy of Muscovy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the modern Russian Federation's newly aggressive policy of military expansion into Ukraine, the Russian state has grown geographically and institutionally through the application of violent force. Focusing on the last 250 years, this chapter will consider how the Russian state has grown in size and capacity under the ongoing pressure of repeated and endemic conflict, along with the key moments of rupture that have seen the state expand. The increasingly bloody wars of the nineteenth century presaged the brutality of Russia's (and the

* Nikolai Kremmentsov, 'Off with your heads: isolated organs in early Soviet science and fiction', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* Vol. 40, No. 2 (2009), pp. 87-100.

** As cited in: Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 162.

USSR's) experience of the early twentieth century. Born in the trauma of the Civil War, the Soviet Union existed for decades under the perceived threat of invasion, a shroud that was used to justify and provide for the massive mobilization of state resources and expansion of state capacity. This further heavily influenced the mentality of the Soviet regime, which was ultimately tested by the Second World War. Victory in 1945 became the founding myth of the Soviet Union and modern Russia, where war memory, national identity and conflict remain intertwined.*



Historiography

The Soviet Union, like the Russian Empire before it, was an empire: a state organized not around a titular nationality or ethnicity (as with many modern nation states, as already discussed in chapter 4), but instead on the basis of centralized control over an extended territory and many different populations. Although disagreement remains among scholars about the exact definition of an empire, there are several common parameters within which this discussion takes place. Empires involve territory, i.e., a geographical dimension, a population, and a sense of collective (shared) identity.



7.a Concept Definition

Empire

A large geographical space ruled by a single state with a population that shares a sense of common identity.

This shared identity is often related to the idea of civilization, which was defined in this handbook's introductory chapter as a complex society bound together by common rule and sharing a common territory, identity, means of communication, and/or religion. Therefore, the concept of empire can be seen as an organizational feature of civilizations. These ideas echo closely the conceptualization of the state offered by the early twentieth-century sociologist Max Weber, who defined the state as a territory and the monopoly of violence on that territory: in other words, when someone or a group of people are in charge of a defined geographical space, they rule, at the most basic level, by exercising the exclusive right to use force.

The use of force is integral to imperial sovereignty** in both its implementation and historical appearance. The emergence of empires, moreover, has long been a topic of investigation and debate among historians and has also been picked up by world historians. One notable theory which claims to explain the emergence of 'mega-empires' has been formulated by Peter Turchin and was introduced in

* These topics will be further discussed in chapter 9.

** This concept has already been introduced in chapter 4.

chapter 3.* Theories of Imperiogenesis like Turchin's have the advantage of being nominally global: the process of confrontation it describes is built upon examples from around the world, and could, in theory, be applied to most contexts. At the same time, the majority of Turchin's 'mega-empires' are to be found in East Asia, with the Chinese empires seemingly the most perfect example of his theory. The largest land empire in history, the Mongol Empire, which controlled the majority of Asia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, also closely fits the bill. This empire originated in present day Mongolia and at its high point under Chinggis Khan's sons and grandsons stretched from the Sea of Japan all the way to Eastern Europe. At the same time, Imperiogenesis theory has been less applicable in the Americas, where confrontations between settled populations and nomadic groups have been less obvious in the development of large-scale imperial formations.

A similar causal process linking external threats to the development of internal cohesion has become prevalent in studies and theoretical works on the history of state building in Europe, as already outlined in chapter 4. The thesis proposed by Charles Tilly, the most prominent advocate of this view, is that 'War made the state and the state made war'.** In fact, Tilly has argued, early state-building endeavors resembled organized crime, specifically protection rackets: those people commanding force convinced others to entrust their security to them in return for payments. This system of taxation allowed the ruler to offer protection and extend his or her control over other social goods, which reinforced claims to rule, authority, and legitimacy. The coercive machinery could eliminate domestic rivals and strengthen outward claims to authority. With time, this system became a self-reinforcing process, similar to the Imperiogenesis theory, and encouraged others to follow suit. If the level of organization remained weak, the territory and population could be usurped by stronger neighbors. In his work, Tilly identifies two parameters for judging state strength: coercion and capital – that is, armed forces and taxation. Nascent states could use both or either of these to establish and defend their sovereignty. In their modern form, states thus began to coalesce around centers of coercion and capital in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Western Europe.

While Tilly's theory of state formation focused largely on control over territory, other scholars have expanded the field of state control to population, emphasizing the ways that coercive power and financial might are built upon and linked to human bodies as much as the physical resource of land. In the 1970s, Michel Foucault persuasively argued that the formation of the *modern* state in the mid-to-late eighteenth century was connected to the development of large standing armies, and the subsequent need to organize and feed populations. As warfare shifted to

* Turchin, 'A Theory for Formation of Large Empires'.

** Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, 900-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990). Charles Tilly, 'War-Making and State-Making as Organized Crime' in: Peter E. Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds) *Bringing the State Back In*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

include mass armies and massive destruction, state's central concerns shifted from controlling borders to controlling people.* More recently, a group of influential economic historians have also argued that from the beginning state formation was at least partially a process of controlling internal dissent through violence: that the conflict that led to state organization was not always an external one to be confronted on the steppe, but a question of internal population control through violence.** As with Tilly's state formation theory and ideas of Imperiogenesis alike, these frameworks agree that violence and war-making have been an inherent part of the process of political power consolidation and state formation.



7.b Concept Definition

War

Violent engagement by at least two identifiable actors commanding force, claiming to represent a group of people to realize a political cause. It involves aggression, destruction and the use of lethal violence.

Notwithstanding Turchin's focus on East Asian 'mega-empires', one of the challenges that continues to face theories of state and imperial development is their heavy emphasis on Western Europe. Tilly's work dealt with Western Europe in the early modern period; Foucault wrote about France; modern theoretical works continue to dwell on the establishment of state power in Europe, rather than elsewhere, while still purporting to a certain universalism. There is, in fact, very little informed theory about similar processes of state building in different geographic and temporal contexts. By the twentieth century, notably, state formation was very different: it took place, by and large, in an environment where territory was already divided, demarcated, and set – but where control over this territory was contested in the process of decolonization. State sovereignty over territory had been a given since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (see chapter four) and most recently confirmed in the Charter of the United Nations drafted at the end of the Second World War, but it has found its nominally insurmountable footing frequently challenged over the last eighty years.

Perpetually caught between its European capitals and Asian territorial holdings, the Russian imperial states and modern Russia alike provide an important bridge between the Eurocentrism of many state formation theories and much of the rest of the world. Russians themselves have spent centuries asking to what degree the history of their state can be understood as a properly 'European' example, and to what degree it might be better categorized as 'Asian' or exclusively 'Russian'. From

* Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), esp. p. 65.

** Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

the beginning of the nineteenth century, these discussions formed the basis of an ongoing debate between ‘Slavophiles’, such as Sergei Uvarov, who argued that the Russian Empire’s path of Asian conquests set it apart from other European powers, and the ‘Westernizers’, who suggested that Eastern geography was immaterial to Russia’s underlying status as a European state. By the mid-1800s, these debates were becoming political, with intellectuals advocating Western reforms, whether of a romantic bent, like Ivan Turgenev, or a more radical socialist one, like Nikolai Chernyshevsky, not only looking to Europe, but living for decades in European countries and suggesting European changes for Russia. Their Slavophile opponents, however, found support in the final two Romanov Tsars, Aleksandr III and Nikolai II, both conservative figures who were skeptical of the West and promoted a return to Nikolai I’s slogan of ‘Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality’. In this reading of history, Russia had been held together for centuries through the controlling application of force over vast territories – conditions different than seen in contemporary Europe.

With the fall of the Romanov Empire in 1917, however, Russia’s historical ‘peculiarity’ was undermined by Vladimir Lenin and the architects of Bolshevism, who argued that the Russian lands were part of the worldwide history of economic development, which in turn drove state growth and revolution. It was capital, not autocratic coercion, that had dictated Russian expansion: as everywhere else, capitalism had developed and expanded and was now, in the Bolshevik reading, being challenged by the working classes. Following the works of Karl Marx and Georgy Plekhanov, Lenin and the other Bolsheviks laid out a theory of state expansion that would remain dominant throughout the Soviet period, whereby the Russian state followed the same patterns of capitalist and economic-driven expansion seen across the world. Imperialism, as Lenin famously penned, was simply the highest stage of capitalism.*



7.c Concept Definition

Marxism

*Political philosophy developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) in his book *Das Kapital* (1867). It sees the world as consisting of and being driven by structural and material factors that determine its development.*

Theories of war and state expansion that contradicted the Leninist paradigm and emphasis on capital tended to find little support in the USSR. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the Russian historian and ethnologist Lev Gumilev began publishing a series of works on the ‘ethnogenesis’ of the Russian people and the expansion of empires across the Russian steppe. Like Turchin’s more modern

* See: Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism, kak vysshiaia stadiia kapitalizma* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1949).

work, Gumilev emphasized the role of geography and conflict between states as the driving force behind Russian state growth; he also suggested that Russia was much more an 'Asian' empire than a European state, having been born in the synthesis of Mongol, Turkic, and Russian peoples.* Gumilev was heavily criticized and his works suppressed during the Soviet period, but in some ways they aligned with Western theories of Russian state development and expansion during the Cold War, which also frequently saw conflict with surrounding powers at the heart of Russian growth. Seemingly following George Kennan's famous 'long telegram' of 1948, many Cold War-era studies pointed to Russia's (and the USSR's) status as a largely land-locked empire surrounded by at times hostile neighbors.** This made border security paramount, which in turn tended to drive expansionist visions of security and, frequently, war.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation has elicited a variety of approaches to its again malleable statehood. With violence accompanying the disintegration of the Soviet imperial state and, more recently, the new expansion of the Russian Federation into some parts of the former USSR, the relative importance of capital ('Western' models of state-building and/or conflict) and coercion (more imperial applications of violence) is again under discussion. In Russia and the West, some historians have emphasized the ways in which the USSR's and Russia's experiences of war and violence adhere to worldwide standards: Mark Harrison, for example, has shown how the Soviet Union was ultimately able to overcome Nazi Germany in the Second World War because of its embrace of technological standardization, which allowed it to produce more guns and bullets than its adversary.*** In a similar theoretical line, Vadim Volkov has written about Russia in the 1990s as a classic example of Tilly's ideas about states developing as protection rackets, representative, Volkov argues, of the violent chaos of the immediate post-Soviet years that has since coalesced around a strong Russian state.*** While Harrison, Volkov, and others have aligned contemporary Russian war-making and security with broader twentieth century processes of state development and modernization, other commentators have seen increased signs of Russian 'exceptionalism', especially in the post-2014 annexation of Crimea. In Russia, the theory of 'Eurasianism', which advocates Russia's domination over the former Soviet space, has found an increasing number of advocates; in the West, many historians have suggested that Russia's often violent expansionism places

* See, for example: Lev Gumilev, *Etnogenez i biosfera zemli* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1989).

** The 'long telegram' has been electronically archived by the National Security Archive in Washington; online at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>. Last accessed 15 December 2021.

*** Mark Harrison, *Accounting for War: Soviet Production, Employment, and the Defence Burden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

**** Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

its model of statehood outside of the Western norm. The history of Russian state development since 1750, as this chapter outlines, holds much evidence supporting both sides of the ongoing debate. The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, moreover, put the country's expansionism into particularly sharp focus, while demonstrating both the state's engagement with broader processes of geopolitical change, such as NATO expansion, as well as its frequently exceptional level of response.

The Eighteenth Century: Russia Emerges as an Empire

Ekaterina II, the adopted Russian Empress who had come to power through a *coup d'état*, would become known as 'the Great' not only because of her expansion of the Empire, but also through her introduction of modernizing policies throughout her rule (1762-1796). This brought Russian statecraft, military practices, and general societal organization further in line with European norms. She expanded and codified policies begun under her predecessors to nationalize the wealth and land holdings of the Orthodox church and legalized earlier practices that had aimed to professionalize the Russian officer corps. Before the mid-eighteenth century, Russian noble families had been obliged to serve the Empire in its armies; by the latter part of the century this was no longer the case. When noble sons did serve, they chose it as a calling, and were both more dedicated and more professionalized as a result. They also began to be outnumbered by professional soldiers and officers from the non-noble classes, including freed peasants and merchant families, a trend that would continue over the coming 150 years before the First World War. With the base of the Russian army and navy drawn from peasant levies and irregular Cossack divisions, this newly professionalized Russian officer corps solidified the Empire's army as one of the most national in Europe – it relied much less than many other states on hired foreign mercenaries.

The national character of the Russian armies was emphasized by Russia's Tsars who – like many late eighteenth century European states – saw the expansion of their territory and power as the outward movement of 'civilization'. In Russia's case, this was an Orthodox Christian civilization challenging the non-Christian rulers of the Far East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, or the Ottoman Empire. In the wars with the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, Russia continuously emphasized the need to protect Orthodoxy and Orthodox believers, a struggle that culminated in the two late eighteenth century Russo-Turkish Wars (1768-1774 and 1787-1792). Initially drawn into a conflict over Poland's royal succession and conflict between Russian and Polish spheres of influence in Ukraine, Ekaterina and her generals, including the famous Peter Rumiantsev and Grigorii Potemkin, managed to use these wars to significantly expand Russian rule south and west into former Ottoman territory.

In 1771, Russian armies captured the Crimean Isthmus for the first time, and from there spent decades capturing Ottoman forts and removing the remaining traces of the Crimean Khanate, the Ottoman's former client state. Over the same decades, the Russian state took advantage of its growing power, capacity for military expansion, and geopolitical weight to oversee three partitions of Poland, finally undermining any threat from the last vestiges of the non-Orthodox state that had overseen the pillage of Moscow in the time of troubles centuries before. By 1794, Russian troops under Aleksandr Suvorov had captured Warsaw; Poland itself was divided primarily between Russia and Prussia, removing the independent state from the map entirely and gifting the Russian empire with more than three million new subjects in Poland and modern Ukraine and vast territories in Eastern Europe.

During the Russian Empire's eighteenth century wars of southern and western expansion, Ekaterina also founded a new military order and medal that symbolized the national and civilizational nature of the Empire's expansion. On the saint day of St. George, November 26, 1769 (according to the Russian Empire's Julian calendar), Ekaterina issued an order establishing the 'Military order of the St. George the Victorious' for Russian officers. A gold square cross with expanded points with a small enameled portrait of St. George at its center, the medal accompanying election to the order was meant to be hung on a 'silk ribbon with three black and two yellow stripes'. With four levels of award, the Order of St. George was given only for exceptional military valor and victory, becoming the highest military order and medal given in the Russian Empire. From the first recipient of the Order of St. George, Peter Rumiantsev, to the collapse of the Romanov dynasty in 1917, a total of 23 first degree medals were rewarded. Over time, the shape and coloring of the medals and ribbons changed: in 1913, for example, the yellow stripes on the ribbon were replaced



Images 7.2 Semyon Budyonnyi, Stalin and Georgii Zhukov, at Victory Parade, 24 June 1945

with orange, and a simpler medal, accompanied by the same ribbon, was instituted for rank-and-file soldiers in the early nineteenth century. Yet the medal and its ribbon remained symbols of victory throughout modern Russian history, even after the Order's formal dissolution by the Bolsheviks after 1917. In the Soviet period, recipients of the rank-and-file medal (as appropriately proletarian) were allowed to display it along with Soviet medals, and Soviet marshals including Georgii Zhukov and Semyon Budyonnyi were amongst those who wore it proudly. (Image 7.2).

During World War II, moreover, the Soviet military created a new 'Guards Ribbon', which co-opted the same three black and two orange stripes; this ribbon was also attached to the 'Order of Glory' instituted in 1943 and awarded during and after the war with Nazi Germany to soldiers displaying special bravery or valor in combat. As the Russian state continued to expand, the colors of war – the black of smoke and the yellow-orange flash of a rifle's firing – followed its soldiers.

The Order of St. George is the highest military order of the Russian Empire and the Russian Federation. It is awarded to those exhibiting exceptional bravery and is a symbol of Russian military might.



Image 7.3 Medal Order of St. George



Image 7.4 Georgii Zhukov (1896-1974), portrait 1960

The Nineteenth Century: Russia as a 'Great Power'

In the history of geopolitical conflict and state development, the nineteenth century is often seen as a sort of dress rehearsal for the absolute destruction of the first half of the twentieth century. European states built increasingly large overseas colonial empires and competed for territory, subjects, and wealth, while wars were fought between increasingly large, mobilized, and explosively armed militaries. Casualties increased exponentially, as did states' need for new soldiers to fill the ranks of larger armies. State agencies multiplied, while state regulation over populations – whether in terms of control through police forces and border regimes, or through the provision of medical, educational, and social services – became a regular part of many states' social orders. The Russian Empire faced these challenges from the somewhat exceptional geographical position of an empire conterminous with its imperial and colonial holdings, but this did little to change the overall trajectory of its nineteenth century.

The Russian Empire entered the 1800s as an undenied 'great power' in Europe, a status it had built through centuries of war and conquest. With unparalleled territorial and population resources, moreover, it was at the peak of its power, able to muster armies and finances to match nearly any adversary. At the end of the eighteenth century, Ekaterina II had passed a series of late reforms that had streamlined the Russian civil administration and organized the increasingly vast Empire into more manageable 'governorships' (*gubernii*). With the Empire stretching by 1800 from Poland in the west to the Chinese border and Kamchatka in the east (and increasingly covering stretches of the Caucasus and Central Asia to the south), effective rule was a difficult when not fraught enterprise. In the years before the development of the railroad or the telegraph, moreover, simply coordinating messages between provinces – not to mention moving troops to one or another border – was a matter of weeks or months at best. In response, the Russian Empire developed a complex series of state practices meant to solidify its rule outside of the core European territories. In conquered regions, the Russian army and its Cossack divisions would build a series of outpost forts (*forposty*) along the border, which would house a mix of peasant colonists and Cossack soldiers. They would also develop relationships with local leaders, and encourage local agriculturalists to make their homes in the areas surrounding the border forts. As communities took hold, the forts and accompanying units would move further into non-Imperial territory. In this way, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the Russian Empire had managed to solidify control over large swaths of northern Kazakhstan.

Other peripheral areas proved more conflictual. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Russia was involved in a series of border conflicts with the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran, resulting in significant territorial gains. Most of what is today Azerbaijan was conquered from Iran by 1806, while Georgia formally joined

the Empire in 1801, having partially been a protectorate of its northern neighbor. Further warfare with both southern empires over the 1810s and 1820s resulted in a further series of victories for Russia, bringing control of the remaining Georgian and Abkhazian lands on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, most of modern Armenia, and the Western shore of the Caspian Sea. By 1830, the entire Caucasus was formally under Russian rule: a rider travelling roughly southeast from St. Petersburg could now reach the border with Iran without ever leaving imperial territory. In practice, however, matters were more complicated, as the North Caucasus – the mountainous area between Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the south and the Russian lands along the Don River in the north – was inhabited by groups that had been neither consulted about this new imperial rule, nor, in fact, ever militarily conquered. For the next thirty years, a disparate coalition of Avar, Lezgin, Chechen, Ossetian, Ingush, Abkhaz, and other groups of mountain peoples continuously rebelled, harried, and raided Russian settlements north and south of the Caucasus mountains. Under the leadership of Imam Shamil, the instability was constant until the mid-1840s, when Mikhail Vorontsov became viceroy of the Caucasus and instituted a new and systematic approach to embedding Russian rule in the region. Auguring the later practices of colonial rule to be applied in Raj-era British India and across imperial holdings in the early twentieth century, Vorontsov eschewed chasing Shamil and his followers in favor of forcibly establishing Russian state power in the region. He levelled forests, built forts, encouraged Russian colonial settlements, deported hundreds of thousands of suspect individuals and entire villages, and co-opted local elites. By 1859 this policy of state-building had led to Shamil's defeat and capture.

At the same time as it expanded in the Caucasus, however, the Russian Empire was focusing the brunt of its attention – and armies – much further west. Like other European empires, the Russian Tsars and nobility were shocked by the regicide and excesses of the French Revolution and threatened by the expansionist campaigns of its nationalist armies under Napoleon Bonaparte. Beginning in 1799 under Tsar Pavel I, Russian forces fought against French revolutionary armies in Italy; from 1804 Aleksandr I, Pavel's son and successor, fought a decade-long battle against Napoleon himself, who had now declared himself Emperor of France. While between 1804-1811 Napoleon decisively won battles against Russia, Austria, Prussia, Britain, and their other allies, the 1812 invasion of Russia itself by Napoleon's massive force of 600,000 proved a turning point. Unable to defeat the Russian army under Mikhail Kutuzov or force it to surrender, Napoleon was ultimately left to withdraw after six months, having had his invasion force of 600,000 men harried by partisans, winnowed by desertion, lost to cold, and generally demoralized and disintegrated down to the 20,000 who returned to Paris.



Image 7.5 Retreat of Napoleonic forces from Russia

Never able to fully recover his military might, Napoleon finally surrendered to a Russian-led coalition in 1814; his attempt at a *revanche* was put down in 1815. Triumphant and emboldened by his victory over Napoleon, Aleksandr I helped to establish the Congress of Vienna and the Concert of Europe that followed Napoleon's defeat, which was meant to provide a forum for the 'great powers' to balance their interests. Rather than considering the need for reform to avoid such bloodshed in the future, he aligned himself with most monarchs in Europe, who felt that the threats of nationalist fervor and social uprising needed to be dealt with harshly and conservatively.

This conservatism also characterized the final decade of Aleksandr's rule, in which he turned away from earlier civil and military reforms in favor of an emphasis on piety and traditionalism. When the succession of his brother, Nikolai I, was marred in 1825 by an unsuccessful coup attempt led by the so-called Decemberists, a group of young military officers advocating liberal reforms and even constitutionalism in Russia, this Tsarist conservatism was only heightened. Fearing the influence of Western and liberal ideas, Nikolai founded the Third Section (*tret'e otdelenie*), Russia's first secret police and predecessor to the later and more famous Okhrana, and broadly opposed the need for reform. As other great powers rapidly modernized, the Russian Empire began to fall behind technologically, most notably in the sphere of railroads. This brought home the double edge of Russia's imperial sword: while

the empire could call upon unparalleled human and territorial resources, it was often stretched to breaking point when it came to harnessing and mustering these resources. This was made unavoidably and painfully obvious in the Crimean War of 1853-1856, where early Russian advances against the Ottoman Empire were ultimately crushed by greater British and French mobility on land and at sea alike.

Coming to power upon his father's death in the midst of the Crimean debacle, Tsar Aleksandr II clearly saw the need for reform. Having negotiated a quick, if ignoble, end to the Crimean War, Aleksandr moved to modernize the Russian economy and military. In 1861, he famously freed the Russian peasants from their state of serfdom, which had previously legally bound them to local landowners. Now peasants were free to move and change places of employment, which in part allowed the state to institute universal army service: from the 1870s, all Russian men were nominally obligated to serve up to six years in the military, with another nine in the reserves. Dmitrii Miliutin, Aleksandr's long serving War Minister, also expanded the officer corps, introducing new training programs, institutes, and further expanding the number of non-noble born officers. Following the examples of France, Prussia, and other European armies, Miliutin also instituted literacy training for all soldiers, significantly improving military efficiency as well as the population's basic educational level.

Miliutin's reforms were meant to streamline the Russian military by removing unnecessary administrative staff while improving mobilization times; they were also intended to boost morale and *esprit de corps* by making military service both more prestigious and more patriotic. The results in the coming decades were mixed. The Russian Empire's ongoing territorial expansion into Central Asia was very successful in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with highly motivated Russian armies moving quickly to capture the Qoqand Khanate and defeat and subject the Khivan Khanate and Bukharan Emirate to protectorate status by the early 1870s (some local military leaders, such as General Mikhail Chernaiev, were so motivated that they violated orders to capture cities, such as Tashkent, victories that were accepted after the fact by St. Petersburg). By 1881, the last holdout of Central Asian resistance, Geok-Tepe in Turkmenistan, had fallen to Russian control, placing the entire region under Tsarist rule. The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 also seemed to demonstrate the value of Miliutin's reforms, as Russian armies, emboldened by the call to 'protect fellow Slavs' in Serbia and the Balkans, soundly defeated the Ottoman military. When called to challenge Japan, a fellow rising power – and one that had much more consistently reformed and invested in modernizing its industry and military alike in the nineteenth century – Russia's armed forces fell short. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) for control of Manchuria and northern China was a disastrous rout for the Russian Empire. Its armies and navies were outgunned and outmaneuvered, and Tsar Nikolai II nearly lost control of the empire in the 1905 Revolution that followed in the wake of the military defeat.

The Twentieth Century: Violence and Consolidation

Having survived the military collapse of the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution, Nikolai II began Russia's twentieth century with a characteristic mix of reform and conservatism. The revolution forced him to allow a parliament, the Duma, to meet and discuss laws, but he and his advisors quickly moved to restrict its powers and, when necessary, simply dismiss it entirely. At the same time, he embarked on a massive program of economic development, promoting Russia as a sphere of foreign investment, encouraging British, French, German, and other corporations to build factories in Russia and rapidly expanding both the state's transport infrastructure and manufacturing capacity. The Russian military also expanded, as the state borrowed heavily from French banks to bankroll naval development, army expansion, and the purchase of armaments. As many other European powers, the Russian Empire had reached the limits of its imperial expansion, with further territorial gains blocked either by existing empires (such as the British Empire's Indian holdings) or buffer states (such as Iran). The same pressures of colonial expansion and economic competition that were bringing the rest of Europe to the brink of war were just as equally felt in St. Petersburg.

When war finally came in 1914, it proved more destructive and destabilizing than even the miasma of nineteenth century conflicts could have predicted. Entering the conflict in July-August 1914 as part of a web of alliances triggered by the assassination of the Austrian Grand Duke Franz Ferdinand and the subsequent threat to Serbia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire found itself consistently outgunned and outfought. Facing both Austrian and German divisions on the Eastern Front, the Russian military consistently lost ground and soldiers, while the war was from the beginning unpopular at home. By late 1916 the Tsar's armies were close to revolt and the economic situation was deteriorating across the country, which together led in late February 1917 (according to the Julian calendar; March elsewhere) to a popular protest that grew into a revolution. The Duma formed a Provisional Government, which asked the Tsar to abdicate. Now in control of the Russian Empire, the Provisional Government chose to adhere to its agreement with the allied powers and continued fighting the increasingly unpopular and unsuccessful war. Their political opponents, the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and other Social Democrats and Social Revolutionaries – all socialist parties – had no such commitments, and took advantage of growing resentment amongst soldiers and workers alike to overthrow the Provisional Government in October (November) 1917. In March 1918, now in control of central Russia, the Bolshevik government under Vladimir Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, removing Russia from the War at great territorial and economic cost.

