

# Concise Encyclopedia of Comparative Sociology

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# Empires, Imperial States, and Colonial Societies

George Steinmetz

The genealogy of sociological research on empires, imperial states, and colonial societies is a hidden one, in several respects. The most general reason for this invisibility is disciplinary amnesia, that is, sociology's general lack of serious interest in its own past except for occasional references to a handful of the field's "founding fathers". There is inadequate knowledge of earlier work in this area even among current sociological specialists in empire (myself included, until very recently). Sociologists nowadays attribute theories of colonial syncretism and transculturation to cultural anthropology or literary criticism, for example, even though these theories were pioneered partly by sociologists (see below). Connell (1997, 1535) argues that sociologists turned inward *en masse* toward questions of "social difference and social disorder *within the metropole*" after the First World War, but a more detailed investigation finds that sociologists have analyzed, advised, and criticized empires throughout the entire history of the discipline, that is, since the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> Of course there have been shifts in emphasis and argumentation over time and across national fields. Sociologists in the USA and France largely lost interest in ancient empires, though this was less true of German and Italian sociologists (Santoro 2013). In general there was more interest in empire among French, German, and Italian sociologists during the interwar and immediate post-1945 periods than in Britain or the United States, while there is more imperial interest among US based sociologists today. I will not be able to map out these geographical shifts here, much less explain them (but see Steinmetz 2013b). I will try to reconstruct, in broad strokes, the major theoretical contributions to the analysis of empires by sociologists during the past 180 years. Given sociologists' growing interest in colonialism, imperialism, postcolonialism, and empire (Steinmetz 2008b; Boatcă and Spohn 2010; Reuter and Villa 2010), it seems a good moment to reconstruct this hidden intellectual genealogy.

What follows, then, is not a simply an intellectual history intended to honor sociological ancestors but an overview of resources for future research. I am especially interested in exploring the ways sociologists have analyzed the *forms, developmental trajectories, determinants, and effects*

of empires. Let me briefly clarify these four terms. "Forms of empire" refers to the ways sociologists have defined empires, colonies, and related phenomena. The word "trajectories" points to the ways sociologists have described the developmental paths of empires. As we will see, theories of "alternative" or "multiple" modernities have largely replaced unilinear views of societies as moving along a universal, common path from tribe to state to empire or from tradition to modernity. As for "determinants" of empire, I identify four major intellectual developments. Early sociological theories tended to seek a single primary source of imperial politics (but see Weber 1891), whereas contemporary historical sociologists typically emphasize overdetermined, conjunctural, and multicausal patterns of causality. Second, earlier theories emphasized political, military, or economic causal mechanisms, whereas current work also attends to ideological, linguistic, psychic, and cultural processes. Third, earlier theories of empire tended to be "metrocentric", locating causal primacy in the core. Imperial theorists subsequently twisted the stick in the opposite direction, emphasizing the efficacy of the periphery (Robinson 1986). Most recently, analysts have integrated these excentric and metrocentric optics, analyzing imperial systems as complex, overdetermined totalities in which cores shape peripheries and vice-versa and in which "fields" such as the colonial state (Steinmetz 2008a) and colonial science (Bourdieu 1993) may be located entirely within the core or periphery or may instead span different imperial spaces (Steinmetz 2012a). The fourth development is the gradual shift in political and historical sociology from a focus on states to a focus on empires. States continue to play various roles within these wider imperial entities, but empires have their own specific characteristics and cannot simply be treated as large states.

Scientific history cannot be described as a single, straight line, but its story should still be told diachronically. My discussion is broken up into four periods, each of which corresponds to important global changes in imperial practice and developments in sociological analyzes of empires. This mode of presentation is not meant to suggest any nec-

essary relationship between scientific and imperial historical developments, each of which is relatively autonomous from the other. Sociologists' interest in empire has often been extremely independent of immediate geopolitics. For example, German sociologists became more, not less interested in colonialism after World War I, even though Germany had lost its colonies and stood little chance of regaining them (Steinmetz 2009). A diachronic approach is necessary, however, in order to track patterns of reciprocal causality between imperial and sociological practice and the play of amnesia and intellectual accumulation within social science. A historical approach can restore to sociology a sense of its own accomplishments and of the ideas that may continue to haunt the discipline, even unconsciously.