This was hardly the end of fighting in Russia, however – in fact, violence was practically unending in one form or another for the next two decades. The Bolsheviks

spent the following three years (1918-1921) fighting a chaotic and constantly shifting civil war for control over the former imperial lands. Some territories, such as Poland and Finland, they lost to nascent nationalist movements; others, like Ukraine or the Caucasus, they recaptured through bloody fighting. Elsewhere across Eurasia they fought aristocratic officers, Tsarist loyalists, Allied interventionists and local power brokers and rebels for control, ultimately regaining the majority of territory once held by the Russian imperial crown. In some areas, such as southern Central Asia, however, fighting continued through the 1920s, as bands of anti-Soviet fighters known as 'basmachi' refused to give up. Having finally established control over the imperial lands by the end of the 1920s, the Soviet state under Joseph Stalin, who had emerged by 1927 as Lenin's successor, threw itself into an expansive plan for military preparation. Convinced that the Soviet Union, as the new Bolshevik state was now called, was surrounded by enemies waiting to attack the world's only socialist state, Stalin believed that the only choice was to become self-sufficient and militarily impregnable. To reach this goal, he pushed through centralized and forced industrialization: factories were built at any cost, workers were incentivized to move to cities, villages were 'collectivized' into state farms where costs could be kept low and surpluses could be directed to factories and factory workers. The military and security apparatuses were given priority access to goods and funding. Excesses were justified in this defensive industrial drive, from the massive use of prison labor in slavery-like conditions in the GULAG, to the deportations of millions of so-called 'kulaks' and potentially disloyal agriculturalists to distant empty plains in need of internal colonists, to the indiscriminate arrest, torture, and execution of hundreds of thousands of Bolshevik Party activists, workers, and officers in the 'Great Terror' of 1937-1938. Any and all acts were justified to prepare the state for the war that Stalin saw as coming.

When that war came, ironically, Stalin himself was ill prepared. Convinced by the late 1930s that the war would be fought with Nazi Germany, Stalin and his foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, signed a defensive agreement with Germany in 1939, the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Meant to provide the USSR a few more years of defensive preparation, this allowed the Soviet military to occupy parts of Poland and the Baltics – as well as engage in an inconclusive 'Winter War' with Finland – without worrying about German invasion. It also lulled Stalin into a false sense of security: he ignored warnings from his own spies about the invasion under preparation, and so on June 22, 1941 the USSR's military was completely overwhelmed by the mechanized German units that flooded over the border. The first months of the conflict were a catastrophe, as Stalin, having built an autocratic system that depended on his decision making, was lost for decisions, and city after city fell to the German forces. Only in November 1941 was a desperate stand for Moscow able to hold fast, but Leningrad was blockaded for years, and it took until 1943 for the Soviet military to stop the German advance in Stalingrad and begin a nearly two-

year push back to Berlin. In the end, it was at least in part Stalin's industrialization that guaranteed Soviet victory, along with the brilliance of military organizers like Dmitry Ustinov, who oversaw the evacuation of military factories to the Urals and Central Asia. The Soviet state also simply proved capable of producing more bullets over the long run. Like Napoleon's invasion a century before, the Nazi assault on the USSR brought forth patriotic fervor of almost unheard-of proportions, as the Soviet people fought for the survival of their state. If the fight against Napoleon had been the 'Patriotic War', then this was the 'Great Patriotic War' – a fight greater than any other.

It also carried losses greater than any other: more than 25 million total dead Soviet combatants and civilians, a loss that haunted the USSR for generations. Following victory over Nazi Germany in May 1945, moreover, the Soviet Union largely foreswore wars of territorial gain, instead opting for the proxy wars and border conflicts more characteristic of the later twentieth century. This was in line with the changing nature of world economies, including the USSR's: rather than direct control over territory or populations, what was now most valued was economic hegemony. Especially after the death of Stalin in 1954, his successors Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev saw the USSR's place as the promoter of socialism across the world, if necessary through the use of force – but most frequently the force of others. The USSR funded and supplied conflicts between anti-colonial or nationalist forces and the capitalist empires of the world, but its direct involvement in most of these conflicts remained secret or limited to the use of military advisors. This pattern was broken by the last, and longest, of Soviet conflicts, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989) in support of the revolutionary communist government. An inconclusive quagmire, the USSR withdrew shortly before its collapse in 1991, leaving a final stain of defeat on a military that had long ridden high on the victory of 1945 and its status as one of the strongest and most feared in the world. This cloud continued to hang over the Russian military throughout the 1990s. The military of the Russian Federation, which had taken the place of the central Soviet power, proved ineffective at holding territory, losing to the Chechen separatists in 1996 and gaining a reputation for corruption and ineffectiveness, reflective of what many Russians felt about their state as a whole. One of the central provisions of the Russian Federation's state-building after 1999 under Vladimir Putin, perhaps unsurprisingly, has thus been the reclaiming of military power and prestige. Chechnya was recaptured at great destructive cost in the early 2000s, and as Russian economic clout has grown in the past decades, so has Russian military activity, from support for Bashar al-Assad during the Syrian Civil War (2011–) or the annexation of Crimea in 2014 to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022. Military might has been accompanied by a resurgence of patriotic fervor, with the Order of St. George formally re-established in 2000 and the ribbon

accompanying it becoming an official symbol of victory over Nazi Germany – and thus Russian military power – in 2005.

Conclusion

Much like the world's other imperial formations, the Russian state in its many iterations has been forged through violence and war. This can be most clearly seen in the years of destruction wrought between 1914 and 1945 – the thirty years of constant war, forced collectivization and industrialization, terror, and then again war, where actors like the Bolsheviks made explicit the place of violence and death in binding states together. Yet it is also visible from the eighteenth century onward in the ways that Russian legal and economic reforms were consistently linked to the state's ongoing push to expand into new territories, conquer new peoples, and somehow rule over more than one seventh of the world's surface. The Russian serfs only became free peasants and then literate workers in the nineteenth century because of Russian military defeats that led to a need for better educated and more mobile soldiers. Waves of industrialization and economic development occurred in large part because of military considerations and concerns – and because contact and conflict with surrounding powers forced the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and Russian Federation to consider the need for change.

Guiding questions

1. What is the Imperigenesis theory and what does it claim to explain?
2. How are legal and economic reforms linked to military defeat or victory?
3. How representative is the Russian experience with war for the history of modern state development?
4. How can we explain the enduring relevance of the St George's ribbon in Russia?

Guide to Further Reading

- Billington, James, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1970). A classic treatment of Russian history from its inception to the twentieth century, with important comment on both culture and military expansion.
- Hosking, Geoffrey, *A History of the Soviet Union, 1917-1991, Final Edition* (London: Fontana Press, 1992). One of the clearest and most succinct overviews of Soviet history, including comment on the USSR's military campaigns.
- Odom, William, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). A clear-eyed analysis of the impact of the Soviet collapse on the previously unified military of the USSR and the now scattered armies of its successor states.
- Sakwa, Richard, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2016). A prescient overview of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.
- Stone, David R., *A Military History of Russia: From Ivan the Terrible to the War in Chechnya* (London: Praeger Security International, 2006). The most comprehensive single-volume work available on imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russian military action and campaigns.

CHAPTER 8.

Identity: From Traditional to Transnational

ARNOUT VAN REE



Image 8.1 Major General Chris Donahue, commander of the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division, XVIII Airborne Corps, boards a C-17 cargo plane at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, 29 August 2021



Introduction

The last US soldier left Afghanistan on 30 August 2021 after a 20-year occupation. It marked the second time in recent history that a superpower was forced to leave Afghanistan in defeat, after the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989. A US-led coalition invaded Afghanistan in 2001. This was a consequence of 9/11 when Al-Qaida terrorists hijacked several passenger planes and flew them into the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon. The invasion was justified by the fact that Al-Qaida was based in Afghanistan. Al-Qaida, responsible for the first attacks on the United

States since Pearl Harbor in 1942, had justified the use of violence through the work of Sayyid Qutb, the so-called philosopher of terror. Qutb's thinking has been used to legitimize armed struggle against those who are defined as heretics and non-Muslims. Yet, this is a reduction or simplification of Qutb's thinking. Furthermore, it has been used to legitimize Western views of Muslims being driven by religious fanaticism and (international) actions.* This ignores the fact that Qutb's thinking has been the result of historical processes and debates in the Islamic world on the role of religion in state and society. What are the links with nationalism and identity? In the Middle East, the period starting in the nineteenth century is defined as the *Nahda*, the Islamic Renaissance.**

This chapter will deal with these historical debates in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. These occurred not only because of developments within this part of the world, such as the decline of the Ottoman Empire, but also resulted from the increasing presence of European imperialism in the region since the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798. It was, also, France which first colonized a North African country, Algeria, in 1830. While the Islamic world had played an important role in terms of power, science, and trade in the centuries following the death of the prophet Muhammad, it steadily lost power in relation to Europe in the modern era. The Industrial Revolution led to a rapid rise of economic and military predominance of Europe. This gave rise to questions and debates in the MENA region about how state and society should be organized. What would be the role of religion? And how could modernization and development be introduced?***

These debates will be traced in this chapter by focusing on the various pan-movements in the MENA region. The main argument of this chapter will be that the different ingredients of identity formation in larger groups are very changeable over time. In particular, the pan-movements, Islamic modernism during the *Nahda* period, Pan-Arabism, and Islamism were attempts to address or resolve tensions between rising nationalism in the region and supranational identity or identities. Furthermore, these pan-movements attempted to help in the transition from a traditional to a modern society and negotiate identity in new political orders. The chapter echoes ideas about political order, offered in chapter four, as well as understandings of religion, discussed in chapter six.

We will first focus on Islamic modernism during the *Nahda* through the figure of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), the awakener of the East, and two of his disciples Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida.**** Afghani was a travelling revolutionary

* John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

** Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins* (London: Picador 2013), p. 117-118.

*** A recent publication discussing this dialectical process is: Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019).

**** Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (London: Arrow Books, 2005) p. 229.



Image 8.2 Battle of the Pyramids, 21 July 1798, by Antoine Jean Gros

surrounded by mysteries and rumors. He became one of the pioneers of the Nahda. His biography matches some of the important developments in the second half of the nineteenth century starting with the Indian Mutiny of 1857, which he witnessed first-hand. This would have a lasting impact on his political activism as he developed a lasting animosity towards the British and developed a drive to free the Muslim world from the burden of colonialism. In short, Afghani as an Islamic modernist argued for a profound rethinking of Islam in the face of the challenges posed by the West. A central part of his political thinking was that the Islamic world needed to unify behind a Muslim leader to resist increasing British and French colonialism. While, in the end Afghani failed in making this vision a reality, he did inspire other political ideologies with his thinking and rhetoric on colonialism, independence, the role of Islam and political activism.* The next dominant ideology became *Pan-Arabism*, which will be examined through Gamal Abdel Nasser.

* Christopher de Bellaigue, *The Islamic Enlightenment: The Struggle Between Faith and Reason 1798 to Modern Times* (New York: Liveright, 2017), in particular Chapter 5: 'Nation'. Nikkie R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani" A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).



8.a Concept Definition

Ideology

A body of coherent thought which influences and justifies the thinking and repertoire of actions of individuals, groups and societies.

This ideology emphasized that the Arab-speaking countries in the MENA region constitute one people as they share a common history, a linguistic bond, and a culture that was more important than religious or ethnic boundaries. Finally, we will focus on *Islamism* through the already mentioned figure of Sayyid Qutb. Islamism became a dominant response to the question of modernity following the collapse of political pan-Arabism in the 1960s. Islamism, in short, is the use of Islamic language and symbols to deal with these identity questions.

As will become clear in the chapter, these debates need to be placed within their historical context. It is, for example, not possible to explain the Nahda, pan-Arabism, Islamism or Qutb's thinking without tracing their global and regional connections. As Keith Watenpaugh argues in his book, modernity needs to be approached as a lived historical experience and engagement which gives rise to different but related responses.* The intellectuals discussed in this chapter were struggling with questions of identity and asked why they were perceived to be losing to the "other". Today this is mirrored in the discussions about the rise of populist politics, such as embraced by the former US president Donald Trump and his slogan "Make America Great Again", the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, Brexit, and the wave of protests in 2019 in Iraq, Lebanon, Chile and elsewhere.



Historiography

As Western European hegemony continued to extend over the world, European states came to control, directly or indirectly, more and more of the Islamic world. This led to increasing knowledge of the Orient especially following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. The production of scholarly work was used to justify and legitimize colonialism as the colonizers were bringing 'civilization', as already discussed among others in chapter six. There is a complex intertwining of the production of knowledge and the growing European power. The modern world was understood by many European scholars as the inevitable, and some believed, final outcome of human progress. This movement was attributed to the increasing power of human reason, the growing technical control that it acquired over the natural

* Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

and social world, to order social affairs.* The idea of the *homo islamicus* became dominant in scholarship on the Orient, an essentialist idea that is still present in contemporary debates namely that the identity of Muslims is solely defined by their religion. For the colonial period, this meant that the region was seen through the lens of the written sources of Islam using a philological approach. This perspective can be seen in the works of, among others, Ernest Renan who debated with Afghani on this topic, George Lane, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, Max Weber but also Karl Marx arguing that the civilization of the *homo islamicus* was static and incapable of change due to its attachment to religion. This was the Orientalist approach dominant until approximately the end of the Second World War.**



8.b Concept Definition

Orientalism

Essentialist approach to the Orient as constituting immutable and stereotyped characteristics of Arab and Asian culture and traditions.

The Second World War was followed by a very productive period in Area Studies as the sharp dichotomy between tradition and modernity experienced a reworking with social scientists taking a leading role in defining views of the MENA-region. Advocates of Area Studies argued that regions of the world should not be approached within the narrow confines of a certain discipline but through the cooperation of various disciplines. Instead of the Orientalist approach grounded in philology where key principles of a civilization were deduced from its classical texts, Area Studies paid attention to the complex dynamics of political, social, and cultural change within societies. However, both approaches, that of Area Studies and Orientalism, are premised on drawing sharp distinctions but on different bases. The latter bases itself on civilizations while the former does so based on tradition and modernity, in other words a perceived stage of development. It, furthermore, argues that through the education of so-called “European or secular” values and the transfer of technology, these less advanced societies could achieve development informed by the perception that European history could predict this. This change from a traditional to modern society would be realized through outside assistance, in other words through economic, political, and cultural influence of the West. This approach is illustrated by the work of scholars like Daniel Lerner, Nadav Safran, and Samuel Huntington. Huntington, for example, is probably best known for his

* Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) p. 1-4, 54.

** Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 66-100.

Clash of Civilizations thesis, which will be revisited in the conclusion.* He argued that, following the end of the Cold War, conflict would be determined by cultural and religious identities.



8.c Concept Definition

Clash of Civilizations thesis

Theory developed by Samuel Huntington which distinguishes nine civilizations in the world (Western, Orthodox, Latin American, Islamic, African, Hindu, Buddhist, Sinic and Japanese) based on shared culture, identity and religion. It claims that future conflict will take place on the fault lines between these civilizations.

This approach informed much of the political discourse during the War on Terror.**

These two dominant approaches of Area Studies and Orientalism were the subject of critique by a new generation of scholars influenced by a linguistic and cultural turn in Humanities exemplified in Edward Said's bestseller *Orientalism* (1976). Said himself said that the idea of Orientalism came to him because of the shock in Western media when the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal. The media questioned how the Arab 'barbarian', i.e. less modern, could be capable of this?***



Image 8.3 The 1973 Yom Kippur War: Egyptian army crossing Suez Canal

* Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1996).

** Lockman, *Contending Visions*, pp. 66-100, 234-242.

*** Edward Said, "Edward Said on Orientalism" interview by Sut Jhally, *Media Education Foundation*, 1998. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g Last accessed 15 April 2022.

The central idea of *Orientalism* is that European knowledge of the Orient consists of imagined constructs defined by everything that the West is not. This body of thought is influenced by the work of amongst others Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, post-structuralists who studied the relationship between power and knowledge production, i.e. discourse.



8.d Concept Definition

Post-Structuralism

A philosophical and theoretical approach that focuses on interpretivist and discursive practices based on the role of language. Language creates and shapes what we perceive to be real but post-structuralists believe there is no reality beyond that.

Using discourse analysis, Said noted that political, scholarly, and public narratives about the Orient were shaped by the changing power relations between the West and the MENA region, and as such represented a hegemonic perspective of reality.



8.1 The Study of History

Discourse

A coherent system of words, communications, meaning and practices that together construct our understanding of phenomena.

Post-colonial theory defines knowledge as generated under specific relations between the powerful and the powerless or the dominant class and the subordinate class. Post-structuralists point out how this knowledge production is used repetitively to legitimize certain interests.



8.e Concept Definition

Post-Colonial Theory

Theory focused on the continuities and discontinuities in language, understanding, practices and organization between colonial and post-colonial societies. It is focused on power disparities in these domains.

It should be noted that Said's critique was not necessarily new. Already in the 1960s Albert Hourani had critiqued the place of Islam in European historiography and its use in interpretations of history. Hourani and others argued that accurate knowledge, i.e. not knowledge produced in the interests of Western power over the region, could be produced through the analytical tools of political economy. Instead of the cultural essentialism of Orientalists or the teleology of modernization theory, "this meant giving explanatory primacy to such things as social structure, the local,

regional and global dynamics of capitalist development, and political and social struggles in their historical contexts.”*

The Nahda

Over the course of the nineteenth century, as mentioned above, the Islamic world was slowly but surely losing power in relation to Europe. This could be clearly seen in the territorial losses the Ottoman Empire suffered in the Balkans, the result of rising nationalism and ensuing struggles for independence, and North Africa with the colonization of Algeria and Tunisia by France.



8.f Concept Definition

Nationalism

A political philosophy and political movement focused on an idea and practice of the nation, which is based on shared identity and solidarity.

Furthermore, while the Islamic world had played an important role in terms of power, science, and trade, this was no longer the case. In this section we will focus on Jamal al-Din al-Afghani who, in the nineteenth century together with his followers Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, is commonly seen as one of the central figures in Islamic modernism. Islamic modernists argued for the selective incorporation of advances of European civilization. Islamic modernism came to Egypt from India through Afghani. While Afghani was born in Hamadan, Iran and educated in the religious madrassahs of Najaf, he went to India at age seventeen, in 1856, to learn, as he put it, ‘western sciences’ to supplement his religious education. India was at that time almost fully under direct control of the British Empire. India was where some of the earliest Islamic modernists lived such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898).**

Afghani was initially not too concerned with the Indian population suffering under the yoke of colonialism, but this changed following the Indian Mutiny, an uprising against the British powerholders in 1857. He was horrified by the level of violence with which the British, who had preached the values of the Enlightenment and modernity, suppressed this revolution. These events would have a lasting impact on his political activism as he developed a lasting animosity of the British and a drive to free the Muslim world from the burden of colonialism.*** His thinking can be distilled in three main conclusions: imperialism threatened the Middle East,

* Lockman, *Contending Visions*, pp. 183-215.

** De Bellaigue, *The Islamic Enlightenment*, chapter 5: Nation.

*** Aslan, *No god*, p. 229-231; Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982) p. 65.

this onslaught by the West could only be prevented by adopting modern technology of the West, and, finally, that Islam was an effective creed for mobilizing the public against the imperialists, although he rarely discussed Islam in religious terms.



Image 8.4 Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897)



Image 8.5 Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905)



Image 8.6 Rashid Rida (1865-1935)

Islamic modernism tends to be placed between traditionalism and secularism in terms of responses to the increased presence of the West and Western thinking. Traditionalism, briefly, represents the response whereby everything seen as non-Islamic or secular is rejected. It is argued that the community, the ummah, should instead return to the original society established by the Prophet at the beginning of Islam. The best-known example of this response is the rise of Wahhabism on the Arabian Peninsula in the nineteenth century. Islamic modernism also argues that Islam had to be profoundly rethought in the face of the challenges posed by the West but did not reject ‘Western’ ideas or advances out of hand. This rethinking was possible as Islam could be applied to all areas of life. It not only contains rules for the afterlife (*‘ibādāt*) but also contains rules for regulating social life and society (*mu‘āmalāt*). These rules together constitute *Shari‘ā*. They had come into existence through the interpretation of the *Sunna* and the *Qur‘ān* by clerics, a process called *ijtihād*, independent reasoning. However, over the course of history this process had increasingly been closed off as the principle of *taqlid* became dominant. This meant the sources were no longer interpreted and the already established rules should be followed.* Islamic modernism argued that the practice of *taqlid* had suffocated creative thinking and led to rigidity. Thus, *ijtihād* had to be revived within Islam

* For an introduction to the Islamic law, *Shari‘ā*, see: Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

as the only completely authoritative sources were the Qu'ran and the Sunna. These had to be re-interpreted in light of modern knowledge and practice. Thus, it would be through *ijtihad* that reform and progress within the Islamic world would be possible.*

Thus, reason or rationality had an important role for Afghani. However, Afghani argued that the intellectual foundations of Western modernity with its ideals of social egalitarianism, popular sovereignty, and the preservation of knowledge originated with Islam and Muhammad's first community in Medina. According to Afghani, Islam was a religion where the use of an individual's reason or rationality had been promoted to come to the core of their religion.** In the Western world this shift in the modern era eventually led to a break-down of traditional hierarchies, such as a separation of church and state in society. This is an important point of difference with Afghani and Islamic modernism, since Islam was to play a central role in their approach to modernity and the reorganization of Islamic society from traditional to modern.

Afghani argued for a political role of Islam by arguing for religious-based nationalism as part of his thinking on how the state should be structured to be able to face the rising challenge of the West. Islam would be an important source for solidarity and the struggle against imperialism. Furthermore, Afghani argued that political reform was necessary to counter the decline and the backwardness. Despotism and the lack of freedom were seen as major reasons for "Muslim sicknesses."*** Afghani saw Islam as the means to protect the Islamic world against the complete domination by the colonizers like the British in India. Interestingly, an appeal for unity between Sunni and Shia runs through the works of Afghani, a unity that has never been achieved. Over time he increasingly argued for unity behind the Ottoman Sultan despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire did not give a say to its citizens in the running of the state.**** A main point in Afghani's political ideas was that the people should have a say in the running of their nation-state.

“For those governed by the republican government, it is a source of happiness and pride. Those governed by a republican form of government alone deserve to be called human; for a true human being is only subdued by a true law that is based on the foundations of justice and that is designed to govern man's moves,

* William E. Shepard, *Introducing Islam: second edition* (London: Routledge, 2014) p. 229-255.

** Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) p. 113-116.

*** Azzam Tamimi, 'Islam and Democracy from Tahtawi to Ghannouchi', *Theory, Culture and Society* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2007), pp. 39-58, p. 43-44.

**** Nikkie R. Keddie, "AFĠĀNĪ, JAMĀL-AL-DĪN," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/5, pp. 481-486, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/afgani-jamal-al-din%20> Last visited 19 December 2021.

actions, transactions and relations with others in a manner that elevates him to the pinnacle of true happiness.”*

Afghani promoted a republican form of government since people would be able to assume their political and social role by participating in governing. This political reform would address the lack of freedom. However, this political reform should occur without abandoning religious principles; blindly copying the European civilization would endanger the sovereignty of the ummah, the community of believers, as the Islamic fundamentals would be abandoned. Afghani thus argued for a form of religious nationalism where the ummah would be united through Islam.**

Afghani's views on the role of Islam, its relationship with rationality and its role or that of any religion in the progression from a traditional to modern society become clear in his public debate with Ernest Renan in the *Journal des Débats* on 18 May 1883. Afghani was responding to Renan's lecture "L'Islamisme et la science" (Islam and science), delivered in 1883. Renan argued that the Arabs were incapable of progress and intolerant.*** The Muslim is, Renan argued, not capable of reason, but is led by religious fervor with all the attached consequences. Afghani countered that "no nation at its origin is capable of letting itself be guided by pure reason."**** Moreover, he argued that religion had an important role to play in civilizational development. It is through religious education that every civilization, including the Christian one, has developed into modernity.

Afghani's writings and speeches showcase that knowledge does not belong to any one culture or is bound by borders. Yet, when making up the balance sheet of the impact of Afghani and Islamic modernism, it must be concluded this was negligible at the time. Islamic modernism promoted reform and not rebellion. Afghani had focused on the elite and overlooked the role of popular mobilization. He never succeeded in mobilizing these leaders to revolt and throw out the colonizing states. At the end of his life Afghani himself also wondered whether focusing on popular mobilization would not have been more effective.***** However, Afghani did continue to influence events after his death through his impact on Abduh and Rida who took his thinking further into two different directions. Abduh's contributions, on the one hand, focusing on the role of autocracy in bringing about modernity are reflected in the dictatorship of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Rashid Rida's work, on the

* Tamimi, "Islam and Democracy", p. 45.

** Mishra, *From the Ruins*, p. 97-98.

*** Margaret Kohn, 'Afghānī on Empire, Islam, and Civilization', *Political Theory* Vol. 37, No. 3 (2009), pp. 398-428, p. 406.

**** Ibid.

***** Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*, p. 195-196; Abrahamian, *Iran*, p. 62-65.

other hand, increasingly gave dominance to the role of Islam as the blueprint for society and the state. It is this line of thinking that inspired Sayyid Qutb.*

Pan-Arabism

Abduh was a close collaborator of Afghani. He was a publisher of the journal *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* together with Afghani when they lived in Paris from 1883 to 1885. Abduh later in life broke with one of the central ideas of Afghani. He became convinced that the Egyptian struggle for independence from colonization was premature and that Egypt needed European tutelage so that it could become developed and join the world community. This would be a period of national education that, if needed, could be under autocratic rule. The intellectuals Abduh influenced took his legacy into a secularist direction, into the direction of pan-Arabism. Pan-Arabism formed another potential answer to the challenge of negotiating identity and order in a modern world. The answer as to how to organize state and society is best exemplified in the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser. The discourse on identity and Pan-Arabism became dominant after the Second World War with the rise of authoritarian rule in the MENA region.

Nasser, just as Qutb who will be discussed below, was part of an anti-colonial generation, sharing concerns over cultural regeneration and national renaissance. President Nasser became the embodiment of the Arab world as assertive, independent, and as builder of a new society liberated from imperial legacies. He was a symbol of how political leadership in the Arab world changed in the 1950s from upper-class civilian politicians educated in European-style institutions, to young military officers with more humble backgrounds. He briefly studied law but then joined the army. He fought in the first Arab-Israeli war and saw it as his duty, just as many of his fellow Free Officers, to avenge this disaster, the *Nakba*. The *Nakba* and the question of Israel seemed to have been one of the reasons to overthrow the old regime, a regime installed by the British. Another reason was the increasing social and economic divide in Egypt.**

Nasser's coup took place on 23 July 1952, as the Free Officers, a group of young officers in the Egyptian army, grabbed power and overthrew the Egyptian monarchy. The Free Officers transformed into the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) with a revolutionary program.*** The realization of the goals of the Revolutionary Command Council was a modernization of society through a revolution led from

* Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, p. 148-150; Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*, p. 287.

** Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 152-174.

*** Nasser outlined the goals of the revolution in his book: Gamal Abdel Nassar, *The Philosophy of The Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Economica 1959).

above by a socialist state. The autocrat would educate the population, and this would lead to development and modernity as envisioned by Abduh. The Nasserist project as a social and political revolution was the building of a new nation based on industrialization and anti-colonial nationalism.*

Pan-Arabism was an important part of this, although it predates Nasser, having been formulated during the Nahda.



8.g Concept Definition

Pan-Arabism

A movement and discourse that emphasized that the Arab-speaking countries in the MENA region constitute one people as they share a common history, a linguistic bond, and culture that was more important than religious or ethnic boundaries.

It contrasts with Islamic modernism or Islamism in favoring a separation, or even subordination, of religion to politics. However, it was not until Nasser came to power that pan-Arabism came to dominate national and foreign policy in the 1950s and 60s. His Pan-Arabism resulted in several foreign policy triumphs that made Nasser the unquestioned leader of the Arab world until 1967. Pan-Arabism became equated with Nassarism. These triumphs were the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, his refusal to join the Baghdad Pact, his ability to play the competing superpowers to his benefit regarding loans for his Aswan Dam project and arms deals, the Non-Aligned Movement with the Bandung Conference** (1955) and Cairo Conference (1957), and, finally, the United Arab Republic. Nasser, thus, pursued a twin project of national and transnational transformation where Egypt was moving in Arab, African, and Asian networks of anti-colonial resistance since “the national and the international were mutually reinforcing routes to liberation.”***

The establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR, 1958-1961), the political union of Egypt and Syria, represents the high point of pan-Arabism and anti-colonial politics in the Arab world. The political union was born out of necessity for the Syrian Ba’ath party as they feared a communist take-over. For Nasser it presented an opportunity to balance his pan-Arabist rhetoric with pragmatic domestic and

* Sara Salem, *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) p. 2; Reem Abou-El-Fadl, ‘Neutralism Made Positive: Egyptian Anti-colonialism on the Road to Bandung’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 42, No. 2 (2015), pp. 219-240, p. 222.

** A recording of Nasser’s speech at the opening of the Asian African conference at Bandung, available at: <http://www.nasser.org/MediaViewer.aspx?VideoID=SPCH-AUD-23126-en> The text in Arabic: <http://www.nasser.org/TextViewer.aspx?TextID=SPCH-339-en> Last accessed 15 April 2022.

*** Reem Abou-El-Fadl, ‘Building Egypt’s Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity and the 1957 Cairo Conference’, *Journal of World History* Vol. 30, Nos. 1-2 (2019), pp. 157-192, p. 163-164, 170-171; Reem Abou-El-Fadl, ‘Early pan-Arabism in Egypt’s July revolution: the Free Officers’ political formation and policy-making, 1946-54’, *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2015), pp. 289-308.



Image 8.7 Presidents Abdel Nasser and Shukri al-Quwatli Signing Unity Pact, Forming the United Arab Republic, February 1958



Image 8.8 Nasser meeting with Che Guevara in 1965

foreign policy. It presented him with the opportunity to rid himself of a rival in Syria. Furthermore, it represented an attempt to overturn imperial legacies, in particular the contentious state borders resulting from the Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and Great Britain made during the First World War, and to put into practice the pan-Arabist idea of a unified regional state. However, reality quickly surpassed this dream as Nasser's draconian style of rule proved the undoing of the UAR. The breaking point was reached in 1961 when Syrian military officers staged a coup and dissolved the UAR. It failed because it had turned into a state completely dominated by Egypt.*

Pan-Islamism

The collapse of the UAR signaled the collapse of pan-Arabism and the regional popularity of Nasser as well. This process was also hastened by increasing regional political rivalries and the devastating loss of the Six-Day War of 1967 during which Israel inflicted heavy losses on the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian forces. These events and the failure of the different authoritarian regimes to deliver on their promises of development and modernization led to a resurgence of Islamic religious practices during the 1970s and the rise of Islamism. This represents the third “answer” to the challenge of identity and modernity. This strand of thinking

* Dina Rezk. ‘Egypt’s revolutionary year: Regime consolidation at home, pragmatism abroad, and neutralism in the Cold War’, in: Jeffrey G. Karam (ed.) *The Middle East in 1958: Reimagining a Revolutionary Year* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 92–112.

will be discussed through the person of Sayyid Qutb. Qutb is popularly known as the ‘philosopher of terror’ as his thinking supposedly inspired the suicide attacks by jihadist terrorists perpetrating 9/11. However, as Omnia El Shakry argues, this interpretation has focused on Qutb’s thought without situating “him within a sufficiently complex and symbiotic local ideological landscape.”*

Afghani’s disciple Rashid Rida can be seen as a bridge between Islamic modernism and Islamism. Unlike Afghani and Abduh, he witnessed the demise of the Caliphate and collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. This marked him deeply. It was the first time in the Islamic world that there was no Caliphate, a religious and political center for the ummah. Rida argued that only through a revived Caliphate, where religious law (sharia) would be applied, could the weakening of the Islamic world be reversed. Rida influenced Hasan al-Banna, who went on to establish the al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, known as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Rida’s work enabled the elitist work of Abduh and Afghani to enter into the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood. He rejected the gradual approach of Abduh, reform through education, for a more revolutionary and confrontational stance. The Muslim Brotherhood developed into the largest and probably most influential organization of modernist Islamic thought and action. They engaged in charity, education, and politics in the MENA-region over the course of the twentieth century.** Qutb became the leading philosopher of the MB from the 1950s onwards for which he was imprisoned several times by Nasser’s regime. While the RCC had initially worked with the MB, following an assassination attempt against Nasser, the organization was outlawed and suppressed from 1954 onwards.

Qutb had belonged to a secular nationalist literary circle in Cairo before joining the MB in 1953. He, thus, belonged to the new educated class socialized into modernist and nationalist symbols that arose during British imperialism.*** Qutb’s gradual shift towards a progressive interpretation of religion as a solution to the issue of modernization and modernity was the result of several drivers. These include the failure of the regime to deliver on its promises of modernization and the resurgence of religiosity in the region. Also, his time studying in the United States played an important role.****

* Omnia El Shakry, ‘AHR Roundtable: ‘History without documents’: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East’, *American Historical Review* Vol. 120, No. 3 (2015), pp. 920-934, p. 925-927.

** Dietrich Jung and Ahmed el Zalaf, ‘Hasan Al-Banna and the Modern Muslim Self: Subjectivity Formation and the Search for an Islamic Order in Early 20th-Century Egypt’, *Numen* Vol. 66, No. 4 (2019), pp. 381-402, p. 382.

*** Patrizia Manduchi, ‘Arab Nationalism(s): Rise and Decline of an Ideology’, *Oriente Moderno* Vol. 97, No. 1 (2017), pp. 4-35, p. 16-17

**** Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, chapter 3.



Image 8.9 Sayyid Qutb

Qutb went to the US in 1948 in service of the Egyptian ministry of Education to study western methods of education. He stayed at the Wilson's Teacher College until 1950. During his stay he became increasingly disillusioned, confronted with consumerism and a lack of morality and religion.* As Qutb writes:

“The researcher of American life will stand at first puzzled before a wondrous phenomenon, a phenomenon that exists nowhere else on earth. It is the case of a people who have reached the peak of growth and elevation in the world of science and productivity, while remaining abysmally primitive in the world of the senses, feelings, and behavior.”**

Qutb seems to echo Afghani's idea of European civilization and the lack of a moral center. He turned against the racism, the sexual permissiveness, liberal individualism, and pro-Zionism he perceived to be present in the US. Upon his return to Egypt, he rejected a job at the ministry of education and joined the Muslim Brotherhood.

Qutb has described his intellectual journey as his own *jahiliyya*. This idea of jahiliyya comes from his book *Milestones*, published in 1964.

* Ibid., chapter 4.

** Sayyid Qutb, “The America I Have Seen”: In the Scale of Human Values (1951), in: Kamal Abdel-Malek (ed.) *America in an Arab Mirror: Images of America in Arabic Travel Literature: an Anthology 1895-1995* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) p. 11.



Image 8.10 Qutb's book
Milestones (Arabic version)



Image 8.11 Qutb's book
Milestones (English version)



It was written while he was imprisoned by Nasser's regime. Here he argues that not only non-Muslims but also Muslims are *jahili*, ignorant. This term references the period before the rise of Islam. The usage of this language justifies confrontation with Nasser and other regimes on religious and political grounds. These regimes were not only authoritarian (political) but also unbelievers (religious). Qutb argued that the contemporary Muslim regimes were not Islamic. He, furthermore, extended the responsibility to ordinary people to change this but also included those ordinary people who must be brought or coerced back into Islam. While Qutb did not explicitly advocate for the use of violence to overthrow these un-Islamic regimes or return people to the fold, this has been the conclusion drawn by his followers. Qutb's reasoning does, however, make it the duty of each individual Muslim to practice *jihād*, to bring about the Islamic state.*



8.h Concept Definition

Islamism

The belief that Islam contains all the answers and solutions for dealing with the questions of modernity. This discourse, thus, makes use of Islamic language and symbols. It is also referred to as political Islam.

Islamism continued its rise in popularity following Qutb's execution and another disastrous war, the 1973 Yom Kippur War. This climaxed in 1979 with three events that continue to have an impact today. While these events may not be directly linked

* Gerges, *Making the Islamic World*, p. 139-140.

to Qutb, they are the result of the same historical processes. The first event was the occupation of the Grand Mosque of Mecca by a group that called for the overthrow of the House of Saud. The second event was the invasion by the Soviet Union of Afghanistan, an invasion that led to the support of Afghan resistance fighters, the mujahedeen, by the US and other countries. Furthermore, support was mobilized on an international level using Islamist language, presenting it as a jihad, that resulted in international Muslim fighters travelling to Afghanistan. In the end this resulted in the establishment of the Taliban and Al-Qaida.* And, finally, in 1979 the shah of Iran was overthrown following the Iranian Revolution that was successful due to the coalition of reformers and ulama, the foundations for which were laid by Afghani's thinking.** This resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini reinterpreting the role of Islam in politics and society with his theory of *velayat e-faqih*, the rule of the jurisprudent.***



Image 8.12 Mujahedeen visit White House with President Reagan, 1983

* Manduchi, 'Arab Nationalism(s)', p. 21-22.

** Kohn, 'Afghānī', p. 400.

*** Abrahamian, *Iran*, p. 496-529.



Image 8.13 Coffeehouse-style painting depicting the Islamic Revolution with the Shah's exile and Khomeini's return, circa 1979.

Description: Scenes from the Revolution are played out on a map of Iran. The Shah is shown leaving carrying two bags marked with the US and UK flags filled with gold and money, flanked by a dog and a demon from Hell. Ayatollah Khomeini emerges from the mist above the outline of Iran, holding the Koran in his right hand and with the green banner of the Prophet waving behind him.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the historical debates in the Islamic world on how to navigate identity with political ordering and modernity. What is the role of religion

in the state and society, nationalism, and identity in the Middle East? We began at the end of the nineteenth century during the period in the MENA region defined as the Nahda, the Islamic renaissance. We saw the rise of Islamic modernism, a call to profoundly rethink the challenges posed by the West. This was possible as Islam was the truth of God revealed to the Prophet and it applied to all areas of life. However, it included the selective incorporation of certain Western ideas and technologies. The important figure was Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. As Pankaj Mishra noted, 'Afghani is barely known in the West today, even though his influence ... at least in its longevity, almost matches Marx's.'*

Two of Afghani's disciples, Abduh and Rida, in turn influenced pan-Arabism and Islamism respectively. Pan-Arabism argued for bonds based on language, history and culture and favoring, unlike Islamic modernism, a separation or even subordination of religion to politics and a focus beyond the narrow concept of the nation-state. It peaked under Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime, which indeed strictly controlled religion. It is the failure of the UAR and the failure of authoritarian regimes to deliver on its socio-economic promises of modernization that led to the rise of Islamism. This was reviewed through the thinking of Sayyid Qutb. Islamism rejects everything Western and calls for the return to 'authentic' Islam, which would bring about modernization and modernity. This does not mean that Islamism rejects modern technology, but it does reject modern Western values and culture. It would, furthermore, be a fallacy to approach pan-Arabism and Islamism as dichotomous. These two discourses are constructed through interaction with each other as should be clear from the biographies of Nasser and Qutb. Furthermore, both were philosophies of liberation from the legacies and continuing impact of colonialism and imperialism.

This chapter has shown that the outcomes were not pre-determined. The question of identity or, in other words, how state and society should be organized is not a linear process but rather a lived historical process. These cannot be reviewed without their respective historical, cultural, and political contexts as well as the regional and global connections. The pan-movements described in this chapter each attempted to address how to progress from a traditional to a modern society.

Each new approach to modernity was responding to the preceding one and the situation in the world. This is not unique to the MENA region but can also be seen in Asia in the figures of Rabinath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, and Liang Shuming.** They also called for a reconsideration of Western claims to universal modernity. Importantly, they pointed to the loss of religious and spiritual values and rejected the unilinear conception of progress based on Western norms. In fact, there is no

* Mishra, *From the Ruins*, p. 50.

** Adam Webb, 'The Countermodern Moment: A World-Historical Perspective on the Thought of Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, and Liang Shuming', *Journal of World History* Vol. 19, No. 2 (June 2008), pp. 189-212. We will return to this issue in the next chapter.

such thing as one universal modernity; it is more appropriate to speak of multiple modernities.

Guiding Questions

1. How have the challenges of identity been navigated in the MENA region since the nineteenth century?
2. What is Orientalism?
3. What is Islamism?
4. How is the thinking of Said Qutb linked to the terrorist attacks of 9/11?
5. Can you think of other Pan-movements? Have they fared better than Pan-Arabism?

Guide to Further Reading

- Bayat, Asef, and Linda Herrera (eds), *Global Middle East: Into the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021). This edited volume shows the global interconnectedness through the prism of the Middle East and North Africa covering a wide range of topics from Rumi to social and political movements.
- Beinín, Joel, Bassam Haddad, and Sherene Seikaly (eds), *A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021). This edited volume demonstrates challenges through critical political economy of the conventional wisdom on the origins and contemporary dynamics of capitalism in the region.
- Chalcraft, John, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). John Chalcraft examines in a comparative framework rooted in the dynamics of hegemonic contestation, protest movements in the Middle East and North Africa from 1798 onwards and ranging from Morocco to Iran.
- Gelvin, James L. (ed.), *The Contemporary Middle East in an Age of Upheaval* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021). This edited volume contains chapters written by scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds and engages with six broader themes in the Middle East and North Africa and individual country studies to make sense of the current disorder and possible future directions.

CHAPTER 9.

Modernity: Being Modern and Counter-Modernity

GINA I. VAN LING



Introduction

Thursday 24 February 2022 was a memorable day. After a long period of peace, war returned to Europe. In the outrage and frustration that accompanied the Russian invasion of Ukraine, volunteers started to travel to the country to enlist and help repel the invasion. The emergence of foreign fighters in the context of war is by no means a new phenomenon. In recent years, foreign fighters in the Syrian civil war, fighting on behalf of the Islamic State received a lot of attention. Also, in the more distant past, during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) the Republican government also hosted a number of fighters from other countries helping resist the Nationalists led by General Francisco Franco. Notable participants were Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell, who became literary greats, not least because of their experiences in the conflict. It appears as a minor detail, holding a passport as another national or colonial subject of the state on whose behalf you are fighting. Still, fighting the wars of others is a broader phenomenon. This type of participation could also be witnessed in the large number of colonial subjects fighting in the First World War on behalf of their colonial metropolises. Often overlooked, Senegal for example lost over 30,000 Senegalese Tirailleurs, who were killed in Europe fighting on behalf of the French, and over 45,000 Nigerian carriers died in the East African campaign and circa 75,000 Indian soldiers lost their lives during the First World War in service of the British forces. Also European settlers from colonial territories engaged in warfare overseas. From New Zealand, to South Africa and Canada, these settlers fought in 'national' corps, thereby stimulating their sense of 'national' identity. The sacrifices of these colonial troops sparked demands for independence in their respective homelands, but were mostly crushed during the Interbellum. An almost neglected contingent were Chinese participating in the First World War.

In 2014 the Chinese in Britain Forum, a coalition of Chinese organizations in the United Kingdom, launched the Ensuring We Remember campaign for a permanent memorial to commemorate the Chinese Labor Corps of the First World War.



Image 9.1 Commemorative stele for the Chinese laborers at Jardin Baudricourt

Between 1916 and 1920 approximately 140,000 Chinese laborers served on the Western Front in Europe to aid the British and French troops as non-combatants in the war effort. The memorial, a so-called *huabiao* (a traditional ceremonial column), was originally scheduled to be unveiled in London on 11 November 2018, the hundred-year anniversary of the war's armistice. The unveiling was postponed due to installation costs and struggles to find a suitable location in the capital, where land is extremely costly. The *huabiao* is nearly ten meters high, has a square base of twelve meters, and requires additional space for visitors to walk around the marble column. After this setback, the organization of Ensuring We Remember hoped to unveil the monument on 4 May 2019, the hundred-year anniversary of the May Fourth Movement in China.* However, at the time of writing this chapter, the memorial still has no home in London.

The difficulties faced by the campaign group illustrate a long-time struggle of less central actors in the First World War to gain recognition for their place in the

* Hilary Clarke, 'Memorial to Chinese labourers who helped allies in World War I struggles to find a home in Britain', *South China Morning Post*, 14 August 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/3022697/memorial-chinese-labourers-who-helped-allies-world-war-i>

war. Although various spaces of commemoration for the Chinese laborers have been created in Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom, they pale in comparison to the attention given to British, French, Russian, German or even American actors. For example, the commemorative stele for Chinese laborers erected in Paris in 1998 is hidden away in Jardin Baudricourt, a small park in the French capital's Chinatown. (Image 9.1) Descendants of laborers and Chinese overseas communities have made various efforts to give attention to the Chinese Labor Corps, but the reach of these efforts generally remain confined to their own groups.

The lack of attention on the role of China and the Chinese laborers in the First World War has multiple causes. The sheer destruction of the war affected the primary actors in much greater numbers, more directly, and during a longer time span than China. Discrimination and dismissal of the importance to commemorate Asian, African, and other marginal groups has left many casualties unnamed and forgotten. In 2021 a special committee of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in the United Kingdom concluded that non-British personnel, including the Chinese laborers, have often been commemorated unequally.*



Image 9.2 Headstones for members of the Chinese Labor Corps at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Poperinge, Belgium

* George Hay and John Burke, *Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration*, (Maidenhead: The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2021). Available at: <https://www.cwgc.org/media/noantj4i/report-of-the-special-committee-to-review-historical-inequalities-in-commemoration.pdf> Last accessed 15 April 2022.

Graves were unmarked – even when the identities of the victims were known – or the dead were implied to be included with general, nameless memorials. This practice goes against the principles of the CWGC that strives to name and recognize every casualty of war. It was only on Remembrance Day in 2017 that the first wreath was laid at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, in national recognition for the Chinese laborers' efforts.



Historiography

The First World War has also been a neglected topic in Chinese historiography itself. Historian Xin Fan points out that scholars of the Republican era in China (1912-1949) disregarded the Chinese contribution because the conflict and major battles primarily took place on European soil.* The First World War was referred to as the 'European War' and China's role in it was considered insignificant. During the Maoist Period of the People's Republic of China (1949-1976), historiography of the war became politicized and was heavily influenced by communist ideology. According to Chinese Marxist scholars, the war exposed the injustices of the capitalist world order. It was a war between 'imperial countries', therefore China had no place in it. As China headed into a new era after the death of Mao Zedong, scholars gradually let go of the communist interpretations of the First World War and today treat it as a historical event in world history. According to Fan, Chinese historians have been 'unable to develop a comprehensive perspective on China's involvement in the war' until recently.**

The centennial of the First World War, which spanned from 2014 to 2018, has prompted a re-examination of the war and its actors. Historians are shifting toward a new approach that considers histories that are understudied or overlooked. By examining regions and peoples outside the well-established – mostly European-centric – narratives, it becomes clear that the First World War was a truly global conflict. The war shook up the entire world order and inspired peoples all over the world to re-examine their place in it. China's involvement in the First World War and the aftermath of the Paris Peace Conference is crucial for understanding China's modern development and its path to becoming an integrated member of the international community of nation-states.

This chapter discusses China's coming to terms with modernity from the nineteenth century by transitioning from a dynastic empire to a nation-state,

* Xin Fan, 'Historiography 1918-Today (China)', in: Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson (eds) *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014). Available at: https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/historiography_1918-today_china Last accessed 22 September 2021

** Fan, 'Historiography'.

China's entry into the First World War, the role of the Chinese Labor Corps, and the impact of the Paris Peace Conference on China's national identity, both internally and externally. The main argument of this chapter is that the exchanges in the context of the First World War led to fundamental questions about the essence of modernity and what it means to be modern. It builds on the discussion about modernity highlighted in the introduction to Part II, as well as the debate about Identity addressed in chapter eight.

China's Modern Experience

In 1793 George Macartney and his delegation undertook a diplomatic mission to China with the aim of opening new ports for trade, relaxing trade restrictions for British merchants in Canton (now Guangzhou), and requesting permanent diplomatic representation in the Chinese empire's capital, Beijing. The industrializing European states had attempted to persuade China to enter their trade system since the seventeenth century, but to no avail. In a letter to King George III, responding to the British envoy's demands, the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing explained that China had no interest in what the British had to offer. After all, the Chinese profited greatly from the trade conditions they had put into place. Moreover, the Emperor rejected allowing the establishment of an embassy because it implied placing the British on equal footing with the Emperor. Chinese international relations were dictated by the idea of *tianxia*, which is commonly translated as 'all under heaven'. In this system, China saw itself at the center of a hierarchically structured diplomatic system. The Chinese empire was the leading political power and a source of culture for the states along its borders.* This system was incompatible with Western-style patterns of diplomacy as the British had hoped to establish with the Qing.

The Qing's resistance to Europe's determination to 'open up' trade with China became increasingly difficult. Western military power was superior to that of the Qing and within several decades the British had found a way into China through opium. The First Opium War (1839-1942) led to the cession of Hong Kong Island and the first in a series of 'unequal treaties' between the Chinese empire and Western powers. Other European countries and the United States soon followed, which led to more and more territory coming under foreign influence. The centuries-old idea of *tianxia* rapidly diminished in value and China was thrust into a new system of international affairs where diplomatic relations were conducted between sovereign nation-states. This new reality challenged the Chinese view of themselves as a highly developed civilization. The empire stood at a crossroads. Pro-traditionalists believed the best way to deal with foreign pressures was to remain steadfast:

* Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 346.

reject Western culture and reform China through a cultural revival that relied on reinterpreting traditional thought. Anti-traditionalists, on the other hand, believed Chinese culture could not be saved – it was corrupt and broken. The only way forward was to Westernize absolutely. Others sought to find a middle ground of “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application.”*



9.a Concept Definition

Counter-Modernity

Intellectual movement against modernity which places emphasis, in differing degrees, on the spiritual, nature, ethics and culture. The central idea is that Western modernity has lost all ethics and spirituality. For Islamic modernism, addressed in chapter 8, this meant for example that there should be a progression from a traditional to a (rational) modern society without the loss of religion or religious values as a necessary moral compass to guide society.

After the Second Opium War (1856-1860) the Qing responded to the challenges it faced both internally and externally by industrializing, following the idea of moderate reformers to adopt Western technology and armaments, while maintaining the Confucian essence of Chinese civilization. This ‘self-strengthening’ movement faced multiple difficulties: continued foreign incursions, internal crises such as rebellions and natural disasters, and – on a more philosophical level – the Chinese emphasis of morality over technical expertise. The ‘self-strengthening’ endeavors were delivered a final blow by the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5. The Qing’s recently established navy was completely destroyed, China lost its influence over Korea, and Taiwan was ceded to Japan, making it the new imperial power’s first colony. The outcome of the conflict with Japan led China into an even greater crisis: not only were they defeated by Western imperial powers, but even by a former subordinate to the Chinese empire. Many Chinese recognized that adopting Western technology alone could not save the empire – there was something fundamentally wrong with the essence of China.

The political thinkers and reformers Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao convinced the Emperor in 1898 to implement far-reaching reforms that were heavily based on the Japanese model of modernization. These reforms went further than the previous ‘self-strengthening’ movement, calling for rigorous institutional and ideological reforms *in addition* to technological innovation. Unfortunately, internal strife at the imperial court, a politically and financially disastrous attempt at trying to expel the foreign powers from China’s territory, and a growing impatience of the Chinese

* A phrase attributed to scholar-official Feng Guifen, who laid the ideological foundation for the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895).



Image 9.3 Cartoon by W.A. Roberts illustrating how foreign powers restricted China's sovereignty

people with the Qing dynasty sealed the fate of the last dynasty. A final attempt at reviving Kang and Liang's reforms in the final years of the Qing had come too little too late. In 1911 rebellions and uprisings against the Qing spread throughout the empire, and in 1912 the Republic of China was declared. The Chinese people were no longer subjects of an empire, but citizens of a modern republic. The new status of China also forced the Chinese to reassess their identity both internally and internationally.

Modernity has highly politicized definitions in China. In the interpretations of twentieth-century progressive reformers and Chinese Maoist and Marxist historians, Chinese modern history begins with the First Opium War.* In this narrative,

* Frederic Wakeman, "Chinese Modernity," in: Dominic Sachsenmaier and S. N. Eisenstadt (eds) *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 155.

Western (and later also Japanese) imperialism prevented the 'self-strengthening' movement in the nineteenth century from being successful. Furthermore, the Qing was seen as a corrupt society that was obstructed in its endeavor to modernize because of 'feudal' structures and 'backward' Confucian thought that had held China in its paralyzing grip for centuries. The establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 was a break with a static past and the beginning of China's 'true' path toward modernity. This categorical dichotomy in Chinese historiography between what is considered modern and premodern is problematic because it dismisses the efforts that were made toward modernity in the late Qing dynasty (and earlier periods, for that matter) that were able to further develop during the Republican years. The various modernizers throughout the twentieth century had different motives to create this dichotomy, but they all had one goal in common: creating a new Chinese national memory for the Chinese nation-state.* According to Liang Qichao, the Chinese thinker who helped draft the reforms of the last decade of the Qing, China had no history, only dynastic 'histories' that were cyclical and did not give the Chinese people a sense of national identity.

With the establishment of the Republic of China, the new nation-state literally broke with old times: the first law that was passed by the national senate related to the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, which symbolized China's commitment to join the modern international world system. Western-style schools were established in order to 'transform Chinese attitudes and habits of thinking' so that they would be more aligned with the (Western) world.** Chinese men cut off their queues – the long tail that characterized loyalty to Manchu (Qing) rule – and the long gowns and Mandarin jackets were replaced by modern Western attire.

Foreign powers were reluctant to recognize the new republic right away. China was by no means a stable, unified republic from one day to the next. Its future was unpredictable. Within three months of Sun Yat-sen's leadership, he yielded power to Yuan Shikai – a powerful military official during the Qing whose interest in upholding the modern values of the new republic only went as far as to further his own political career. At the same time, there was also a genuine enthusiasm among politicians and intellectuals to modernize China and become a full-fledged member of the international community. The Republic realized early on that establishing friendly relations with the foreign powers was crucial for China's development; they still held extensive influence over the country's domestic and foreign policy. Ultimately, the foreign powers in China were most concerned about protecting their investments, which totaled \$1.61 billion by 1914.*** They bargained to their advantage

* Wakeman, 'Chinese Modernity', p. 156.

** Guoqi Xu, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 37.

*** Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton), p. 267.

in return for recognition. China's weakness as an independent state remained a point of frustration that would haunt the nation for many decades to come.

In order to understand what caused some of that frustration, we must take a closer look at China's perception of the international system. Although the Chinese understood that the concept of *tianxia* and the old dynastic style of foreign relations were not compatible with the realities of the new world order, they had an idealized view of the international system that they were drawn into by the Western powers. China believed that by developing a more open and welcoming attitude in their diplomatic endeavors, they would gain equal recognition in the international community, which would benefit China's sovereignty. When foreign relations worked out differently in practice, it led to a sense of betrayal. Additionally, the romanticized view of the international community meant the Chinese were not always cognizant of the complex relations that existed between Western nation-states. As Xu Guoqi points out, the Chinese talked about the international order in abstract terms and as a static condition, but the developments in the world in the early twentieth century show that this was far from reality. New emerging powers such as the United States, Germany, and Japan were about to challenge the status quo.*

In Chinese communist historiography the Republic of China is often characterized as a failure of modernity. Indeed, the new nation-state faced many challenges; but viewing the Republic only through its failures mainly serves to legitimize the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 by the Communists and does not give credit to the new and innovative socio-cultural and political developments that occurred. The Republic was brimming with new ideas, the Chinese people experienced more freedoms than in any other period of China's history, and thanks to a rapidly growing media the country's (literate) public was more informed than ever before about domestic and foreign affairs.

China Enters the Great War

When the First World War broke out in June 1914 Chinese intellectuals followed the war that was unfolding in Europe with great interest. As the Western powers shifted their attention away from China to focus on the conflict, these intellectuals saw an opportunity. Liang Qichao remarked that if China played its cards right, the young Republic could become a "completely qualified nation-state".** This ambition was as much about joining the international community as it was about regaining China's sovereignty and building a strong, stable state. There was internal unrest in

* Xu, *China and the Great War*, p. 74-6.

** Xu, *China and the Great War*, p. 83.

China, with warlords gaining more influence over certain territories, the Tibetans attempting to claim independence, and other uprisings. If the government showed its strength to the Chinese people, the hope was that it would help revive the nation. In August 1914 Yuan Shikai attempted to convince the British to help China recover Qingdao, Germany's concession in Shandong province, by offering 50,000 troops in the operation.* However, the British dismissed the idea, and Yuan's government quickly declared the Republic's neutrality in the conflict. Aside from Germany and Great Britain, Russia, France, and Austria-Hungary also had concessions in China. The Chinese republic was therefore keen to avoid conflicts between opposing sides being fought out on its territory. It would almost certainly affect the relations between the foreign powers and the Chinese government. Furthermore, an armed conflict would weaken the already fragile republic.



Image 9.4 A Chinese map depicting the alliances of the Great War

The European preoccupation with the war did not only present an opportunity for China. Japan realized that it could proceed with executing its expansionist plans in the north of China without too much resistance. On 23 August 1914, shortly after Yuan's covert discussions with the British, Japan declared war on Germany. Within

* Guoqi Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 13.

three months of fighting the German naval commander Alfred Meyer-Waldeck surrendered and the territory came into Japanese hands. Protests by Yuan's government against the Japanese warfare on Chinese territory fell on deaf ears. Besides, with the fighting already taking place, there was little to be done. To make matters worse, Japan presented China with 'Twenty-One Demands' in January 1915 that would extend Japanese control over Shandong and Manchuria, as well as a wide range of other far-reaching infringements of China's sovereignty. News of the demands led to nation-wide anti-Japanese protests, riots, and a boycott of Japanese goods. Despite the population's efforts, Yuan felt he had no choice but to accept most of the demands by May 1915.

The protests were unsuccessful in turning away the Japanese, but it was an important event for China, as it united the entire nation. It also stimulated popular support for the idea that China should challenge the Twenty-One Demands after the war at the negotiating table of the peace conference. Joining the war became an increasingly attractive idea and would soon become the main focus in China's foreign policy. The Chinese government now faced a dilemma: which side should China join? After extensive discussions with Chinese diplomats abroad, it became clear that China had a better chance by aligning with the Allied side, even if that meant they were siding with Japan. However, when Great Britain, France, and Russia requested the Japanese government to help bring China into the alliance, Japan categorically refused.* China now faced a new problem in their endeavor to join the Allies.

Meanwhile, France and Great Britain were facing great losses on the frontlines in Europe. Human resources were at a constant shortage. The finance minister of China, Liang Shiyi soon devised a clever plan to send laborers-as-soldiers to Europe. The scheme would make it possible to be involved in the war and maintain close ties with the Allies. Sending laborers to the Western Front was a gesture of goodwill that would hopefully persuade France and Great Britain to involve the Republic in the peace conference and to accept China as an equal member of the international community. The plan also anticipated the effects on China of siding with the Allies by having France and Great Britain hire the laborers through "private" companies. In that way, Germany could not accuse China of violating its neutrality.** France reacted positively to the plan right away. Great Britain initially refused China's help but eventually accepted China's offer of help in the summer of 1916. According to Xu Guoqi, France hired approximately 40,000 Chinese laborers between 1916 and 1918, while Great Britain recruited 100,000 laborers to aid their war effort in France and Belgium.

* Lo, Huimin, *The Correspondence of G. E. Morrison*, vol. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978), p. 659. As quoted in: Frances Wood and Christopher Arnander, *Betrayed Ally: China in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military 2016), p. 127.

** Xu, *Strangers*, p. 15-6.

After Germany announced it would engage in unlimited submarine warfare, the United States – a neutral party in the war up to then – called upon all other neutral states to declare war on Germany. China finally had a direct entry into the conflict, which would guarantee their place at the peace conference and would solidify their international position. Additionally, China could now declare war without having to join the Allies; despite being committed to addressing Japan's Twenty-One Demands at the peace conference's negotiating table, being on the same side as their enemy remained a bitter pill to swallow. After a failed attempt by Yuan Shikai to restore the emperorship in China, followed by his sudden death in June 1916, China's territory became increasingly fragmented by warlords who gained ever more control. It was more important than ever for the new government to show strength and unity, however symbolic that may have been.

The Chinese Labor Corps on the Western Front

The story of the Chinese laborers is not only important for gaining an insight into the diversity of globally connected actors during the First World War. The laborers also played an important role in China's search for national identity. Liang Shiyi's plan to send laborers-as-soldiers to Europe was met with great enthusiasm by Chinese intellectuals. The Chinese laborers would learn from the West and bring their new ideas back to China upon their return. The intellectuals were inspired by the New Culture Movement that emerged in 1915 as a response to the Republic's failure to address China's problems. It was an iconoclastic movement that rejected 'traditional' Chinese culture and Confucian values. Instead, the supporters of the movement embraced Western ideals such as science and democracy.



Image 9.5 A parade of Chinese laborers at Boulogne, 12 August 1917

The men who were recruited to the Chinese labor corps were generally poor peasants in their 20s and 30s from the coastal regions in China. Many were illiterate, although some had learned a little English or French through missionary schools. They were recruited by Chinese agents who advertised through newspapers or public places like temples, teahouses, opium dens or fairs. Although the majority of men were hired as 'common' labor, there were also skilled workers. They worked ten hours per day, seven days a week, and were allowed time off for Chinese holidays. The conditions Chinese laborers had to work under varied widely. The French-recruited laborers were generally kept away from the frontlines, while those recruited by the British were often very close to the fighting. Either way, working on the Western Front was hard and often dangerous. Some laborers were killed by German shelling or unexploded mines while digging trenches or clearing battlefields. Many Chinese needed to adjust to a new diet – although some efforts were made to accommodate Chinese tastes – and to the different culture.

Overall, the French and British were very pleased with the work of the Chinese labor corps, but there were also frequent management problems. Cultural misunderstandings on both sides were a daily occurrence, in part caused by a shortage of interpreters. The laborers had diverse regional backgrounds, meaning they also spoke different languages and dialects. Finding sufficient interpreters who spoke the right languages was often a challenge. Aside from misunderstandings and general ignorance, the Chinese laborers also faced harsh discrimination. The diaries of British and French personnel, and military manuals provide an insight into how the Chinese were perceived. One example is Daryl Klein who described the Chinese as inferior in his writings and derogatively referred to them as “Chinks” in the title of his published diary.* The laborers were often treated like small children who needed to be disciplined. They were perceived as unhygienic, irresponsible, and untrustworthy.

An important source of support for the Chinese laborers was the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Chinese members of the YMCA provided entertainment programs, social support programs, and education. The members of the YMCA were Western-educated Chinese who were inspired by their experience abroad and believed in the Chinese cause to rebuild a modern nation. Perhaps one of their most important contributions was raising the literacy rate among the laborers. Even though the vocabulary they learned was basic, the impact was significant. The association also published weekly journals and newsletters that discussed a wide range of topics including Chinese and world news, politics, culture, and editorials. The laborers proved to be engaged discussants and took great interest in matters that concerned the Chinese nation. The education programs for Chinese laborers on the Western Front inspired similar programs in China. One of the most prominent

* Daryl Klein, *With the Chinks*, (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1919).



Image 9.6 Chinese actors entertaining an audience of British and American soldiers, local inhabitants and Chinese workers at their camp at Samer, 26 May 1918

examples is the National Association of Mass Education Movements that was started by former YMCA educator Yan Yangchu in the 1920s. His association aimed to “[e]liminate illiteracy and make new citizens”^{*} and within several years his mass education programs had spread across the nation. Such programs not only taught people to read and write, but they also instilled a sense of national pride and unity in China’s citizens during a time when the country was increasingly fragmented by warlordism.

By the time these men returned to China, they were transformed: literate and educated by their experience of being in Europe and coming into contact with different people, cultures, and ideas. Many laborers came home with a good amount of savings too. For many, imagining China as a nation held little meaning, but as Xu observes, their experience abroad made the concept tangible.^{**} They formed a community in a foreign place, which created a bond that extended to their homeland. Upon their return, these men had the potential “to play a new kind of active role in Chinese politics.”^{***} The laborers were sought-after guest speakers at political and intellectual gatherings, as they symbolized a new generation that was enlightened by Western ideals and culture. They were also pioneers of collective labor action in

^{*} Xu, *Strangers*, p. 210 note 67.

^{**} Xu, *Strangers*, p. 236-7.

^{***} Spence, *Modern China*, p. 277.

China, having learned to stand up and fight for their own causes in Europe. One of the first modern Chinese labor unions was the Returned Laborers Union, which had a significant impact on how people in China mobilized.

Disillusionment of the Paris Peace Conference

Germany's surrender and the subsequent armistice of 11 November 1918 charged China with anticipation. The Chinese celebrated their victory with parades and the demolishing of a monument that the Qing government had been obliged to erect in honor of the Germans who were killed in the Boxer Rebellion. Between 1919 and 1920 formal meetings took place in Paris to negotiate the peace terms between Allies and the Central Powers. China was on the winning side, so they had high hopes for the peace conference at Versailles, where they expected to be an equal negotiating partner. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points gave the Chinese an extra sense of empowerment. China was inspired by Wilson's call for peace, the self-determination of nations, democracy, and the establishment of a "general association of nations" that would resolve international conflict through negotiation and diplomacy, instead of guns. China's immediate aim at the conference was to recover Qingdao and have the Sino-Japanese treaties based on the Twenty-One Demands annulled. In the long term, the republic wanted sovereignty over its entire territory (the return of all concessions signed away under unequal treaties) and economic freedom (tariff autonomy). China looked forward to becoming an equal member of the international community in a new world order. President Wilson was "the number one good man in the world" who would help China achieve its goals.*

The Republic of China sent a delegation headed by five skilled diplomats to Paris who were supposed to realize the goals China had entered the war for in the first place. What these diplomats were unaware of was that Japan had made secret agreements with both the Allies and Duan Qirui, who resigned as president of China in October 1918. Duan had taken out secret loans with Japan to finance his army in exchange for Japan gaining the right to station its military in Shandong. Upon arrival at the conference, Japan announced that France, Great Britain, and Italy had signed a secret treaty in which each pledged their support for Japan's claims on Germany's concessions in Shandong as a reward for military assistance against the Germans. As a final blow, Japan and Great Britain concluded that China had not significantly contributed to the war effort of the Allies. By the time they entered the war in 1917, their military participation was limited to confiscating a few German ships along the Chinese coast. Talking about the Chinese labor contribution, the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs was quoted as saying that it had involved neither

* Xu, *China and the Great War*, p. 245.

“the expenditure of a single shilling nor the loss of a single life.”* Approximately 3000 Chinese lives were lost on the Western Front.

Needless to say, China's demands were not met at the peace conference. Japan gained new territories in China and the unequal treaties of the Qing remained unchanged. When the news reached the Republic, the people of China were shocked and felt betrayed. On the 3rd of May people gathered in the streets of major cities and telegrams were sent to the Chinese delegates in Paris urging them not to sign the peace treaty. On the 4th of May protests erupted in Beijing, with thousands of students taking to the streets to protest against the injustices inflicted upon the nation. Protests in other cities soon followed. Meanwhile, the pressure on the Chinese delegation in China not to sign increased by the day. The government was indecisive until the very last moment; on the day of the signing deadline, the 28th of June, the president finally sent instructions not to sign the treaty, but by then Chinese students and protesters had already ensured the delegates could not leave their hotel.



Image 9.7 Tiananmen Square on 4 May 1919. Approximately 3,000 students from 13 universities in Beijing gathered to protest against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles

* Balfour to Curzon, May 8 1919, in: E.L Woodard (ed.) *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (London: H.M Stationary Office, 1946), series 1, 6:565-66, cited in: Xu, *Strangers*, p. 101.

The May Fourth protests became a turning point in China's modern history. They triggered a new surge of Chinese nationalism that forced China to reassess its place in the world yet again. The events at the peace conference reaffirmed that China's traditional values had prevented the country from becoming an equal member in the international community. The movement marked a change in the scale of grassroots political action and other public movements that were aimed at a wider variety of groups within society. In the official Chinese Communist historiography, the May Fourth Movement marks the beginning of Chinese modernity. As this chapter has shown, however, modernity can be traced back to before the Republic. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) interpretation of modernity plays an important role in its ideology, because it makes a convenient distinction between the dark, backward, and shameful past of China before the founding of the party, and the hopeful future where the CCP would come to play a pivotal role in the nation's success and 'revival'.

Finally, it is important to note that the May Fourth *Movement* that was brought about by the protests was not just a national movement. It can also be placed in the broader context of anti-colonial movements that emerged around the world during that time. The First World War did not only force China to redefine its identity. The entire world had to readjust to the new realities that the war had created.

Painted out of history

In 1914 French artists Pierre Carrier-Belleuse and Auguste François-Marie Gorguet undertook the challenge of coordinating the creation of one of the largest paintings in the world to celebrate France's anticipated victory in the Great War: the *Panthéon de la Guerre*. The painting was to depict France and its allies, and tell the story of its victorious heroes during the First World War. The painting was completed in 1918 and was displayed in a specially constructed building next to the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris. As the war continued, more nations and figures were represented, and the design of the painting changed numerous times. When China decided to launch its plan to assist the Allies by providing laborers for the Western Front, Chinese figures were soon included in the painting. On the postcard (Image 9.8), a Chinese laborer can be seen kneeling in the foreground of the painting. Once the US became involved in the war and took on a more prominent role, various sections of the painting needed to be redesigned to make space for the Americans. In the final version of the painting the Chinese laborer has disappeared. It is unclear why the Chinese were no longer depicted. Perhaps the artists felt there was no space, or they might have simply forgotten to repaint the figure elsewhere on the canvas. Whatever the reason, China was no longer included and no longer commemorated.

The disappearance of the Chinese laborer from the painting is a recurring topic of discussion among those seeking recognition for the Chinese Labor Corps' efforts



Image 9.8 Postcard of Panthéon de la Guerre, depicting a kneeling Chinese laborer

during the war. For many, the painting illustrates how the Chinese laborers are forgotten in all forms of commemoration of the war. Among nationalist groups, the issue is placed in the context of China's so-called 'Century of Humiliation' – a politicized term that is used to characterize the period of foreign presence in China between the First Opium War in 1839 and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In these discussions, the disappearance of the Chinese figure embodies the treatment of China as an inferior country that was colonized and manipulated by Western countries during the Qing and the Republic.



Image 9.9 Panthéon de la Guerre. The Chinese laborer behind the American flag is missing

Conclusion

The First World War was not merely a European conflict. The Chinese case demonstrates that the war was a truly global war that moved beyond and between borders. China's history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

is characterized by change and the need to modernize; but the way that China envisioned modernization was constantly changing as the empire transitioned to a republic. China was in search of its identity as a *Chinese* nation and as a nation-state in an international system where it was no longer the center of the world. The Great War presented an opportunity for China to enter the international community of nation-states and become an equal player on the international stage. By sending Chinese laborers to aid the British and French war effort, China could maintain an image of neutrality while gaining a seat at the negotiating table at the end of the war. The Chinese labor corps played a crucial role in fulfilling China's foreign policy objectives. At the same time, the laborers' experiences in Europe gave them an invaluable lesson in understanding and shaping their place in the Chinese nation. The Allies' dismissive reaction to China's efforts during the war, the betrayal of Japan, and the betrayal of China's own leaders led to a turning point in China's modern history. It accelerated the decline of traditional Chinese societal structures and the emergence of new social and political movements that still leave their mark on China today.

Guiding Questions

1. How was China's worldview altered by the Western presence in China in the nineteenth century?
2. What is modernity and how can the characteristics of modernity be applied to China?
3. How was the contribution of the Chinese labor corps important for China?
4. Why did the Chinese feel betrayed by the Allies at the Paris Peace Conference?
5. What is the significance of the *Panthéon de la Guerre* for the Chinese in remembering the First World War?

Guide to Further Reading

- Kuhn, Philip A., *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Kuhn's work provides a deeper understanding of the Chinese state's modernization process as it came into contact with foreign powers from the nineteenth century.
- Mitter, Rana, *A Bitter Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). A compelling analysis of the impact of China's May Fourth Movement that focuses on both the movement itself and its legacy.
- Spence, Jonathan D., *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 2013). A very accessible history of modern China that provides a broad understanding of key issues and events since the Ming Dynasty.
- Westad, Odd Arne, *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (London: Bodley Head, 2012). A solid introduction to the history of China's foreign relations since the eighteenth century.
- Xu, Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). Xu's comprehensive research on the Chinese Labour Corps gives a detailed account of the lives of Chinese labourers in Europe during the First World War.
- Xu, Guoqi, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). This book addresses China's role and place in the First World War and connects it to the country's search for its identity in the modern world.
- Zarrow, Peter, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). Starting with the defeat of China in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, which throws the empire into an existential crisis, this book describes how various traumas and violent episodes have created the country's modern state.

CHAPTER 10.

Human Rights: Norms and Policy

WILLIAM MICHAEL SCHMIDLI



Introduction

By the time they reached the ambush site, the men who killed Benjamin Linder had walked most of the night. Silently fanning out in a U-formation over a small knoll and on either side of a rugged trail leading to a small construction site, the unit was concealed and ready as the light of the sunrise began to pierce the dense foliage. A half a mile down the trail stood a lonely government outpost, and further on the residents of the village of El Cuá were starting the day. It was April 1987, and the dozen or so combatants were a small contingent of the 12,000-15,000 counterrevolutionaries – known as “contras” – backed by the United States government and waging a deadly war of attrition across northern Nicaragua against the leftist *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (the Sandinista National Liberation Front [FSLN]) government in Managua. Cradling AK-47 rifles the men watched the trail and waited.

The sun was high in the morning sky by the time a thin column appeared on the path. As the figures drew closer, the contras counted ten men clad in olive-drab uniforms. They carried rifles and wore pistol belts with extra magazine pouches. Walking single-file, the men kept their distance from one another and scanned the foliage for signs of danger.

The contra unit commander waited until the lead individual had nearly reached the construction site before shouting, “¡Alto! ¡Rindanse! [Halt! Surrender!]” When the men responded by opening fire, the contra ambush sprang into action. Caught in the crossfire, the first five men in the column were hit almost immediately, their bodies falling onto the trail or into the water of a narrow stream. Four others were wounded but managed to escape back down the trail from where they had come.

As the firing died down, the contras hurriedly collected the rifles from the fallen and searched the dead bodies for documents. They executed the wounded. Fearing a Sandinista counterattack, they then quickly withdrew. The entire encounter – one of the hundreds of small-scale contra attacks that rarely made the news outside of Nicaragua – had lasted less than a quarter-of-an-hour.*

* Department of State [DoS] Cable, US Embassy Honduras to DoS, June 1, 1987, Subject: “Request for Debriefing of FDN United in Linder Case,” Digital National Security Archive [DNSA], ID: N102999; DoS, Press Briefing, June 16,

Typed copy of Benjamin's letter dated April 10, 1987

March 14, 1987

Dear Family,

Greetings from Bocay. I've been here for the last three days. I'm at the last part of the most relaxed part of the job - walking around streams. I've spent the days climbing up and around a stream which runs into town. Climbing through pasture and cornfields. The sun beats down at midday. The sugar cane is sweet. The beans are being harvested. I took shelter from the midday sun in a little pool formed at the base of a two-meter fall.

But now it is time to start to put my ideas into action. I started to figure out a little dam to measure how much water there is in the stream. This is a scary part for me. Bit by bit I get the experience I need. But I'm always nervous before I start to build anything.

April 10

It's now a month later. I'm in Managua. It has been a hard, varied month.

The dominating (overwhelmingly so) parts have been Don's leaving and the war. To write about the war in a way that can be used in some form means a bit of a change in how I write. It is all me but it comes out a little different. Not so much less personal from my point of view, but less personal as I imagine who will read it. To make it easier I'll switch pieces of paper.

When I first started working in Cuá-Bocay I really didn't have a feel for the community. In some ways this isolated me from the war. I'd come into town for a week, then leave for a month as I was shifted from project to project. But only partially isolated. I remember "bad times" of 1984 and 1985, times when several people I sort of knew died. Coming into town, I heard of Mary Lou Reyes' death, a nurse killed in the contra attack of El Cedro (The Cedars), a cooperative between El Cuá and San Jose de Bocay - 1984. Two teachers returning to El Cuá after Christmas break, killed in an ambush - Jan. 3, 1985. Scattered incidents of terrorism.

In 1986 the contra changed tactics. With the increasing numbers of desertions from the contra forces they could no longer maintain battalions in the field. They switched to land mines, both pressure, to kill whatever goes over them, and wire remote controlled - only to kill what they considered targets. This included a public transportation truck with 34 people all killed on July 3, 1986, the day before millions of Americans celebrated the Fourth of July. "Bombs bursting in air" seems much less glamorous when it is your friends being killed. That was 1986.

The coffee harvest, Oct. 1986 - Feb. 1987, was relatively peaceful, only because of a well-executed campaign by the Nicaraguan people. I do say people and not army or the EPS - Ejército Popular Sandinista (Sandinista Popular Army). This is because of the very nature of the fight against the contra. Wilfredo Monte has a small store in town, two nights a week he goes out to a hill on the outskirts of town, really just behind my house, with his rifle and uniform. He is still Wilfredo Monte - father, husband, store-owner, and friend. He guards his community along with many other women and men from town.

Image 10.1 Letter from Ben Linder

But by the time the contra detachment had linked up with its larger patrol group the following day, word had already spread that one of the five men they had killed was Benjamin Linder, a 28-year-old United States citizen living and working in solidarity with the leftist Nicaraguan government. A mechanical engineer from

1987, DNSA, ID: NI03006.

Portland, Oregon, Linder had overseen the construction of a small hydroelectric power plant that brought electricity to El Cuá. Hoping to eventually power machine shops, a lumber mill, and rice-processing plant, Linder's immediate concern was bringing electricity to the local health clinic and school. Nicaraguans in the region "know 1987 will be a very hard year. But they also know that they are winning the war," Linder wrote in a letter to his parents 18 days before his death. "Next week, for the first time high school classes will be taught in El Cuá."^{*}

A footnote in the decade of hostility between the United States and Nicaragua that spanned the 1980s, Ben Linder's death nonetheless illuminated competing visions of human rights and democracy. Entering the White House in January 1981, Ronald Reagan defined human rights as democracy promotion, the free market, and anti-communism – a framework that Reagan officials used to justify an aggressive effort to roll-back perceived communist gains in the Developing World. The leftist Nicaraguan government took center stage in Reagan's aggressive Cold War policy. By mid-decade, covert White House funding for counterrevolutionaries had developed into a sprawling operation that would claim tens of thousands of Nicaraguan lives.

Yet Reagan's war on Nicaragua met fierce opposition in the United States. Throughout the 1980s, a majority of Americans opposed a U.S. military intervention in the region, and as many as 100,000 U.S. citizens visited Nicaragua in support of the revolutionary government.^{**} Rejecting their own government's call to support the contras, American solidarity activists embraced the promise of the Nicaraguan revolution: self-determination, participatory democracy, and socio-economic transformation.

Human rights, in other words, had very different meanings for the Reagan administration and the U.S. solidarity activists. These divergent understandings of human rights raise difficult questions. Where do human rights come from? What are human rights? And how do human rights considerations shape policy and politics? Using Reagan's intervention against Nicaragua in the 1980s as the case study, this chapter grapples with these and related questions by examining the complex U.S. engagement with human rights in the second-half of the twentieth century. The main argument of this chapter is that the discussion of norms in international affairs, in particular the debate about human rights, shows rich diversity as well as a divergent practice over the course of the twentieth century.

^{*} Linder, quoted in Testimony of David Linder, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, May 13, 1987, DNSA, ID: N102993.

^{**} Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), p. 3.

Where do human rights come from? To be sure, modern human rights are connected to a long history of religious, philosophical and legal texts claiming certain rights for human beings, as well as activism on rights-related issues. Numerous and diverse religious traditions from across the globe can be interpreted as advancing conceptions of rights. Similarly, from the Code of Hammurabi's (in)famous "an eye for an eye" law of retribution nearly four thousand years ago to the powerful claim that "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" constitute "unalienable rights" in

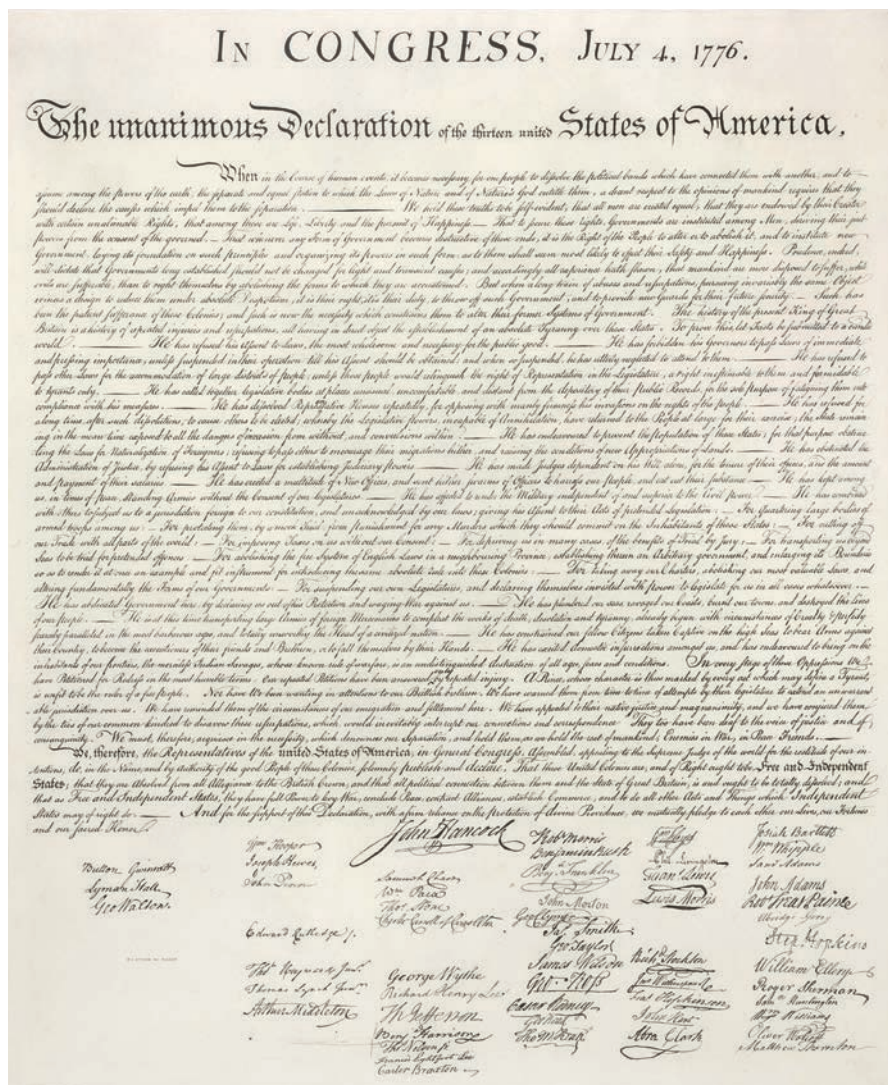


Image 10.2 US Declaration of Independence

the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, many philosophical and legal texts can be understood as precursors to modern articulations of human rights.

Finally, humanitarian movements such as British anti-slavery activism beginning in the late eighteenth century, and activism on rights-related issues such as demands for women's suffrage contributed to discussions of how to secure rights at home and abroad.



10.a Concept Definition

Human Rights

A set of norms and principles with universal application to guide behavior and interaction. Codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and translated in national, regional and international law.

There are generally three generations of human rights: 1) civil and political rights 2) economic, social and cultural rights 3) solidarity and collective rights.

But if modern human rights are rooted in the past, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the concept itself took shape. This presents a challenge for historians who seek to understand the origins and evolution of human rights. First, there is the issue of historical accuracy: depicting human rights as a straight line from past to present obscures more than it illuminates. Describing Jesus, Buddha, or Confucius as human rights activists, for example, is misleading because it applies a presentist perspective to historical actors who understood the world and articulated their ideas in very different ways; as historian Kenneth Cmiel writes, “this kind of thing can get soggy fast.”*



10.1 The Study of History

Presentist perspective

Idea that only the present matters and the experience of today is the standard to measure all things.

Second, the limitations of language make it challenging to analyze human rights without falling into a semantic trap: simply using the phrase “human rights” runs the risk of reinforcing the notion that human rights are Universal Truths. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth: one hundred years ago, “human rights” was not even a commonly-used term. By contrast, today almost everyone in the world has at least a rudimentary understanding of the concept of human rights;

* Kenneth Cmiel, ‘The Recent History of Human Rights’, *American Historical Review* Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 2004), pp. 117-135, p. 119.

indeed, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) holds the Guinness World Record for the most translated text: 370 languages and dialects.*



Image 10.3 Eleanor Roosevelt holding a poster of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lake Success, New York, November 1949.

The historian's task is thus to understand why the concept of human rights emerged as a powerful political language in the mid-twentieth century, and how ideas about human rights have since shaped – and, in turn, been shaped by – broader historical processes. In other words, historians try to avoid teleological thinking, already addressed in chapter 4 in the discussion about political order, that depicts human rights as objectively “good” – a milestone on the path of human progress. Instead, historians explore how the emergence of human rights ideas was contingent on specific historical developments, and analyze the ways in which human rights advocacy was (and is) embedded in political contestations – whether local, national, or international.

* In 1900, for example, the term “human rights” appeared only 22 times in the *New York Times*; a century later, it appeared 847 times. (This was actually a decrease from the wave of human rights activism in the 1970s; in 1977 the *New York Times* mentioned human rights 1,718 times.) Data accessed in ProQuest Historical Newspapers. On the world record, see United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘A New World Record: Universal Declaration in 370 Languages’, 23 April 2010. Last accessed 18 February 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/newsevents/pages/aneeworldrecordudhr.aspx#:~:text=The%20Universal%20Declaration%20of%20Human,dialects%20from%20Abkhaz%20to%20Zulu>.

These concerns have guided the research of historians interested in explaining the wave of human rights activism in the United States during the mid-twentieth century. The immense hardship caused by the Great Depression in the 1930s challenged many Americans' traditional emphasis on *negative* rights – limits placed on the government's ability to coerce or abuse its citizens.

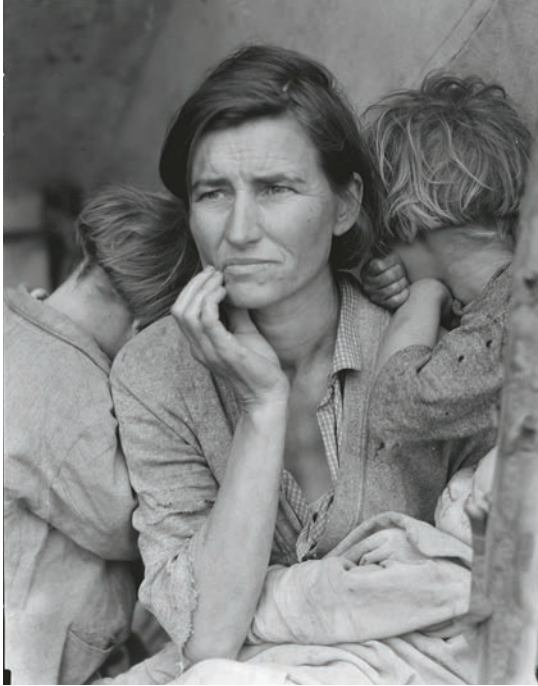


Image 10.4 Florence Owens Thompson, Migrant Mother in the Great Depression, 1936, by Dorothea Lange

Instead, the New Deal – the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration's program of reforms and regulations aimed at curbing the economic crisis – increasingly emphasized *positive* rights, that is, the government's obligation to ensure that citizens are treated equally.



10.b Concept Definition

Negative Rights

Rights that are conceptualized as preventing the subjection to a specific kind of action.

Positive Rights

Rights that are conceptualized as seeking subjection to a perceived just action.

America's entry into the Second World War fueled more expansive discussions around rights. If what the United States was fighting *against* was obvious, the war sparked intense debates among lawyers and scholars over what the Allies were fighting *for*, resulting in new and expansive articulations of rights and justice that envisioned changing relationships between peoples and nations. As Mark Philip Bradley argues, “almost without exception, those engaged in wartime global rights talk advocated an elastic notion of sovereignty in which states would no longer be the sole arbiter for the protection of individual human rights.”^{*} Underscoring the rising visibility of these ideas, combined with widespread horror at accumulating evidence of Nazi atrocities, the term “human rights” was mentioned seven times in the founding charter of the United Nations, drafted in 1945 by 51 nations.^{**}

However, as the term “human rights” gained popularity, it raised a fundamental question: what are human rights? It was to this task that the newly-formed UN Commission on Human Rights turned its attention. Led by the indefatigable former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the Commission successfully drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was ratified by the UN General Assembly in 1948.

A remarkable achievement for a commission composed of men (and a few women) representing distinct political and economic systems as well as cultural traditions from across the globe (albeit largely excluding the colonized world), the UDHR is composed of 30 articles that include political and civil rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights. Intended to be aspirational, rather than legally-binding, the UDHR “proclaimed that all people everywhere possessed certain basic and identifiable rights,” Paul Gordon Lauren writes, “that universal standards existed for the world as a whole, and that human rights were matters of legitimate international concern and no longer within the exclusive domestic jurisdiction of nation-states of the past.”^{***} The UDHR's influence in subsequent decades is hard to overstate: it served as a model for national laws and constitutions in many countries; created a foundation for a multitude of subsequent human rights agreements, such as the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons; and provided a framework for non-state actors to articulate human rights claims.

The achievement of the Universal Declaration was all the more striking since it overlapped with the onset of the Cold War. By the end of the 1940s East-West tension had emerged as the defining feature of international relations, pushing human

* Mark Philip Bradley, *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 63.

** Charter of the United Nations, 1945. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/>. Last accessed 19 February 2021.

*** Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 232. See also: Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2002).

rights concerns to the margins. In foreign policy, U.S. policymakers increasingly threw their support behind anticommunist allies – with little attention to domestic abuses.



10.c Concept Definition

Cold War

Period between 1945 and 1989 where there was an active rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union based on different ideologies, capitalism versus communism. The confrontation remained 'cold' with the exception of a series of 'hot' wars in the developing world.

Domestically, a loose alliance of Republicans (concerned that human rights threatened U.S. national sovereignty) and southern Democrats (seeking to maintain African American segregation) joined forces in opposition to human rights – hamstringing the U.S. engagement with human rights for the following quarter-century.



10.d Concept Definition

Criticism towards Human Rights

Since 1948 several sets of criticism have been formulated against the emergent human rights discourse.

- 1) They are a reflection of essentially Western norms*
- 2) Are they rights to be offered or can they be claimed?*
- 3) They have been formulated in an ambiguous manner*
- 4) They are unevenly enforced*
- 5) They are ineffective and have not improved universal well-being.*

Yet human rights experienced an extraordinary resurgence in the United States in the 1970s. Why? One arena of human rights activism was in the U.S. Congress, where elected officials from both sides of the U.S. political spectrum gravitated to human rights. On one hand, human rights appealed to opponents of U.S. support for repressive Cold War allies, such as the brutal Greek military junta that took power in 1967. Such support, they argued, reflected a failure to live up to America's moral traditions. Correspondingly, as the United States became increasingly mired in a costly conflict in Vietnam, opponents of the war denounced the intervention as epitomizing the misguided and destructive logic of the U.S. effort to prevent the expansion of communism, known as the Containment strategy.

On the other hand, human rights also served to advance the agenda of congressional Cold War hawks, who embraced human rights language to criticize the Soviet Union and its allies. Drawing on the UDHR, they worked to publicize the plight of prominent Soviet dissidents and championed Soviet citizens facing

emigration restrictions, particularly the thousands of Jewish “refuseniks” seeking exit visas to Israel. Despite fierce opposition from the Richard M. Nixon administration, this unwieldy alliance of congressional human rights advocates could claim considerable success; by late 1976 Congress had passed nearly a dozen pieces of legislation binding U.S. actions in the international arena to the promotion of human rights.

The 1970s also witnessed a surge of grassroots human rights activism in the 1970s. In an influential analysis, Samuel Moyn argues that human rights emerged as a “last utopia” after the failure of socialism and decolonization to realize their emancipatory potential in the 1960s.* Other scholars focus on distinct political developments in the United States: in an era defined by the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War and Nixon’s resignation amid the Watergate scandal, as well as revelations of U.S. support for repressive allies such as Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, human rights as a foreign policy concern appealed to many Americans. As a result, existing organizations like Amnesty International experienced unprecedented membership growth and new groups sprouted across the country, especially in Washington, D.C. where they coalesced into a powerful, albeit loosely-connected political lobby.

Significantly, U.S. human rights activism developed differently than in other parts of the world. First, the longstanding U.S. emphasis on liberty and the individual shaped Americans’ understanding of human rights. Whether championing anti-Soviet dissidents or condemning right-wing military regimes’ use of torture against perceived subversives, U.S. human rights activists focused their attention on the violation of political rights and civil liberties. In an era defined by privatization, deregulation, and economic liberalization, few American human rights activists advocated social and economic rights. Second, as historian Kenneth Cmiel has written, human rights organizations eschewed “thick descriptions” of local culture and context in favor of simple and direct “thin” messages.** Although thin descriptions could both make human rights violations visible and drive human rights activism, they came at a cost, rendering less visible unique local conditions and structures that contributed to rights abuses. Finally, Americans who gravitated toward human rights activism typically did so out of a sense that human rights violations occurred overseas; underscoring an abiding belief in American exceptionalism in a movement that appealed primarily to white, middle-class activists, the far-reaching domestic challenges the United States faced in the 1970s were rarely perceived as human rights problems.

The 1970s thus witnessed a surge in human rights activism in the United States. Americans from the grassroots to the Oval Office sought to insert human rights onto the political landscape. Their motives ranged widely, from concern for Soviet

* Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (New York: Belknap Press, 2010).

** Cmiel, ‘The Recent History of Human Rights’.

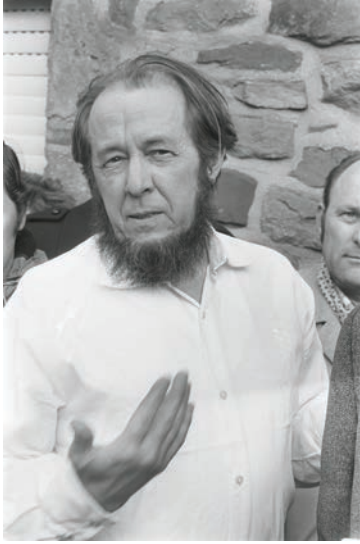


Image 10.5 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

dissidents like the Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, to support for Chilean mothers whose colorful *arpilleras* – hand-stitched patchwork quilts – depicted their children’s disappearance by state security personnel.



Image 10.6 Quilt Showing the Torture on the Esmeralda Ship, by Espina Dorsal, Arpillera Museo de la Memoria Chile 2021

An unwieldy coalition, the human rights movement nonetheless demonstrated an ability to mobilize tens of thousands of ordinary people and boasted an effective political lobby in Washington. Underscoring the power of human rights as a political message, Jimmy Carter edged out the incumbent Gerald R. Ford in the 1976 presidential election. During the campaign, Carter emphasized the importance of human rights as a core U.S. foreign policy concern, and boldly proclaimed in

his inaugural address that “Our commitment to human rights must be absolute.” Yet amid a resurgence of Cold War tension, the administration struggled to operationalize such lofty rhetoric.

By the end of the 1970s, the question was not whether the U.S. should promote human rights in foreign policy, but how it should attempt to do so. And with Carter’s resounding defeat to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election, the answer to this question was far from clear.



Image 10.7 Ronald Reagan

Entering the Oval Office in January 1981, Reagan was determined to roll back perceived communist gains in the developing world.

Nicaragua stood squarely in the cross-hairs. Top Reagan officials warned that the FSLN was closely aligned with communist Cuba and sought to export leftist revolution across the region, particularly neighboring El Salvador. Reagan also viewed Nicaragua as a test-case for beating the “Vietnam Syndrome” – public skepticism toward American global leadership that lingered in the aftermath of the U.S. defeat.



10.e Concept Definition

Vietnam Syndrome

A perception held by US Cold War hawks in the aftermath of the defeat in the Vietnam War (1954-1973) that the US people had become overly wary of military interventions.

Two months after taking office, the president authorized a secret program to train and equip counterrevolutionaries operating on Nicaragua’s borders. By mid-decade, the U.S.-backed contras had grown to a guerrilla force of more than 10,000 fighters, and were regularly hitting targets in northern Nicaragua, ranging attacks on FSLN

military patrols to the sabotage of bridges and the burning of government-run farms, clinics, and schools. Denouncing the Sandinistas as communist satraps, Reagan lauded the contras as “the moral equivalent of the founding fathers.”*

Yet Reagan’s support for the contras ran into opposition in the United States. On Capitol Hill, in December 1982 congressional lawmakers prohibited the Department of Defense or the CIA from attempting to overthrow the FSLN with US funds. Congress subsequently tightened the legislation by prohibiting all lethal aid to the Contras.** Congressional resistance to Reagan’s intervention in Central America was fueled by grassroots activism. Worried that U.S. soldiers would end up fighting on Nicaraguan soil and horrified by evidence of contra abuses against civilian targets, U.S.-based human rights organizations, churches, and Latin America-focused solidarity groups established a powerful voice in the Central America debate. As the human rights organization Americas Watch asserted in 1985 – in its eighth report on Nicaragua since 1982 – “we find that the most violent abuses of human rights today are being committed by the contras, and that the Reagan administration’s policy of support for the contras is, therefore, a policy clearly inimical to human rights.”*** Hundreds of Americans moved to Nicaragua to support the revolution in capacities that ranged from university teaching to reporting contra atrocities, while tens of thousands visited the embattled nation to witness the achievements of the revolution first-hand and engage in solidarity activities such as harvesting coffee.

Ben Linder was one of the Americans living and working in Nicaragua in solidarity with the Sandinista revolution. Twenty-three years old when he arrived in Managua in 1983, at the time of his death four years later Linder was working to bring hydroelectricity to the northern Nicaraguan village of El Cuá. Linder was not the only foreigner killed in the Contra War, but he was the first U.S. citizen to be killed, and his death reverberated through the close-knit community of American solidarity activists. As a close friend confided in her diary, “We feel a gut-wrenching sadness and loss.”****

For opponents of the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, Linder’s death was indisputable evidence that the White House was supporting an army of terrorists systematically engaged in human rights violations. It was a message that activists had been asserting since the early 1980s. The contras repeatedly engaged in “murder, kidnapping, various forms of brutal mistreatment, and a pattern of military conduct which deliberately endangers civilians,” Americas Watch reported two months

* Gerald M. Boyd, ‘Reagan Terms Nicaraguan Rebels ‘Moral Equal of Founding Fathers’’, *New York Times*, 2 March 1985, p. 1.

** Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1993), p. 296, 302.

*** Americas Watch Committee, ‘Human Rights in Nicaragua: Reagan, Rhetoric and Reality’ (New York: Americas Watch, July 1985), p. 16.

**** Jennifer Atlee-Loudon, *Red Thread: A Spiritual Journey of Accompaniment, Trauma and Healing* (Washington, D.C.: EPICA, 2001), p. 97.

before Ben Linder's death. The Reagan administration's support for the contras, the report concluded, "associates the U.S. government with a pattern of gross human rights abuses that ... the contras show no signs of curbing."** Linder's murder further galvanized solidarity activists. Two weeks after his death, 70 Americans marched 30 war-torn miles from El Cuá to the village of El Cedro, where they helped rebuild a medical center that had been destroyed by the contras. "We hold the Reagan administration responsible for what might happen to us," a spokesperson for the group declared.** Across the United States, too, Linder's death energized opponents of the Reagan administration's support for the contras. "This was an ambush, not a chance encounter. This is murder," Linder's father, David Linder, told members of Congress in hearings held less than a month after his son's death. Speaking for thousands of Americans in the 1980s who actively sought to end the U.S. intervention in Central America, David Linder concluded, "I consider the United States government and its effectors – the contras – guilty of this crime."****

Yet opponents of the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua had no monopoly on the language of human rights. In fact, the Reagan administration deflected such criticism by using its own human rights talk to justify lethal support for the men who murdered Ben Linder. "We stand against totalitarianism, particularly imperialistic expansionist totalitarianism," Reagan declared in a radio address shortly after Linder's death. "We are for democracy and human rights, and we're for a worldwide prosperity that only free economies can give and the pursuit of human happiness that only political freedom allows."***** Indeed, after initially seeking to downgrade human rights as a U.S. foreign policy priority, by late 1981 the Reagan administration had pivoted, embracing a human rights policy that centered on democracy promotion, the free market, and anti-communism, while rejecting social and economic rights claims. In what Hal Brands favorably describes as a policy of "enlightened self-interest" the administration increasingly recognized the utility of human rights promotion as a mechanism of "promoting global well-being, and of strengthening U.S. security and influence in the process."***** Although critics complained that the Reagan administration failed "to address the root causes of many human rights abuses," the administration's narrow definition of

* Americas Watch, "Human Rights in Nicaragua 1986," (New York: Americas Watch, February 1987), p. 139.

** 'Americans Protest Contra Aid, Cross Nicaraguan Battle Zone', *San Francisco Examiner*, 17 May 1987.

*** Testimony of David Linder.

**** Reagan, radio address to the nation, 'Soviet Union-United States Relations', 29 August 1987, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 23 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 975.

***** Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), p. 126.

human rights gained significant support in Congress by neatly tapping into notions of U.S. exceptionalism while remaining fully compatible with the U.S. Cold War containment strategy.*

In the case of Nicaragua, Reagan's human rights policy provided a nimble inversion by positioning the United States as the defender of hemispheric democracy, rather than the aggressor seeking to orchestrate a regime change in Managua. As contra supporter Rep. Bob Dornan (R-CA) told Ben Linder's parents during congressional hearings on their son's death, if Linder had killed one of the contras in the ambush, "he would have killed a Nicaraguan on Nicaraguan soil who believed he was fighting for democracy and to retrieve his stolen revolution."*** Similarly, Representative Connie Mack (R-FL) argued that Linder was "not ... a victim of this nation's Central American policy" but of his own poor judgement. Echoing the president by describing the contras as "freedom fighters," Mack assailed liberals for pursuing a foreign policy of "appeasement." On the other hand, the conservative approach, he concluded, "seeks freedom."****

The debate over the Reagan administration's intervention in Nicaragua thus illuminates the malleability of human rights talk. First, both supporters and opponents of the U.S.-backed Contra War used human rights language – albeit in decidedly different ways and to support radically different political objectives. Second, the confrontation revealed the extent to which human rights remained a defining feature on the American political landscape after the "boom" decade of the 1970s. Although Reagan had initially tried to downgrade human rights as a U.S. foreign policy priority, by the end of the 1980s the administration's narrow framing of human rights had gained bipartisan appeal. As the incoming Secretary of States James A. Baker III asserted during his 1989 confirmation hearings on Capitol Hill, human rights "is one of the very basic foundations of our foreign policy, and for that matter, our national security policy."*****

Third, the competing understandings of human rights left a lasting imprint on U.S. human rights promotion. The Reagan administration's human rights emphasis on democracy promotion and the free market provided a blueprint for Bill Clinton's support for "market democracies" in the 1990s. "Democracies don't attack each

* Human Rights Watch and Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 'The Reagan Administration's Record on Human Rights 1987', (New York: Human Rights Watch and Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1987), p. 1.

** Quoted in: Branko Marcetic, 'The American that Reagan Killed', *Jacobin Magazine*, 2 May 2017. Available at: <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/05/reagan-ben-linder-nicaragua-contras-sandinistas>. Last accessed online 19 April 2021.

*** Connie Mack, 'Freedom and an American Death in Nicaragua', *New York Times*, 28 May 1987, p. A22.

**** Quoted in: Aryeh Neier, 'Human Rights in the Reagan Era: Acceptance in Principle', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 506 (November 1, 1989), pp. 30-41.

other,” Clinton declared in 1994, “they make better trading partners and partners in diplomacy.”*



10.f Concept Definition

Democratic Peace Theory

Theory based on the insight, originally suggested by Immanuel Kant, that democracies do not fight war against each other. Democratic peace has had a large influence on foreign policy; the promotion of democracy is believed to act as a deterrent against war.

Following the 11 September 2001 terror attacks, the Reagan-era emphasis on anticommunism found a successor in the George W. Bush administration’s expansive War on Terror, which, along with democracy promotion, served as an important rationale for the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in late 2001 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq two years later. “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture,” Bush asserted during his second inaugural address, “with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”** Such lofty rhetoric was hard to square with the reality on the ground: between 2003 and 2019, conservative estimates placed the total number of direct war deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan at 465,000.***

Yet if human rights talk underpinned American globalism in the post-Cold War era, it also continued to serve as a political language to mobilize grassroots activism on a wide range of struggles, from women’s rights to combatting poverty to movements for environmental justice.



10.g Concept Definition

Grassroots Activism

Community-based collective action focused on a particular cause or theme, involving the population directly.

Decades after the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, American activists continued to echo Eleanor Roosevelt’s vision of a world where, “our fellow human beings ... have rights and freedoms which give them dignity and which

* Clinton, State of the Union Address, 25 January 1994. Available at: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-25-1994-state-union-address>. Last accessed 21 April 2022.

** George W. Bush, second inaugural address, 20 January 2005. Available at: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-20-2005-second-inaugural-address-0#dp-expandable-text>. Last accessed 21 April 2022.

*** Neta C. Crawford and Catherine Lutz, ‘Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars’, 13 November 2019, *Costs of War Research Series*, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University. Available at: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Direct%20War%20Deaths%20COW%20Estimate%20November%2013%202019%20FINAL.pdf>. Last accessed 21 April 2022.

will give them a sense that they are human beings that can walk the earth with their heads high and look all men in the face.”* It was a vision evident in a dusty celebration on May 21, 1995 in the remote Nicaraguan town of San José de Bocay, 25 miles north of El Cuá. The Cold War was over; the Contra War, too, had ended, and in northern Nicaragua former contras and Sandinistas eked out a hardscrabble living side-by-side. Yet amid the residual political tension and endemic poverty, hundreds of hopeful residents gathered to inaugurate a new hydroelectric plant funded by the North American donors to the Ben Linder Memorial Fund. Founded by Ben Linder’s parents shortly after their son’s death, the project was maintained by Nicaraguan members of the Association of Rural Development Workers–Benjamin Linder. Within weeks night classes were being held in the public school, the local health clinic was refrigerating vaccines, and an ice cream shop was open for business. “Children were everywhere, and those who were children when the project began, who had known Ben, are children no longer,” the Linders proudly recalled. “Soon the children will be those who don’t remember the time before the light.”**

Guiding Questions

1. Agree or disagree with the following assertion: human rights are rooted in Universal Truths, not political contestations.
2. Why did ideas about *rights* proliferate in the United States in the mid-twentieth century? What rights were included? Excluded?
3. What was the significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
4. What were the causes and consequences of the human rights “boom” in the 1970s?
5. In what ways did the U.S. intervention against Nicaragua in the 1980s reveal the malleability of human rights talk?

* Eleanor Roosevelt, transcript of speech on human rights, 1951. Available at: <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/documents/356632/390886/Eleanor+Roosevelt+Transcript+of+Speech+on+Human+Rights+1951.pdf/7c4b27f5-0512-46f0-8119-8b57f201ca9#:~:text=We%20must%20want%20our%20fellow,all%20men%20in%20the%20face>. Last accessed 21 April 2022.

** Ben Linder Memorial Fund Newsletter, Winter 1994–1995, Box 7, Folder: Linder, Rita Clark Nicaragua Collection, Bucknell University Special Collections, Lewisburg, PA.

Guide to Further Reading

- Borgwardt, Elizabeth, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Examines U.S. foreign relations during the Second World War and the rise of human rights during the mid-twentieth century.
- Bradley, Mark Philip, *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Explores how human rights became believable to ordinary Americans in the 1940s and 1970s by analyzing developments in political and legal thought, photography, film, and fiction.
- Brands, Hal, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016). Analyzes U.S. foreign policy in a rapidly changing international system from the 1970s to the early 1990s.
- Eckel, Jan, *The Ambivalence of the Good: Human Rights in International Politics since the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). A global history of international human rights politics since the 1940s.
- Glendon, Mary Ann, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2002). Explores Roosevelt's leadership in the drafting of the modern human rights movement's founding document.
- Iriye, Akira, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock (eds), *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). A wide-ranging collection of essays on human rights history since the 1940s.
- Keys, Barbara J., *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). Analyzes the importance of the Vietnam War and its aftermath in the rise of human rights advocacy in the United States.
- Moyn, Samuel, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (New York: Belknap Press, 2010). Moyn argues that human rights achieved prominence in the late twentieth century on the ruins of earlier political utopias.
- Peace, Roger, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). Examines grassroots U.S. opposition to the Ronald Reagan administration's intervention against Nicaragua in the 1980s.
- Snyder, Sarah B., *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). Highlighting the importance of non-state activism, Snyder examines U.S. human rights advocacy in the 1960s.

CHAPTER 11.

Ecology: Past and Present

ELISA DA VIÀ, JUDITH NAEFF AND ANNE MARIEKE VAN DER WAL



Introduction

“[...] I want to tell you about that lagoon,
that lucid, sleepy lagoon lounging against the sunrise
men say that one day
that lagoon will devour you
[...] they say you, your daughter
and your granddaughter, too
will wander rootless
with only a passport to call home” [...].*

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, a Marshallese climate change activist and poet, opened the United Nations 2014 Climate Summit with these alarming and moving words.** She compellingly drew the world’s attention to the precarious future most Pacific island nations face, due to climate change, in particular rising sea levels, as well as the consequences of nuclear waste pollution. Numerous reports and studies have been published in recent years, most notably the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Report of 2022,*** indicating with scientific precision the dangers and consequences of rising global temperatures. It is through personal and artistic performances, from members of the communities most affected already by damage to their environment, that the message of environmental degradation truly hits home.**** From the lithographs and art installations of Ralph Hotere (1931–2013), to the poetry and short stories of Déwé Gorodé (*Utê Mûrûnû: petite fleur de cocotier*

* Statement and poem by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Climate Summit 2014 – Opening Ceremony. Available at: United Nations Youtube Channel. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mc_IgE7TBSY Last accessed 21 April 2022.

** See for instance: Michael Pearson (ed.) *Trade, Circulation and Flow in the Indian Ocean World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Gwyn Campbell, *Africa and the Indian Ocean World from Early Times to Circa 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

*** IPCC, 2022: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

**** Laura Bleiberg, ‘Artists of ‘Water is Rising’ sing, dance against climate change’ *Boston Globe*, 13 November 2011.



Image 11.1 Operation Crossroads “Baker Day” Underwater Atomic Bomb Test, Bikini Atoll, 25 July 1946

(1994), *L'Epave*, 2005), theatrical projects such as ‘Water is Rising’ (2011) or the novels of the Tao/Taiwanese writer Syaman Rapongan (*Black Wings*, 1999; *The Face of a Sea Voyager*, 2007) and the Samoan writer Albert Wendt (*Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, 1979; *Black Rainbow*, 1992), these voices from the Pacific have used art to reveal the splendor of the ocean, raise awareness of its pollution and remind their audience of the importance of understanding the sea, not as separate, but as integral to human history.

The sea has played a crucial role in connecting communities and civilizations. From the busy sea-lanes on the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, to the high seas on the Atlantic and the vast stretches of the Pacific Ocean, water has not been an obstacle but rather a connecting tissue allowing cross-cultural contacts and long distance trade. Whereas humans have long been aware of this, historical research in the past has tended to overlook the sea as a site of history. To be sure, maritime history is not a new field of historical research, but it has traditionally been more connected to the history of naval warfare and/or exploration from a state or empire perspective. Yet, with the growth of fields such as World History, oceans have gained a more central focus in historical research, rivaling historical studies on continental empires and nation-states, and placing these bodies of water center stage as main

research objects, as opposed to the distant shores or harbors from which mighty navies sailed.*

The increasing popularity of fields such as Indian Ocean World studies, Pacific studies, Atlantic World studies, and more recently Arctic Ocean studies, confirm this trend.** Smaller bodies of water have naturally also fascinated historians, like the connections of the Caribbean sea, or the Baltic sea, and the Mediterranean. Braudel's masterpiece *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II* (1949) is a prime example of understanding the history of peoples by looking at their environment, and more specifically their connection to the sea. The *long durée* of human development is a history of "man [sic] in his relationship to his environment", according to Braudel.***

Building on Braudel's insight, this chapter seeks to understand the recent history of Pacific island nations with regard to the dramatic changes in the maritime environment, caused by two prominent dangers: the effects of nuclear testing and climate change. Secondly, it aims to investigate local epistemologies of ecology in connection to the *long durée* of living with and on the ocean. This chapter will address theories and concepts relating to Environmental History, the Anthropocene and Nuclear Imperialism through the case study of nuclear bomb testing in Polynesia and the 'Nuclear Free Pacific' movement, with a specific focus on nuclear tests in French Polynesia, international campaigns as organized by Greenpeace, as well as actions and artistic works used to raise awareness of nuclear pollution of the Pacific Ocean and rising sea levels. As we shift our attention to the sea, we aim to make visible how human history cannot be separated from the history of the environment. As Braudel wrote, the sea itself is the best witness of the past, it "patiently recreates for us scenes from the past, breathing new life into them, locating them under a sky and in a landscape that we can see with our own eyes, a landscape and sky like those of long ago".****

* See for instance: Pekka Korhonen, 'The Pacific Age in World History', *Journal of World History*, Vol.7, No. 1 (1996), pp. 41-70; Katrina Gulliver, 'Finding the Pacific World', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2011), pp. 83-100.

** See for instance: Bernard Bailyn, 'The Idea of Atlantic History', *Itinerario* Vol. 20, No. 1 (1996), pp. 19-44; Toyin Falola and Kevin D. Roberts (eds), *The Atlantic World, 1450-2000* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and Their Shared History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Atlantic in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Ferdinand Braudel, *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 1.

*** Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, p. 20.

**** Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, p. 1.



Historiography

The vast challenges posed by global warming have led to impatience with issues of representation. Debating nationalism or religion, the argument goes, is irresponsible if it does not also address the global catastrophe that is threatening all of us today. The question of the environment and its relation to human development has gained priority, not only in global politics, but also in the discipline of history. Environmental History is the field of history concerned with understanding the relationship between the environment and human societies, more specifically the impact of the environment on civilizational development, as well as the role of humans in changes to the environment.



11.a Concept Definition

Environmental History

A field of history concerned with understanding the impact of the environment on civilizational development, as well as the role of humans in changes to the environment.

Early forms of environmental awareness are usually grouped in a ‘first wave of environmentalism’, or rather conservationism, which most scholars place around the first half of the nineteenth-century followed by a second wave of conservationism, which began roughly around the turn of the twentieth century until the Second World War. The first wave is considered part of the ‘Romantic period’, a cultural movement which emerged as a counter-modern response to rapid industrialization and urbanization in Europe. Nature was idealized, and the impact of modernity on nature became a cause for concern. George Perkins Marsh’ *Man and Nature* (1864) is an example of this growing concern that complex civilizations, like for example the Roman Empire in Antiquity, would eventually bring about their own destruction by their thirst for expansion and tendency to deplete their surrounding natural resources. Typical for this first and more specifically for the second wave of conservationism, was the belief in the abilities of humans to control nature. In particular, with the conservationist efforts of the early twentieth century, during which for instance several national parks were created in emerging nation states around the world, this notion of protection of nature went hand in hand with the desire to manage it. These positivist approaches to ‘taming the wild’, evoked a critical reaction and some historians began questioning this power relation between humankind and nature, as well as criticizing ecological determinist beliefs. In particular the French historians, part of the ‘Annales school’ produced some groundbreaking works, like Lucien Febvre’s *La Terre et l’évolution humaine: introduction géographique à l’histoire* (1922) and of course Braudel’s *La Méditerranée* (1949).

Early Environmentalism Movements

The period after 1945 witnessed a renewed interest in ecology and what some scholars call the “third wave of conservationism”.^{*} Acute awareness of the destructive forces modernity could unleash on humankind and nature came after the world witnessed the detonation of two atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945. Additionally, fears grew for disappearing ecosystems (as expressed in for instance Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949) and new public awareness emerged of the widespread use of toxic gasses and pesticides (Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, 1962).^{**} The undeniable air pollution due to increasing numbers of motorized vehicles in the world’s metropolises was recognized. Popular concerns with environmental pollution reached new heights.



Image 11.2 Earth Rising, NASA, 1968

^{*} David Lowenthal, ‘Environmental History. From Genesis to Apocalypse’, *History Today*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2001), pp. 36-42, p. 40.

^{**} Riley E. Dunlap and Angela G. Mertig, *The Evolution of the U.S. Environmental Movement from 1970 to 1990* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 3



11.b Concept Definition

Environmentalism

The idea that the environment deserves protection and is in need of efforts of restoration and improvement for its general condition and status.

A turning point in the popular modern imagination of the Earth as one living entity, of which the human population is dependent, came through the publication of a photograph (see image 11.2) taken by three astronauts on-board the Apollo 8 in 1968. In their orbit around the moon, looking back at Earth, they were the first humans in history who saw the Earth as a lone and fragile planet, floating in the cold darkness of empty space. Despite their mission's focus on the moon, the astronauts had the presence of mind to take a few pictures of this "beautiful blue marble". It was these images of Earth that would confront the world's population with a clear perception of their home.* In the words of the poet Archibald Macleish, at that moment in time, we came "to see ourselves as riders on the Earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold – brothers who know now they are truly brothers".**

The idea that the environment was in need of active protection was embraced by ecology movements across the world. Many of these movements coming out of the 1960s were awareness raising movements. They were trying to influence popular opinion as well as policy making. This culminated in mass participation of the first Earth Day on 22 April 1970 under the slogan 'we all breathe the same air'. From the 1970s onwards, there was also a clear increase in more hands-on, locally oriented and organized environmental movements seeking to protect local ecological habitats.*** With the publication of the report *The Limits of Growth* in 1972 by the so-called 'Club of Rome', the message of a broad and somewhat diffuse ecology movement was brought back to one simple notion, that the world's population needed to prepare "for a period of great transition, the transition from growth to global equilibrium"**** as the realization set in that 'exponential growth is impossible on a finite planet'.

* A similar experience was felt in 1990 when the photograph of Earth as a 'pale blue dot' was sent home from the space probe Voyager 1, from a distance of around six billion kilometers. The astronomer Carl Sagan stated that it was this "perspective that [once more] underscores our responsibility to preserve and cherish that blue dot, the only home we have".

** Archibald Macleish, 'Riders on Earth Together, Brothers in Eternal Cold', *The New York Times*, 25 December 1968.

*** Dunlap and Mertig, *The Evolution of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, p. 6.

**** Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth. A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), p. 24.

The Ecological Paradigm Shift

The reception of this report was diverse. The responses ranged from outright rejection, e.g. among others the business community as well as certain academics, calling the report a 'Model of Doom'.^{*} Others strongly supported it, ranging from non-governmental organizations to governments, taking up the environment as a key policy issue. Within academia, the growing public attention for the environment resulted in an ecological turn or 'ecological paradigm shift'.^{**} It brought together scholars from the Humanities and Social Sciences to again consider ecology and the environment and the interplay between humans and nature. This time they focused on the connection between inequality and environmental change.^{***} Some of these works on the human impact on ecological changes and the supposed consequences for the stability and survival of a civilization, leaned towards a form of 'environmental determinism'. For example, Jared Diamond's famous book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997), in which the 'rise of the west' was explained by the favorable biological environments in which Western (or rather Old World) civilizations developed.



11.c Concept Definition

Environmental Determinism

The idea that the pre-existing environmental conditions determine the subsequent development of society.

Significantly, this paradigm shift also entailed a critique of mainstream environmentalism for its failure to ask deeper questions about the causes of ecological problems. Two positions can be identified here. First, proponents of deep (as opposed to shallow) ecology embraced a *biocentric* environmental ethics that challenged *anthropocentric* approaches to nature conservation, whereby the value of any part of nature is determined solely by its usefulness to humans.^{****} Deep ecologists claimed that non-human life has intrinsic value and deserves moral consideration.^{*****} For instance, Law professor Christopher Stone, argued in a paper

^{*} Cole, H. S. D., Christopher Freeman, Marie Jahoda, K.L.R. Pavitt, (eds), *Models of Doom: A Critique of the Limits to Growth* (Milford, Conn.: Universe Publishing, 1973).

^{**} J. Donald Hughes, *What is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016) p. 11.

^{***} Some of the earlier examples of these scholarly works from the field of History are: Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972) or R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

^{****} Arne Naess, "The shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," *Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No.1-4 (1973), pp. 95-100.

^{*****} Nina Witoszek and Martin Lee Mueller, Special Journal Issue 'Deep Ecology', *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, Vol. 21 (2017), pp. 209-217.

in 1972 entitled “Should Trees Have Standing, Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects” that nature should have the same legal rights of protection as human lives.*

Second, social ecology as a school of thought associated with Murray Bookchin, rejected any form of “centrism” (of humans or nature) and claimed that environmental problems and crises are rooted in hierarchical, state-controlled, and exploitative social structures predicated on domination of both people and nature. Rooted in the eco-anarchist analyses of Russian historian Peter Kropotkin, this approach connected environmentalism with emancipatory struggles against imperialism and oppression both at the local and global level.



11.d Concept Definition

Anthropocene

A period in history, the most recent geological epoch, in which the presence of human beings has made an imprint on the surface of the Earth by way of radioactive fallout, microplastics and heavy metals and the influencing of the Earth's climate.

The influence of deep ecology also influenced the development of fields like Big History, which has been described as “an origin story for the Anthropocene Epoch of human history”.** Their main contribution to the field of history has been to remind us that significant change, be it cultural or social but also climatic, is something very recent and as such an abnormality in the otherwise very stable history of human development. The obsession with the progress of time and progress of history which defines the modern era was reinterpreted with regards to scale and intensity, leading to a realization that “matters that for millennia [had been] local concerns [now] became [truly] global [affairs]”***

Growing concern about the magnitude of the environmental crisis has also fueled skepticism towards the exclusive and autonomous agency of humans. On the one hand, the global environmental crisis is largely human made. The human impact is so vast that, as described above, scholars increasingly accept our time as the “Anthropocene”, a term popularized by Dutch meteorologist and atmospheric chemist Nobel Prize winner Paul J. Crutzen in the early 2000s to describe a new geological epoch of planet Earth in which the impact of humans has led to irreversible change comparable to the climatic transformations of cosmic proportions, such as the Ice Age. On the other hand, what makes climate change precisely frightening is that it develops in ways that are largely beyond human intention and control. Despite

* Christopher D. Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing?—Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects.” *Southern California Law Review* Vol. 45 (1972), pp. 450–501.

** David Christian, “What is Big History?”, *Journal of Big History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2018), pp. 4–19, p. 17.

*** J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World* (New York: Norton, 2000) p. 4.

the significance of human impact on the planet, a post-humanist perspective, a philosophical school which questions human autonomy and agency in driving change, propagates a humble understanding of humans as sharing agency with non-human elements in a complex assemblage. The character of non-human agency is subject to debate. Some point to the generative and self-organizing capacity of the atmosphere, bacteria and the cosmos.* There is, for instance, evidence that some plants have memory.** Some even controversially claim that matter is also capable of experience, desire and memory.***

Since the 1990s, political ecologists have increasingly turned attention to local-level studies of environmental movements, symbolic politics, and the “institutional nexus of power, knowledge and practice,” drawing from post-structuralism’s engagement with discourse analysis and from post-modern approaches to development.**** Much work has explored the ways in which environments and environmental knowledges are discursively constructed, analyzing how and why particular forms of knowledge predominate, and underscoring the role of social norms and cultural practices in shaping the perceptions of scientists, policymakers and bureaucrats.***** In a similar vein, research in political ecology has focused on the relationship between symbolic struggles over meaning and day-to-day material struggles over control and access to resources; all this in an attempt to raise the emancipatory potential of environmental ideas, uncover discourses of resistance and put them into wider circulation.*****

In this respect, political ecology research has been increasingly associated with the rise to prominence of environmental justice as a social movement and a distinctive interpretive frame that foregrounds the political economy of environmental racism and unequal exposure to hazards, waste, and pollution, as

* Manuel DeLanda, ‘Non-Organic Life’, in: Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (eds) *Incorporations* (New York: Urzone 1992), pp. 129-167.

** Robert Krulwich, ‘Can a Plant Remember? This One Seems to, Here’s the Evidence’, *National Geographic* 15 December 2015. Available at: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/can-a-plant-remember-this-one-seems-to-heres-the-evidence> Last accessed 22 April 2022.

*** Karen Barad, ‘On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I am’, *Differences: Feminist Theory Out of Sciences*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2012), pp. 206-223.

**** Peter Walker, ‘Political Ecology: Where is the Ecology?’, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 29, No.1 (2005), pp. 73-82. See also: Richard Peet and Michael Watts, *Liberation Ecologies* (London: Routledge, 1996); Noel Castree and Bruce Braun, *Social Nature* (London: Blackwell, 2001). See for a discussion on post-structuralism chapter 8.

***** Tim Forsyth, *Critical Political Ecology* (London: Routledge, 2003); Brian Wynne, ‘Scientific Knowledge and the Global Environment’, in: Michael Redclift and Tim Benton (eds), *Social Theory and the Global Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 169-189.

***** Donald Moore, ‘Marxism, Culture, and Political Ecology: Environmental Struggles in Zimbabwe’s Eastern Highlands’, in: R. Peet, and M. Watts, (eds), *Liberation Ecologies* (London: Routledge, 1996); Arturo Escobar, ‘Whose Knowledge, Whose Nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements’, *Journal of Political Ecology* Vol. 5, No. 1 (1998), pp. 53-82.

well as the role of subaltern “vocabularies of protest,” and counter-discourses of nature and land use in the so-called “environmentalism of the poor”.*



11.e Concept Definition

Environmental justice

A form of justice involving developing and upholding of the rules and regulations on the protection of the environment for all people.

Within this context, special emphasis is put on the mobilization of indigenous environmental knowledge or indigenous epistemologies in local idioms of struggles for territorial rights. Moving beyond a long-standing Western tradition of idealizing native peoples as “ecologically noble savages”, the focus of this line of analysis is the circulation of “indigeneity” as a means to politicize environmental concerns and articulate historically and geographically situated appeals to self-determination, decolonization, and self-representation. As described in the introduction to this chapter, numerous counter-discourses on nature and the use of land and sea from, for instance the Pacific, are becoming ever louder and are increasingly finding resonance in global institutions and NGO’s.

The key source for this chapter is an extract from the book *Black Rainbow* by Albert Wendt. Wendt is a writer of Samoan descent, living and working in Aotearoa/ New Zealand. *Black Rainbow* is a dystopian novel about an imaginary totalitarian New Zealand. His book is an example of the vocabularies of protests, which were created in response to the environmental threat to the Pacific, specifically the threat of nuclear pollution. We include a short excerpt of a scene set in Auckland. The protagonist and his wife do their daily exercise running to the One Tree Hill memorial. This time, his wife has brought along an art work, the lithograph *Black Rainbow*.

[...] Maungakiekie [...] is an extinct volcano. The road up to the summit follows the ridge that is the eastern edge of the cone. The grass was still sparkling with dew. Our breath smoked. For once the smell of sheep shit was absent. As we climbed, the swirling clouds in the heavens dropped lower and seemed to anchor themselves to the tip of the Memorial. I gazed down at the bottom of the cone. A few sheep were grazing among the boulders. She continued to pull away from me, striding bravely. When I got to the carpark around the Memorial and the lone pine tree that grew a few meters away, she was already on the concrete platform that was the base of the Memorial. I hurried up the steps.

* Joan Martinez Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (London: Edward Elgar, 2003).

We stood and looked at the city that spread out in all directions, at the other dead volcanoes, the harbours, bays, horizons and islands of the Gulf. The mattress of dark cloud cast its shifting silence over everything. The southerly stirred.

'It's getting cold', I said.

She unzipped her haversack. Out of it she took the Hotere lithograph. For a while she examined it. Her sweat dripped onto the glass. She wiped it dry with her sweatband. 'Once all this and that city was forest,' she said. She gripped the lithograph with both hands.

As she circled the Memorial, she held the lithograph out in front of her, like an icon. In it the sky and the full swing of the city were caught. Every shade, shape, light, twist, change and impermanency of them. Reflected there for a time and then lost as she circled.

*Was she reinvesting everything with mana?** Warding off evil spirits? Or what?

The cloud cover in the east began to thin out. The morning sun became visible, a faint ball of orange. She stopped and, facing it, held the lithograph above her head, with the Black Rainbow pointed at the sun. As the sun rose the lithograph's clock of doom recorded its rising.

Then in an ancient language I'd not heard before, she sang to those who'd been there before us.

Later, on our way down, she started jogging. I hurried to catch up with her. Our shadows ran on ahead, separately. It started drizzling. The tiny raindrops were icy needles that pricked at our faces and arms.

'Was Hotere a descendant of the original tribe?' she asked, more to herself than to me.

'Don't know', I looked up. There was no rainbow in the swirling heavens. [...]

[...] "I have no history. She has no herstory. Our children's history began with us but that's all – there is no time before that. History is a curse, the Tribunal has ruled.

*We must be free of it to be. I believe them. [...]"***

In the novel, an all-powerful corporate state Tribunal requires all citizens to “confess”, so that the Tribunal can take over “the past, the guilt”. History is equated with the burden of guilt and “dehistorifying” is framed as liberation. The morning routine with which the novel opens, sets up a contrast between the protagonist and his wife. She always buys a lot of fruit; he consumes too much beer and has developed a paunch. She misses her children and community; he does not talk about the past. The protagonist is thus introduced as someone who has internalized a suburban lifestyle and has committed himself to the Tribunal’s project of historical

* In Polynesian and Melanesian cultures, mana is the spiritual life force energy or healing power that permeates the universe.

** Albert Wendt, *Black Rainbow* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 18-19 and 21.



Image 11.3 One Tree Hill Memorial Auckland



Description: The Hill was named after a single tree which was growing on the hill when Europeans arrived. The Maori name for the hill is Maungakiekie or hill of the kiekie. Kiekie (screw palm or weaving plant) refers to the epiphyte or vine which grows on other trees. This Maori description probably predates the contemporary greenery on the hill.

Image 11.4 One Tree Hill Memorial Auckland (detail)

erasure. In the opening scenes, their children have already been relocated, and in the second chapter, the wife disappears too. The protagonist, upon acquiring his reference letter stating that he is a free citizen, is sent on a quest to find his relocated family. It is a quest scripted by the state Tribunal as a commercial real life game in which the protagonist needs to follow clues, receives monetary prizes for completed segments and is pushed along by hunters. The novel follows the

protagonist during this journey from urban to rural Aotearoa/New Zealand, during which he experiences “moments of environmental contact that arouse decolonized memories, which ultimately reconnect him to his genealogy, Indigeneity, and family.”^{*} Though there is a clear progression from ignorance to awareness through traversing the landscape, the novel eschews easy binaries, situating indigenous cultures right in the urban future.^{**} The excerpt above comes early in the novel, before his wife is relocated and the journey begins.

The title of the novel, *Black Rainbow*, refers to a series of lithographs of the same title, created by the Maori artist Ralph Hotere in protest of the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior (see next section). Hotere produced a new work in the series every time the French exploded a nuclear device in Moruroa.^{***} The lithograph that features in the novel shows a black arch surrounded by a countdown of numbers. The darkness of the image, and the countdown, simultaneously signify the retrieval of colonial history and memory in the course of the protagonist’s journey, the neocolonial nuclear countdown and ongoing anticolonial resistance.^{****}

The memorial on top of Maungakiekie that the couple passes daily is a large obelisk to commemorate the Maori people. When Sir Lord Logan Campbell died in 1912, his will bequeathed £5000 for the “uprearing heavenward of a towering obelisk in memoriam to the great Maori race”, as he thought the indigenous people were doomed to go extinct. When the obelisk was finally completed in 1940, however, it was very clear that the Maori were here to stay and activists have since contested the name “memorial”. Like the lithograph, the obelisk thus signifies colonial violence, as well as indigenous resilience and anticolonial resistance.

The ritual performed in the excerpt relates these memories of settler colonialism and nuclear imperialism to the suburban sprawl that has replaced the forests. This is not only because consumerism and urbanization have swallowed up parts of nature, but also because this history of urbanization is ridden with stories of forced displacement. Only nine years before publication of Wendt’s *Black Rainbow*, residents of Rongelap, one of the Marshall islands, were forced to evacuate due to excess levels of radiation.^{*****} More broadly, the novel can be seen as a form of “oceanic storytelling” in which colonial violence, capitalist expansion and ecological degradation are intertwined.^{*****}

* Rebecca Hogue, ‘Decolonial Memory and Nuclear Migration in Albert Wendt’s *Black Rainbow*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (2020), pp. 325-348, p. 326.

** Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Islands Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2009). In particular chapter 4: ‘Adrift and Unmoored: Globalization and Urban Indigeneity’.

*** Juniper Ellis, ‘The Techniques of Storytelling: An Interview with Albert Wendt’, *Review of International English Literature* Vol. 28, No. 3 (1997), pp. 79-94, p. 87.

**** Julia Boyd, ‘Black Rainbow, Blood-Earth: Speaking the Nuclearized Pacific in Albert Wendt’s *Black Rainbow*’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 52, No. 6 (2006), pp. 672-686, p. 677.

***** Hogue, ‘Decolonial Memory’, pp. 326-327.

***** See Hogue, ‘Decolonial Memory’.

The protagonist's initial puzzlement at his wife's ritual on the memorial stands for the larger process in which concerns for the environment, political repression and historical injustice have often been disconnected from each other, serving to relegate the experiences of Oceanic peoples to amnesia and disparagement. Albert Wendt sees his literary work as an attempt to counter "the stereotypes and fallacious myths about Samoa, Polynesia and the South Seas" produced by popular narratives and Western social sciences alike.* His fiction should be seen as an attempt to decolonize our knowledge of the world by "reintroducing engaged modes of Oceanic ecological thinking", deserving the attention not only of literary scholars, but also of a historian.**

Nuclear Tests in French Polynesia and The Nuclear Free Pacific Movement

The story of the Pacific region is intimately tied up with ecology. The Pacific Ocean is a vast maritime space with a large diversity of islands, many of them remote and sparsely populated. They were locations of choice, among others for France, to test nuclear weapons arsenal. Until the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996, which prohibited the testing of nuclear devices in the air, on land, under sea or in outer space, nuclear testing was common.

The nuclear age had started with the invention of the nuclear bomb, based on the fission or fusing of atoms. Its destructive effect was proven beyond doubt on 6 August 1945, when the American B-29 bomber Enola Gay dropped a single atom bomb called 'Little Boy' on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. With this destruction, the United States and its allies hoped to force Japan to surrender, as Germany had done already. More than 70,000 people died instantly and it vaporized and incinerated parts of the city. Together with a second bomb used against Nagasaki three days later, over 200,000 people died in the attacks. Apart from being a deadly and traumatic experience for the people directly involved, following on from the blast, others would die of burns, radiation, cancers and over the next generations birth defects and deformities occurred. The devastation was enormous, with concrete collapsed and steel melted, the locality became a waste land.

While the horrific nature of the bomb was recognized everywhere, a race started for its further improvement, testing and development. This all powerful weapon would feature prominently in the arms race of the Cold War. Testing occurred in remote places, deserts but also islands, notably in the Pacific. Over the course of the past 75

* Albert Wendt as cited in Paul Sharrad, 'Albert Wendt and the Problem of History', *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 37, no. 1 (2002), pp. 109-116, p. 109.

** Dina El Dessouky, 'Activating Voice, Body and Place', in: Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (eds) *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 254-272, p. 270.

years, since the first test in New Mexico, 2000 nuclear detonations have occurred. The results of the nuclear fall-out and radiation are visible on the planet and form one of the arguments for geologists to recognize the new geological epoch of the Anthropocene.

While the United States was the first nuclear power, others quickly followed. In particular the Soviet Union caught up and started developing its own arsenal. As a corollary, a new imperialism developed as control was sought over the supply of essential materials to develop nuclear capability, especially uranium.



11.f Concept Definition

Nuclear imperialism

Imperialist activities to establish and maintain control over nuclear production and output (including weapons production) at the cost of communities in the developing world. Think for instance of the mining of uranium, as a core ingredient for nuclear fuel.

The testing regimes of the United States, Britain, France and later also China in the Pacific have led to large-scale ecological damage to humans and eco-systems. Pacific Islanders who were directly impacted by the dangers of radioactive fallouts, instantly organized a series of formal protests. Traditional leaders and politicians of the Marshall Island communities for instance lodged a petition submitted to the UN in 1954, demanding an immediate end to nuclear bomb testing in the Pacific, and expressing their fears of becoming a homeless nation.* Their petition read:

The Marshallese people [...] are also concerned for the increasing number of people removed from their land.... Land means a great deal to the Marshallese. It means more than just a place where you can plant your food crops and build your houses or a place where you can bury your dead. It is the very life of the people. Take away their land and their spirits go also.**

Similarly, government officials from other states in the South Pacific expressed anger over the casual attitudes of nuclear powers with regards to the health and safety of inhabitants of Oceania. For example, the New South Wales Premier J.B. Renshaw ironically asked in 1964 “If this ‘quaint little bomb’ is so harmless, why aren’t the French letting it off in the Bay of Biscay or in a paddock on the South of France?”***

* Nic Maclellan, ‘Grappling with the Bomb: Opposition to Pacific Nuclear Testing in the 1950s’, in: Phillip Deery and Julie Kimber (eds), *Issues on War and Peace: Proceedings of the 14th Biennial Labour History* (Melbourne: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 2015) p. 23.

** Petition from the Marshallese People Concerning the Pacific Islands: “Complaints regarding explosions of lethal weapons without our home islands to United Nations Trusteeship Council, 20 April 1954, circulated as UN Trusteeship Council document T/PET.10/28, 6 May 1954. Cited in: Maclellan, ‘Grappling with the Bomb’, p. 23.

*** New Zealand Press Association, *N.S.W. May Protest About Bomb*, 9 December 1964. New Zealand National Library Archives, Press, Volume CIII, Issue 30619, page 21.

New Zealand also saw a large number of nuclear disarmament committees emerging across the nation in the 1960s and '70s, organizing vigils and picketing marches. These committees directly addressed the French government, as their concrete plans for nuclear testing in French Polynesia were seen as the closest threat to New Zealand and the Cook Islands. In a letter to the French Ambassador in New Zealand, campaigners pleaded with the French to reconsider as “the plans for French nuclear testing will quicken the arms race, encourage other nations to extend nuclear testing to an area previously free of tests, and increase the possibility of danger from nuclear fall-out in the Southern hemisphere”.* The New Zealand government eventually saw no other option but to bring the matter before the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 1973, pleading that the continuing atmospheric nuclear tests conducted by France violated the rights of New Zealand under international law. The court ruled that the French government should cease all nuclear tests which could cause radioactive fallout endangering the populations of New Zealand, the Cook Islands and Tokelau islands.** France responded by continuing their tests underground. Moreover, those island communities of French Polynesia most affected, had no such judicial means of opposition to protect the sovereignty and integrity of their nation, as they were still subjected to the French state.

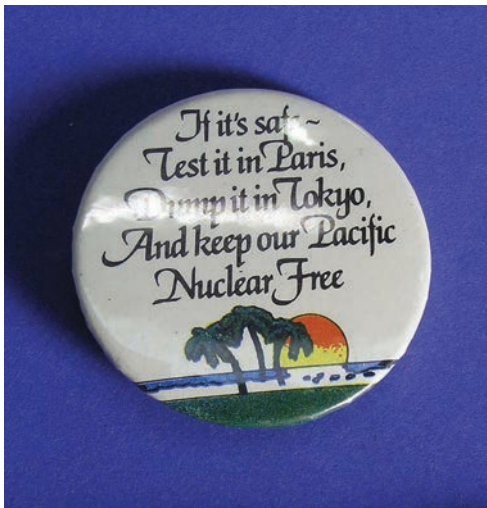


Image 11.5 Button Anti-Nuclear Protest

* Second Protest at French Plans, New Zealand National Library Archives, Press, Volume CII, Issue 30027, 11 January 1963, p. 10.

** Don MacKay, 'Nuclear Testing: New Zealand and France in the International Court of Justice', *Fordham International Law Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 5 (1996), pp. 1857-1887, p. 1864.

From both the public responses as well secret deliberations by nuclear powers, about the possible damage their tests could cause, it becomes apparent that concerns for the wellbeing of local populations were practically non-existent. They were deemed insignificant next to the 'global importance' of the nuclear tests which were seen as the surest way to safeguard humanity against another world war. British government officials, for instance, wrote about the health dangers to Pacific islanders, expecting that "only very slight health hazard to people would arise, and that only to primitive peoples".* Indeed, not only the remoteness of the Pacific Islands but more importantly their marginality in global politics, and their perceived 'primitiveness' "was the resource that drew their imperial occupiers to focus on their lands and their seas".** They became completely subjugated to the will of nuclear powers. Historian Gabrielle Hecht has argued that this period of nuclear testing, should in fact be regarded as the age of Nuclear Imperialism, as it followed the same patterns and logic of nineteenth century imperial conquest: "Once the weapons were built, the imperial cycle began anew, with atomic bombing – more palatably referred to as 'nuclear testing' – of the Marshall Islands, the Sahara, the Navajo Nation, Maralinga, Moruroa, and other colonized spaces".*** Indeed, imperial politics were the driving force behind France's decision to select several atolls in French Polynesia as the main site for their nuclear tests. The first French nuclear test had been conducted in Algeria in 1960, but with the independence of the country in 1962, the possibility of quelling opposition or even gaining access to the site evaporated. The remoteness of French Polynesian islands, but more importantly, the colonial control over local independence movements, made the island nation the best candidate in the eyes of the French government.****

Despite close control over local politics, resistance did mount and preceded the actual testing.***** As soon as it became clear nuclear tests were going to be carried out in French Polynesia, local politicians in the Territorial Assembly united in condemning the plans. For instance, Felix Tefaatau, of the RDPT (Rassemblement démocratique des populations Tahitiennes) a political party seeking autonomy from France, remarked that "since there is really no danger at all, why does not the French government make these tests in the Marseilles harbour or in the centre of Paris?" Similarly, the local representative of the Gaullist party, Ellie Salmon, stated: "Like

* Minutes of meeting on 27 November 1956 marked "Top Secret-UK Eyes Only," xy/181/024. Cited in: Nic Maclellan, 'The Nuclear Age in the Pacific Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2005), pp. 363-372, p. 363.

** Robert Jacobs, 'Nuclear Conquistadors: Military Colonialism in Nuclear Test Site Selection during the Cold War', *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, Vol.1, No. 2 (2013), pp. 157-177, p. 160.

*** Gabrielle Hecht, *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), p. 4-5.

**** Jean-Marc Regnault, 'France's Search for Nuclear Test Sites, 1957-1963', *Journal of Military History* Vol. 67, No. 4 (2003), pp. 1223-1248.

***** Jean-Marc Regnault, *La Bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'Implantation 1957-1964* (Paris: Scoop, 1993). Cited in: Maclellan, 'The Nuclear Age in the Pacific', p. 364.

all metropolitan Frenchmen, we say no to the bomb”.* The RDPT, furthermore, feared that the arrival of many French military personnel and their families was a new way of increasing the number of French settlers on the islands and tipping the political balance in their favor. “We people born in the islands”, said Tefaatau, “must be on our guard against all these outsiders, who settle here with the sole purpose of making money”.** Representatives of French Polynesia in the National Assembly in Paris equally tried to change the government’s plans. On 7 September 1966, two months after the first nuclear test had been conducted by the French in Moruroa, the Polynesian deputy John Teariki addressed president De Gaulle stating “I cannot help but speak to you, Mr President, on behalf of the inhabitants of this territory, all the bitterness, all the sadness that we feel to see France, [...] [having become part of] the “Atomic Gang””*** and by doing so disrespecting “the contract that binds us to France and the rights that are recognized to us by the Charter of the United Nations”****.

Concerns also mounted in Europe and North America, initially first among Pacifist movements who feared the nuclear arms race would lead to the total destruction of humankind but later included also the growing ecology movements in the West. Large-scale popular protests against nuclear weapons started in the 1970s, in particular after a partial meltdown of a nuclear reactor in the United States at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania. Environmental organizations from the US and Europe started concerted actions to create public pressure. Focused on environmental change, deforestation, and anti-nuclear protests, they became a powerful voice in the debate.

More radical activist environmentalist movements like Greenpeace were also part of what Vassos Argyrou has called a societal paradigm shift from seeing nature as separate from humankind and dangerous, to sacralizing the Earth and nature and seeing humankind as inherently part of it.***** As such they took more ‘aggressive’ steps in ensuring nature’s protection by, for instance, placing activists as human shields between whaling vessels and ocean wildlife or between forests and lumber companies. Additionally, these movements recognized those communities who had managed to maintain a better equilibrium between their society and nature, not as ‘pre-modern’ but as guardians of a truer understanding of a human’s relationship to nature.***** Acting upon this belief, the originally Canadian organization Greenpeace

* Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign, French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 60.

** Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign*, p. 60.

*** John Teariki, député, Discours d’accueil au général de Gaulle, Papeete, 7 septembre 1966. Cited in: Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Moruroa Mon Amour* (Paris: Stock, 1974), p. 176-185.

**** Teariki, Discours. Cited in: Danielsson, *Moruroa*, p. 176-185.

***** Vassos Argyrou, *The Logic of Environmentalism: Anthropology, Ecology and Postcoloniality* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

***** Argyrou, *The Logic of Environmentalism*.

became active in the struggle to keep the Pacific nuclear free. With a fleet of ships, they patrolled Pacific islands, moved people from islands which had suffered from contamination by nuclear fallout, put people on islands to monitor the activities and tests, while asking for the world's attention to these actions. For example, with their operation 'Exodus' in 1985, the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior aided around 350 Marshallese nuclear refugees from fleeing the heavily contaminated atolls. Following this campaign, the Rainbow Warrior stopped over in Auckland, New Zealand, to refuel and prepare for their campaign in French Polynesia. The ship never made it to Moruroa.

Greenpeace's flagship was moored in the harbor of Auckland in preparation for the protest. In the evening of 10 July, a mine went off which blew a large hole in the ship. Instead of quickly evacuating, the crew decided on a closer inspection. The planners of the attack had not accounted for this response and their second mine went off, which killed one of the Greenpeace photographers.

The public outcry was large and suspicion fell on France immediately. After initial denials, the French government was forced to admit that the Foreign Intelligence Agency was responsible, which had received orders approved by president François Mitterrand personally. The French agents were apprehended and brought to court. In the aftermath of the attack, France paid Greenpeace damages, with which the organization bought a new ship to continue their campaigns in the South Pacific. In complete contrast to the aims of the French state to reduce attention to their nuclear test plans by disabling Greenpeace, their action ignited a global resurgence of condemnation of nuclear weapons and nuclear tests. Also as a result of the attack, New Zealand, on whose territory the attack took place, renewed its ties with the



Image 11.6 The Rainbow Warrior in Marsden Wharf in Auckland Harbor after the bombing by French secret service agents

Pacific nations. Together they declared a nuclear free zone ranging from the Equator to Antarctica and from Papua New Guinea to Easter Island.* Ironically, despite years of informal and formal protests from local communities of Pacific islands, the attack on a Western non-governmental organization was the trigger for global support for the Nuclear Free Pacific movement.

With the end of the Cold War and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1996, the threat of a nuclear war and nuclear pollution seemed to diminish, at least in popular perception. Yet, with the emergence of a new generation of climate activists, the topic of nuclear power has again gained attention. Paradoxically, nuclear power can also be used for energy generation and features in discussions about the energy transition and a green future. Nuclear energy is controversial because of the nuclear waste that is produced. It is stored mostly underground and can continue to emit nuclear particles for tens of thousands of years. In the recent discussion about the Green Deal, nuclear energy was given a green label by the European Commission because of the absence of pollution in the atmosphere, at least in comparison to common carbon sources.** Moreover, the holy grail of renewable energy is the nuclear fusion process, which mimics the energy production of the sun and in contrast to nuclear fission leaves no waste products.*** In the meantime, energy diplomacy has emerged as a field of interest whereby the sources of energy have become of interest in international affairs and in relations between states. In particular, renewable energy diplomacy and energy security have increased in importance. The overreliance on one supplier has been in sharp focus in the confrontation with the Russian Federation over Ukraine.

Conclusion

The damage to the Polynesian ecosystem has already been done and the results of the nuclear testing regime are still with us. The storage of nuclear waste after the testing has left many islands with facilities that are now at risk because of climate change. Rising sea levels will lead to dangerous situations whereby nuclear waste could spill into the ocean. A study from 2019 showed that radiation in some

* Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds, A History of Seas, Peoples and Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 321.

** 'European Commission Declares Nuclear and Gas to be Green', Deutsche Welle, 2 February 2022. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/european-commission-declares-nuclear-and-gas-to-be-green/a-60614990#:~:text=Nuclear%20power%20plants%20would%20be,has%20gone%20into%20operation%20though>. Last consulted 20 April 2022.

*** Haley Zaremba, 'Why Nuclear Fusion is Still the Holy Grail of Clean Energy', OilPrice.com, 24 August 2021. Available at: <https://oilprice.com/Alternative-Energy/Nuclear-Power/Why-Nuclear-Fusion-Is-Still-The-Holy-Grail-Of-Clean-Energy.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%20century%2C%20scientists,holy%20grail%20of%20clean%20energy>. Last consulted 20 April 2022.

Marshall islands is currently higher than the radioactive radiation in Chernobyl or Fukushima, the two most notable locations of prior nuclear accidents, and is thus still the most radioactive landscape in the world.* We are hearing the voices of the Pacific Islanders, such as in the United Nations Climate Summit sessions. However, it is only recently that these voices are being heard and taken seriously.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the ecological paradigm shift?
2. In the dystopian picture of a fictional future of New Zealand, written by the Samoan author Albert Wendt, history has become a barrier to 'liberty'. What could be the symbolic message of the author with regards to New Zealand's engagement with their settler history?
3. How does the indigenous perspective of the environment feature in this extract?
4. How can a novel be used as a historical source?
5. How is nuclear imperialism the same or different from previous imperialism(s)?

Guide to Further Reading

- Argyrou, Vassos, *The Logic of Environmentalism: Anthropology, Ecology and Postcoloniality* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005). Have recent environmentalism movements managed to adopt a postmodernist view of the relation between humans and nature? Argyrou is of the opinion that most contemporary efforts for conservationism and environmentalism remain thoroughly modernist, as they all seek in one way or another a form of 'stewardship' as the ideal and only role for humankind. This drive for stewardship comes from an underlying and persistent notion of nature as either 'sacred' or otherwise idealized; or the notion of humanity being part of nature, thus saving nature is saving humanity.
- Clark, N., *Inhuman Nature: Sociable Life on a Volatile Planet* (London: Sage, 2011). This important publication engages with social theory and focuses on the role of humans and their habitation of the Earth and the interaction with Earth processes. Not only climate change but also disruptive events, such as hurricanes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions remind us that we inhabit a fragile Earth.
- Crosby, Alfred, *Ecological Imperialism. The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). The rapid colonization and permanent settlement of Europeans in the 'New Worlds', from North and South America to Australia and New Zealand, was not the

* Maveric K. I. L. Abellaa, Monica Rouco Molinaa, Ivana Nikolic-Hughes Emlyn W. Hughes and Malvin A. Ruderman, 'Background gamma radiation and soil activity measurements in the northern Marshall Islands', *PNAS*, Vol. 116, No. 31 (2019) pp. 15425-15434.

result of military superiority or brute force, but mainly due to ecological imperialism. This refers to the introduction of Eurasian plants, animals and pathogens to these colonies, and the subsequent replacement of certain indigenous plants, animals and peoples.

- Crutzen, Paul J. and Eugene F. Stoermer, 'The "Anthropocene"', *Global Change Newsletter* Vol. 41 (2000), pp. 17-18. As the vice-chair of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program, launched by the International Science Council in 1987, Crutzen and his colleagues studied the changes in the global geo- and biospheres. The rapid and dramatic changes, becoming dramatically visible in the later decades of the twentieth century, led Crutzen to propose in this article that humanity had entered a new geological epoch, called the Anthropocene, revealing the destructive force of modernity. This epoch, he argued, started with the industrialization in North-Western Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, which led to increased depletion of natural resources and emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.
- McNeill, J.R., *Environmental History in the Pacific World. The Pacific World Lands Peoples and History of the Pacific, 1500-1900*, Vol. II (New York: Routledge, 2001). This edited volume provides a thorough overview of the important historical developments with regards to environmental changes in the Pacific world. Moreover, it opens up the field of Pacific World Studies to include a much larger area, moving beyond the traditional understanding of Pacific Studies centered around the Polynesian world, and focusing on all coastal nations bordering the Pacific Ocean, from South West Chile to North West Canada, and North East Japan to South East New Zealand.
- Poray-Wybranowska, Justyna. *Climate Change, Ecological Catastrophe, and the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2020). This scholarly publication looks at fiction, from a postcolonial angle. It engages with discussions about effects of colonialism and environmental disasters and how these topics have been linked and treated in literary fiction.

Conclusions: World History Today

ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN AND HELEN STEELE



Introduction

With giant strides this handbook has walked the reader through the last millennium. It has attempted to link major themes in World History to the most significant developments that explain the increasing complexity of human co-habitation over this one thousand year period. We have seen different ways and intensities of connecting, as well as different modes of contact, interaction, imitation, emulation, and expansion, as well as crisis, conflict, disengagement and war. In the introduction to this handbook we have argued for a World History approach that engages with the study of history from the local and place specific, while linking it to macro and global perspectives. Moreover, World History has been argued to be distinct thanks to its interdisciplinary approach, which uses insights from different strands of history writing with national, regional, micro, thematic, transnational and Earth-centered lenses.

World History as a field has most certainly matured in recent years. A renewed appreciation for World History overlapped with the rise of neoliberalism and the view that globalization should be seen as a beneficial development. It coincided with a new popular interest in historical works. Books such as Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, as well as Peter Frankopan's *Silk Roads*, ended up at airport newsstands and made it to popular bestseller lists. History became notably relevant and had something to contribute in discussions infused with buzzwords such as networks and connections. While neoliberalism has been the subject of increasing criticism, the World History agenda has also not been immune from detractors. We will offer some reflection on this discussion below.

In the chapters of this volume, we have attempted to paint a picture of increased connectivity through the lens of a series of common themes. These themes have allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the role of communication to create greater connection between human groups. These exchanges focused on the spread of ideas, techniques, and world views but also on conflict and diseases. Moreover, the spread of exchange lead to the creation of networks of trade and the emergence of capitalism. Antagonistic encounters between different groups provided the trigger for political ordering, in the shape of empires and states. These political orders faced questions of identity and belonging, which were resolved in different ways. Warfare

proved to be an important ingredient, as well as the idea of religion, for legitimating practices and social coherence.

An important caesura which we identified was the distinction between pre-modern and modern societies. The emergence of modernity as a result of the 'Age of Revolutions' and the questioning of the world based on reason and scientific investigation, is a reality which is still with us today. Importantly, it is placed center stage in political discussions and general reflections regarding the justness of the present order. Has our conception of progress really led to a fairer world in which human rights and human dignity are optimally respected? Has the prevalent idea of progress not contributed to the ecological crisis we face today? Only by understanding our past trajectories, can we reflect and think through our current predicament.

In this conclusion, we will try to answer the question of where we now stand in our sense-making exercise and we aim to arrive at an assessment of the World History approach itself. What has it brought us, what shortcomings can we identify, and where are we heading? We will discuss these questions using the concepts that were introduced in the opening chapter; the historians toolkit invites us to consider ordering using chronology, space and concepts.

Ordering

Chronology

Previously we have defined history as the study of change over time in the human past. In order to make sense of change, historians like to understand events and developments by organizing them. Even when they appear as messy and chaotic while living through them, labels, categorization and compartmentalization are tools that are frequently used in history writing. Even today we attempt to apply compartmentalization when living through events which we recognize as momentous. We can think of recent compartmentalizing efforts based on watershed moments: the end of the Cold War, 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, the 2014 rise of ISIS, the 2016 election of Trump, the Covid pandemic, the August 2021 fall of Kabul and notably the 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. They all indicate the end of something and also the emergence and definition of something new, as not seen before. Only time will tell whether they hold up to scrutiny.

We have seen chronology playing a role in the divisions of the sections of this book, as well as in the chapters where words have been used such as pre-history, the Bronze Age and the Cold War, all denoting specific phases or timeframes. We should not see these labels and categorizations as absolute. Just like any aspect of history writing, they are subject to reconsideration and rewriting.

We have used many of these conventions without substantially questioning them. We should be aware, however, that alternative chronologies can be found. We

have societies and cultures, for example, subscribing to other systems of counting time. The Jewish calendar is based upon what is believed to be the start of the Earth in the year 3761 BCE. In North Korea, the calendar is based upon the birth year of the founder of the republic Kim Il-Sung and revolves around the Juche ideology. The Juche calendar starts in the year 1912, which is Juche 1.



Image 12.1 Eise Eisinga Planetarium Franeker

Even in our conventional calendar, we have shifted from using the designation a.d. (anno domini) denoting the birth of Jesus Christ in the year zero to using CE (common era) without shifting the Christian benchmark.

While calendars are tools to appreciate the passing of time by days, months and years, clocks are used to measure the passing of time by minutes and hours. In ancient Egypt there are the first indications of time keeping based on sun dials based around daylight hours. In the nineteenth century standardization was introduced founded on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and all other designations of time around the world are based on zero hour, being midnight in Greenwich in the south of London.

This type of counting of time suggests a linear approach and the passing of it as a linear progression. This idea fits in with the dominant World History approach of a linear historical narrative and bears clear witness to its core meta-narrative. The overarching logic is geared towards ever increasing connectivity and complexity in human society. This ever-increasing human interaction leads to progress, based



Image 12.2 Sundial, Chariot Wheel Sun Dial at Konark Sun Temple, India

on ideas of rationality, secularization, science, industrialization and globalization. Seeing history from this angle is arguably a form of teleology, as discussed in chapter 4. Teleology can be problematic if the evidence is unsubstantiated.

This is aptly illustrated by the End of History thesis which is based on a linear perspective on history. Francis Fukuyama proclaimed the victory of liberal democracy when witnessing the collapse of the Soviet Union at the start of the 1990s.



12.a Concept Definition

The End of History thesis

Thesis which sees the end of human ideological development in the attainment of liberal democracy. The thesis has a longer pedigree but was popular at the end of the Cold War and during the demise of Soviet communism.

However, the rise of democracy has been very uneven.* Democracy emerged in three waves after the Age of Revolutions**; first in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century, followed by the era of decolonization in the aftermath of the Second World War. The third wave of democratization occurred from the mid-1970s onwards starting with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal and spreading to Spain and Latin America, Asia and Africa. The victory of liberal democracy at the end of the Cold War formed the inauguration of an era in which Western states actively strove to promote democracy as the superior system of political order. With enough money and stamina including military means, it was believed that democracy could be introduced regardless of the prior or existing political context. This idea was practiced in different places such as Afghanistan and Iraq. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is clear that democracy is in retreat. Alternatives such as political Islam and capitalist authoritarianism have proven attractive to significant numbers of people.

The alternative to this dominant linear view of history, is seeing history as a cyclical process. There are cycles visible in history of populations growing and contracting, economies expanding and going bust and cultures thriving and going under. A major example of this cyclical view on history with a long pedigree is the rise and decline of empires. In recent years, the discussion about power transitions between a declining power and an ascending power has received a lot of attention. The re-emergence of China specifically has been the subject of much scholarly interest. In a theory called the *Thucydides Trap*, Graham T. Allison has built on the ideas of the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, who found that when a rising power challenges a dominant power pressures in the system create a tendency for violence.***

* Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005).

** Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

*** Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can China and the United States Escape Thucydides Trap?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2017).



Image 12.3 Thucydides



12.b Concept Definition

The Thucydides Trap

A theory developed by Graham Allison, based on ideas offered by Greek historian Thucydides, that a rising power will challenge a dominant one and this challenge will end in armed conflict.

Examples are among others the rivalry between Athens and the emergent Sparta and the emergence of a unified Germany at the end of the nineteenth century challenging British dominance.

The re-emergence of China, in this perspective, comes at the expense of the United States. Based on historical precursors of power transitions the likelihood of violence, according to Allison, is difficult to escape.

The theory has been criticized for lacking a causal explanation. As an alternative it is proposed that it is not so much ascendancy which leads to violent challenge, rather exploiting a post-ascendancy last opportunity.* What present-day China has in common with Athens in its confrontation with Sparta and Germany before the First World War and Japan at the start of the Second World War is a declining demographic, a maximum extension of their economies and a recognition that the window of opportunity to improve on its situation is closing. A period of rapid growth in these cases is followed by a slowing down, domestic audiences become restless and this mixture creates a pressure cooker effect.

* Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Norton, 2022)

Another perspective on this cyclical approach to history has been offered by quantitative research. The field of cliodynamics has collected huge amounts of data on a series of indicators from different societies across time and place.



12.c Concept Definition

Cliodynamics

Field of study based on quantification of historical phenomena and processes. An important exponent of this field is Peter Turchin. The term derives from Clio, the Greek muse of history.

Based on this large dataset, Peter Turchin and others have claimed the existence of macro-historical trends and longitudinal patterns, in particular fifty year cycles of social unrest. Their indicators have now predicted the ‘turbulent twenties’* marked by social and political turmoil. Intra-elite rivalries, among the political and social elites which have grown during the good times, are driven by frustrated aspirations of those wanting to join, or those who do not feel represented.** This forms a recurring pattern of social polarization consisting of fifty year cycles since 1780.

While historians like to order in time, time frames and the passing of time, the other major parameter used is space. The conventional systems of counting time with which we as scholars are familiar today are decidedly Western inventions.*** Historians like to use spatial divisions in their efforts of sense making. Moreover, another major ordering mechanism can be found in a thematic approach, which we have adopted in this book. Also here, alternative orderings can, of course, be imagined.

Space

The division of the world based on maps with a northern and southern hemisphere and a grid pattern of latitude and longitude is a product of a certain time and place, with a comparable trajectory to thinking about time. While the earliest known map makers, such as Herodotus in the fifth century BCE, believed the world consisted of Europe, Africa and Asia, increased information and awareness led to ever more sophisticated map making exercises.

* Jack Goldsmith and Peter Turchin, ‘Welcome to the Turbulent Twenties’, *Noema Magazine*, 10 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.noemamag.com/welcome-to-the-turbulent-twenties/> Last accessed: 20 April 2022.

** Peter Turchin, ‘Dynamics of Political Instability in the United States 1780-2010’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2012), pp. 577-591.

*** Goody, *The Theft of History*.

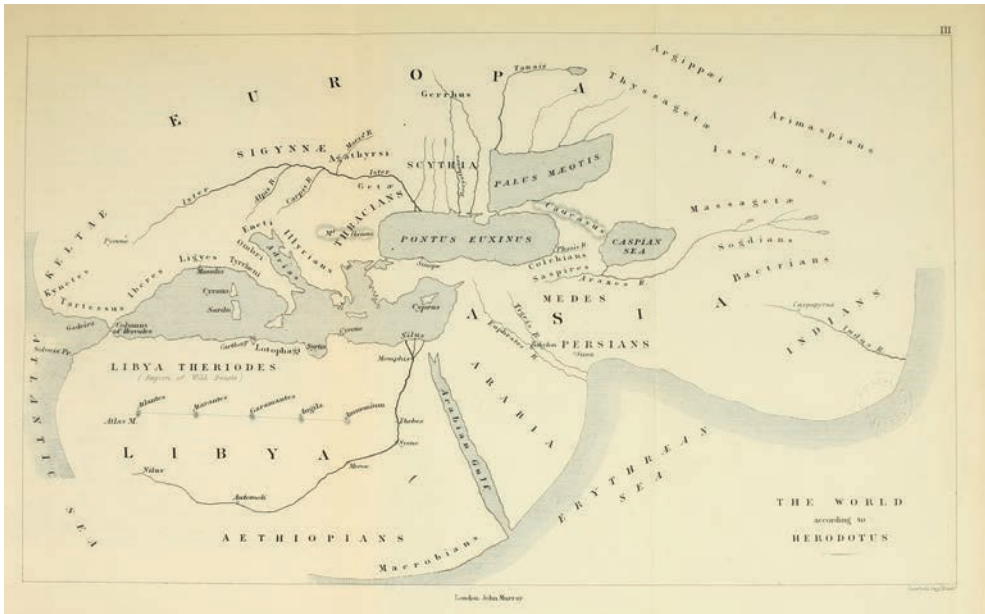


Image 12.4 Herodotus Map

The current dominant projection of the world puts the north pole on top with the equator as the central focal point. This is called the Mercator projection. Alternative projections, for example, put the south pole on the top or project the Pacific as a focal point rather than the Atlantic.

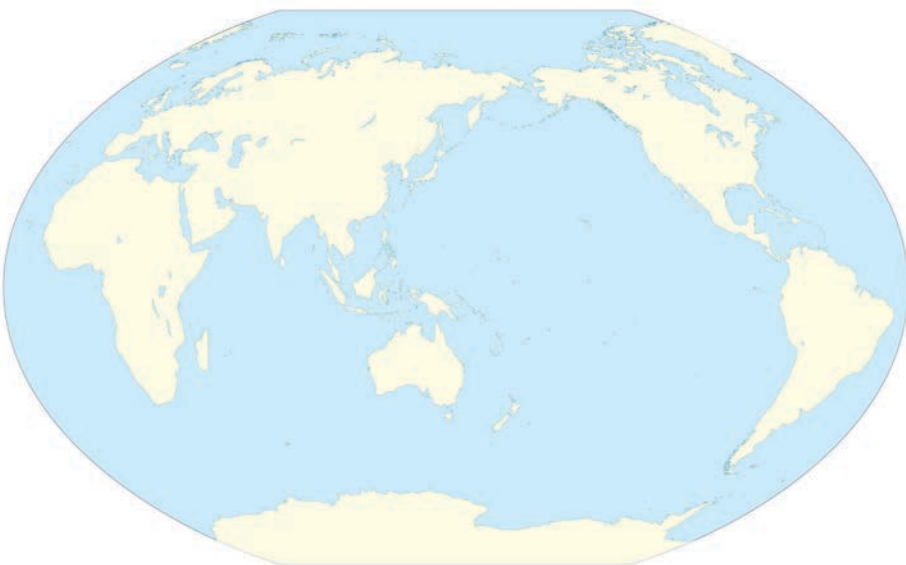


Image 12.5 World Map with Pacific center stage

Moving beyond space as defined by geography alone, population density can also be projected spatially and the picture that emerges is completely different from conventional geographical projections. Those countries with large or rising populations suddenly gain prominence at the expense of those with contracting demographics. These different projections invite us not only to look differently at our world but also to think differently.

Concepts

Apart from alternative maps, alternative ordering can also be achieved by looking at conceptual lenses. In this volume, we have taken on board many of the conventions that are commonly used for ordering our world. When discussing communication, trade, race, religion, war, identity, and modernity, we have liberally used the concepts of power, state, civilization, and empire. However, power is in itself a contentious concept and theme for ordering.



12.d Concept Definition

Power

The ability to make others do what you want them to do and which they were not inclined to do in the first place.

Hard Power

Coercive instruments in the shape of military and economic capabilities to influence the behavior of an opponent.

Soft Power

Instruments of attraction and co-option to influence the behavior of an opponent.

We should distinguish hard power, in the shape of coercion or war, from soft power as exercised by for example, legitimation and emulation.* Both have been prevalent. Power tends to become, sooner or later, questioned or disputed. Moreover, other actors apart from the Westphalian state such as non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, transnational terrorist organizations, wield power and are powerful enough to affect order.

Since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, states have been the most important building blocks of international order.** Membership of the United Nations depends on the recognition of statehood. States have in different constellations shaped the international order. Labels such as unipolar, bipolar and multipolar have been used

* Joseph S. Nye jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (London: Hachette 2009).

** See also discussion in chapter 4.

to describe the international order adopted over the past two hundred years. In the nineteenth century multipolarity dominated; during the Cold War bipolarity and since the 1990s unipolarity or a unipolar moment occurred. The expectation is that multipolarity will determine the shape of international affairs in the years to come. The re-emergence of China will form a defining feature.



12.e Concept Definition

Unipolarity

An international order with one dominant power, such as the dominance of the United States immediately after the end of the Cold War.

Bipolarity

An international order with two dominant powers, such as during the period of the Cold War with the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Multipolarity

An international order with multiple strong powers, such as after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century in Europe. This was also called the 'Concert of Europe' or a system of the balance of power, with strong powers balancing against each other and against one dominant state.

However, where we like to see order, others claim no such thing has been visible. 'No truly global "world order" has ever existed. What passes for order in our time was devised in Western Europe nearly four centuries ago, at (...) Westphalia (...) the sole generally recognized basis of what exists of a world order.'^{*} Henry Kissinger, former American Secretary of State and long standing scholar of international relations, here claims that the order was by no means global. Moreover, he argues that '[the] very international order must sooner or later face the impact of two tendencies challenging its cohesion: either a redefinition of legitimacy or a significant shift in the balance of power'. ^{**} Therefore, order, as with the other themes, is subject to perennial change.

^{*} Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), pp. 2-3

^{**} Kissinger, *World Order*, 365.



Image 12.6 President Reagan and Soviet Secretary General Michael Gorbachev signing the INF Treaty 1987

While we have tried to justify the thematic choices we have made for this handbook in the first few pages, there are still many other concepts that can, have been, and should be explored. Studying change over time in the human past knows many different and unexplored entry points. It is true that the selected themes can reveal and tell a major story. At the same time, they obscure and disguise simply because of the prominence of the chosen concept.

There are two most obvious and notable omissions in the narrative here that deserve an explicit mention. First, the counter-forces or retreats from globalization need to be pointed out. While overall linear progress dominates the picture, this is by no means a reflection of the historical detail. The progress of increased human connectivity over the course of the past millennium has gone in stops and starts. As noted, rises and declines have occurred, as well as retreats and re-emergence. However, the dominance in the picture has been squarely on connection rather than disconnection. The process of withdrawal, of disconnecting and disordering, have not been substantially treated here. Nor have they received prominent attention in the wider World History debate. We have witnessed significant retreats from globalization, for instance during the interbellum when the ideological and economic diversity increased, and communism and fascism gained a foothold. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the connections had decreased, not

least from the economic crisis which erupted with the stock market crash in 1929, in comparison with say three decades before.

There have been voices in the debate drawing attention to the counter-forces or the push back against globalization. One example is the 'clash of civilizations' thesis offered by Samuel Huntington in the 1990s and introduced in chapter eight.* His vision remains popular, also among politicians, despite the criticism that scientists have raised against the argument.** There is little empirical evidence, for instance, to substantiate the claims of the theory. While civilizations might be said to exist, the definition on which he bases them is open for interpretation. Is there such a thing as an African civilization? Moreover, when looking at clashes, the largest number of victims in conflict have fallen not when civilizations clash but within civilizations themselves, i.e. the conflicts within the Islamic civilization have caused more deaths than the clashes on its fault lines.

With the election of American president Donald Trump in 2016, counter-voices to globalization have become more prominent and attained a more mainstream position. Preceding his election, the 2008 financial crisis gave an indication of what was to come. While Trump claimed to represent the white working class, who had suffered due to loss of jobs and social misery as a result, among others, of unfair global trading practices, he gave impetus to a wider movement on the right of the political spectrum. It demanded attention for the negative effects of globalization, which became visibly evident during the Covid-pandemic with problematic economic dependencies coming to light and the storming of Capitol Hill on 6 January 2021. These right wing counter-voices to globalization were far from alone.

The climate crisis has also raised concerns about the logic and necessity of ever increasing globalization. Movements like Extinction Rebellion question the logic of present farming and fishing techniques, the prevalence of air travel and carbon reliance. Their civil disobedience campaigns have also attracted a lot of attention and similar to the right-wing social movement draw on longer running discussions about social justice and the shape of the global commons.*** In the case of environmental activism, the activists draw on prior campaigns and examples of activism against acid rain, greenhouse gasses and ozone depletion, which have attained notable effects in the past.

Seeing both the right-wing and climate activists as counter-voices under-sells their global connectivity. Both could be seen as social movements enjoying the benefits of globalization and both are truly global phenomena. As has been pointed out by several scholars, 'Anti-globalization is itself a phenomenon of globalization,

* Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1996).

** Jonathan Fox, 'Ethnic Minorities and the Clash of Civilizations: A Quantitative Analysis of Huntington's thesis', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2002), pp. 415-434.

*** Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).



Image 12.7 Sydney Climate Change Protest, 2019

and usually seeks to reconstitute the nation's place in the world rather than to retreat into a disconnected autarky'.* In telling the story of increased interaction and connectivity, indeed, the world has witnessed many times over retreats from interaction, and disconnection. The puzzle is: to what extent do they undermine globalization and can we really imagine a reversal?

Apart from those providing active push back against globalization, the second omission in the World History debate is the lack of attention of and recognition for those unable to participate in this process. It is not only the willful or knowing disengagement with globalization that deserves attention but also those people who are not able to opt into globalization because of circumstance that should be part of the narrative.** How representative are the globetrotting liberal cosmopolitans and whose story do they tell? We tend to take for granted the access to information, the open attitude towards the world around us and the ability to engage with it. There are, however, many citizens in the world who lack access because of ability or circumstances, who do not possess the means and the skills necessary for the

* Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2018), pp. 1-21, p. 2.

** See for exceptions: Amy Stanley, 'Maid-servants' Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia 1600-1900', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 2 (2016), pp 437-460. Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the world: Essay toward a global labor history* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Minu Haschemi Yekani, *Koloniale Arbeit: Rassismus, Migration und Herrschaft in Tansania (1885-1914)* (Cologne: Campus, 2018).

interaction. We only have to imagine the illiterate, the poor, and the child laborers as a substantial group left out of this globalizing narrative.

Questions for World History

History invites us to study change over time in the human past by appreciating its unique context, time and place and by trying to get as close as possible to the lived historical experience. It is fair to say that the multidisciplinary ambitions of World History have, so far, paid off. The sources and research from subject matter experts have enriched the perspectives and debates. The work of researchers that have conducted archival investigation, looked in detail at primary and secondary sources, and reached informed opinions, has led to the vibrancy of the World History debate. However, there is an increasing recognition that many things are being left out of the discussion. Several critical observations about the current state of the art within World History can and should be made.

It is not an uncommon problem in meta-history history writing to emphasize one idea at the cost of others. Initially, a dominant factor tends to be identified that holds strong cards to explain the drivers of historical developments, in particular progress. We have seen this with Marxist history writing in which class structure held all explanatory power. The Marxist dialectical materialism sees history developing as a consequence of material and structural forces, capitalism. This has shown itself to be problematic because it exclusively focused on one part of the picture. Similarly, the idea of connectivity and progress as modernity, undergirding the World History narrative, is powerful for what it tells but falls short in what it excludes. In particular, the awarding of great importance to structures, at the cost of agency and the individual, can be marked as a shortcoming and an area for improvement.* These are just two examples of traditions of history writing where the over-reliance on one particular element has started to show shortcomings over the course of time.

This is not the only set of problems with the World History enterprise. The endeavor had the notable ambition of making history writing more inclusive and moving beyond Western dominance, both in subject matter as well as expertise. This de-centering exercise, has been, among others, a response to the invitation to 'provincialize' the West.** While the movement to provincialize the 'West' has been successful in highlighting problems with conventional historical investigation, it is far from complete; first, based on quantitative evidence, the shift to the global

* David A. Bell, 'Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2014), pp. 1-24.

** Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire*.

has not substantially materialized. Historians are today still largely interested in Western history and history writing. A recent survey has found that in the United Kingdom and the United States things are very slow to change and over 75% of historical research is devoted to Europe, the US and Canada.* Second, in the process of provincializing Europe, the continent has moved from a 'knowing subject' to 'an object of global history', with the result of shifting from Eurocentrism to 'a Eurasian centrism'.** In other words, it has shifted from inside out perspectives to outside in but is still preoccupied with itself. When tackling one challenge, a new one has thus emerged.

We can identify two prominent epistemological challenges for World History***. Most prominent is the issue of language. The promise of World History as disruption of the conventional and Western centric narrative has not fully materialized because the core debate remains a largely Anglo-Saxon affair. Publications are mostly in English, the dissemination, the key journals and publishers are firmly rooted in the Anglosphere. We have arrived at a situation with entrenched scholars in established positions, who publish in key journals where the debate takes place, such as the *Journal of World History* and the *Journal of Global History*. Rather than opening things up, centrifugal tendencies have played out; this 'drive to overcome Eurocentrism contributed to the Anglicizing of intellectual lives around the world'.**** The route to academic recognition is to publish in English. It leads one scholar to the conclusion that it 'is another Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues'.***** This leaves out, despite its original promise, the local and specific in other languages than English. It is a clear invitation for future scholarship and one in which International Studies as a field and as a specific academic program can make distinct contributions.

Apart from being linguistically narrow, World History faces an epistemological challenge when looking at approaches to investigation. Dominant academic practices and existing hierarchies promote methodologies that are familiar and recognizable. Cultures and societies, for example, that have not left any written traces are treated

* Luke Clossey and Nicholas Guyatt, 'It's a Small World After All: The Wider World in the Historian's Peripheral Vision', *Perspectives on History*, 1 May 2013. Available online: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2013/its-a-small-world-after-all> Last accessed 20 April 2022.

** Maxine Berg, 'Global History: Approaches and New Directions', in: Maxine Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-18, p. 5. See also: Daniela Tenger, 'Analysis of the Journal of Global History 2006-2010'. Available at: <https://www.rug.nl/let/studeren-bij-ons/master/rema/mhir/journal-global-history-tenger.pdf>

*** See also discussion in: EUI Global History Seminar Group, 'For A Fair(er) Global History', *Cyber Review of Modern Historiography*. Available at: <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/cromohs/FairHist> Last accessed 20 April 2022. See also chapter 2 which discusses epistemology.

**** Jeremy Adelman, 'What is Global History Now?', *Aeon Essays*, 2 March 2017. Available at: <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment> Last accessed 20 April 2022.

***** Adelman, 'What is Global History Now?'.

differently because conventional research standards cannot be applied.* History writing in non-written traditions, apart from archaeology approaches, puts us on the road to storytelling and fiction as part of understanding and explaining the occurrence of change over the course of human existence. Some scholars have taken this up and presented arguments for an incorporation of these strands of thinking. For example, myth complexes and sense-making narratives about origins and predecessors are important in many societies in the process of identity formation and societal grounding.** Oral history, therefore, deserves a more prominent place in the World History discussion.

In an overall appraisal of the World History field, the normative ideal of global citizenship also warrants some reflection. The field operates in the belief that the study of the process of ever-increasing connections can be instrumental in the formation and education of future generations and can create responsible and informed global citizens. This forms the cosmopolitan core of the field. World History and Global History courses, where they are taught, tend to attract large audiences. The offering of these types of courses beyond history departments, such as in political science and liberal arts programs, bears testament to the importance and spread of the appeal of World History. The promotion of responsible citizenship is laudable in and of itself. While history writing in the nineteenth century aimed to serve the ideal of nation building, the present day ambition of history writing to create global citizens demonstrates continuity in its social function. In a polarizing political landscape, informed citizens are crucial.*** Many of the challenges the world faces can only be tackled based on a sense of shared pasts, shared understandings and an idea of a shared future. History has a lot to contribute. What is on the horizon? Will we see a return to national history writing? Or will we witness a new type of history writing that is more inclusive? Or will the field grow into a plurality of a series of *World Histories*?

Whatever the road ahead will look like, wider developments in society and by academics hold exciting promise. The rapid development of artificial intelligence has prompted scholars to start reflecting on widened opportunities for inductive science: a situation with overwhelming data, pointing to hitherto undiscovered patterns in human behavior, begging for explanation.**** Still, some caution is necessary, even at this point. Not only is the data worth as much as the person

* See also the discussion in chapter 2 on Communication.

** Berit Blieseman de Guevara, *Myth and Narrative in International Politics: Interpretive Approaches in the Study of IR* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

*** Drayton and Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', p. 15.

**** Laura Spinney, 'Are we witnessing the dawn of post-theory science?', *The Guardian*, 9 January 2022. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jan/09/are-we-witnessing-the-dawn-of-post-theory-science> Last accessed 20 April 2022.

devising the selection criteria and the algorithms, but also, and perhaps more importantly, as psychologists have pointed out, we are extremely bad at assessing our own individual past, and even worse at gauging our own future.* This should be cause for a large measure of humility.

One thing is certain, the historical record of human experiences of changes over time offers us a rich panoply of human choices made in specific circumstances. It is on this record that we can draw when we want to make sense of our past, our current predicament and possible futures. We learn most likely not literally from history but by looking at what other people did in other timeframes and other places, which can help us think through our own choices. Reading, seeing and listening about this past can enrich our present. If history teaches us anything, it is that change is perennial. Being aware of this invites again humility and can make us wiser. Wise people might just be a little bit better prepared for that unknowable future.

Guiding Questions

1. Give some examples of alternative ordering principles for history writing. Discuss.
2. What are the two most important epistemological challenges for World History?
3. What can World History contribute to global citizenship?
4. What limitations does the World History approach present? What gets left out?

* Eugene M. Caruso, Daniel T. Gilbert and Timothy D. Wilson, 'A Wrinkle in Time: Asymmetric Valuation of Past and Future Events', *Psychological Science*, Vol. 19, No. 8 (2008), pp. 796-801. Available at: https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/danielgilbert/files/caruso_et_al._wrinkle_in_time.pdf Last accessed 20 April 2022.

Guide to Further Reading

- Antunes, Catia, and Karwan Fatah-Black, *Explorations in History and Globalization* (London: Routledge 2018). Another example of the Leiden University approach to world history by a group of excellent scholars.
- Bayley, C.A., *Remaking the Modern World 1900-2015: Global Connections and Comparisons* (London: Wiley Blackwell 2018). A wonderfully concise overview of the most recent period, based on a global history approach.
- Bently, Jeremy, 'Myths, Wagers and Some Moral Implications of World History', *Journal of World History*, 16, 1 (2005), 51-82. This contribution makes the case for the wider importance of the study of World History.
- Berg, Maxine (ed.). *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2013). This book offers both an overview of the past as well as an outline for the future of the field.
- Edgerton, David. *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London: Profile 2008). A nice overview of the most recent history through a thematic approach with an emphasis on the role of technology.