### **Empire, Imperialism, Colonialism, and the State**

The overarching concept in all discussions of imperialism and colonialism is "empire." An empire can be defined minimally as a relationship "of political control imposed by some political societies over the effective sovereignty of other political societies" (Doyle 1986, 19; Eisenstadt 2010, xxii–xxiii). The word empire or *imperium* initially referred to large agrarian political organizations formed by conquest (Koebner 1955, 1961; Goldstone and Haldon 2010, 18). Ancient empires typically combined restless expansion and militarism with mechanisms aimed at stabilizing the conquered by offering them peace and prosperity in exchange for subjection and tribute (Pagden 2003). One result of the endless waves of territorial conquest and political incorporation in the ancient world was that empires were multicultural or cosmopolitan, although some empires' conquered populations were integrated into the core culture to a greater extent than others. Although Rome was the prototype,<sup>2</sup> historians extended the idea of empire to such diverse polities as Mesopotamian Akkad, Achaemenid Persia, and China from the Qin to the Qing Dynasty.

The word "imperialism" was originally coined in the 19th century to decry Napoleon's despotic militarism, but by the end of the century it was being used to describe the behavior of empires at all times and places. In the 20th century the concept of imperialism was transformed from a polemical into a scientific concept, with two

main definitions. On the one hand, imperialism referred to all efforts by a state to increase its power and territory through conquest (Salz 1931). A second definition, associated with Marxists and J.A. Hobson (1965), cast imperialism as an aggressive quest for economic investment opportunities, raw materials, or sources of cheap labor. According to leading contemporary historians, imperialism is a form of political control of foreign lands that does not necessarily entail conquest, occupation, or permanent foreign rule. It is best seen as "a more comprehensive concept" than colonialism, since empires may understand colonies "not just [as] ends in themselves, but also [as] pawns in global power games" (Osterhammel 2005, 21–22).

The keyword "colonialism" is based on the Latin verb *colere* (meaning to inhabit, till, cultivate, care for), and colonization still often has these connotations and does not necessarily entail political conquest. Modern colonialism is distinguished from *colonization* in that it does involve political conquest, but it does not necessarily involve settlement in conquered territories. In contrast to imperialism, colonialism always involves the seizure of sovereignty and long-term foreign rule over the annexed space. Modern colonial rule is also organized around assumptions of racial or civilizational hierarchy that are enforced through law and administrative policy. These official inequalities prevent most colonized subjects from attaining rights and citizenship status equal to the colonizers (Chatterjee 1993; Steinmetz 2007, 218–39).

The final keyword is "the state". States figure at four main points in the sociology of empire. First, there is always a state at the core of every empire (Schmitt 1991, 67), with the possible exception of some ancient empires that were "in almost perpetual campaigning motion" (Mann 1986, 145). Second, colonizers smash extant native polities or refunction them to create their own *colonial states*. Third, colonizers often rely on indirect rule through diminished *native states*. Finally, empire-possessing states may devolve into states *simpliciter*, as with the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires after World War I; conversely, states may grow into or acquire empires. States are thus the coordinating centers, peripheral extrusions and building blocks of empires, and sometimes the endpoints of empires' historical narratives.



## Five Periods of Sociological Research on Empires: 1830–1890

### *Proto-Sociologists as Colonial Analysts, Critics, and Policymakers*

Auguste Comte and Alexis de Tocqueville represent two poles in the discipline's permanent struggle between critics and supporters of empire. Comte used evidence from contemporaneous non-western cultures as proxies for earlier stages of European development, like many later sociologists, but he was no supporter of colonialism. Comte argued that early-modern colonialism "opened new opportunities for the warrior spirit by land and sea," thereby prolonging "the military and theological *régime*" and delaying "the time of the final reorganization" (Comte 1830–1842, vol. 6: 128–29). Those countries in which investors became "personally interested" in overseas colonies experienced an increase in "retrograde thought and social immobility" (Ibid., 720).

Tocqueville (2001, 78) also warned against the creation of a large class of military heroes returning home from colonial wars and assuming "distorted proportions in the public imagination." But while some readers of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* have been led to believe that its author rejected "every system of rule by outsiders no matter how benevolent" (Berlin 1965, 204), this was far from the case. Tocqueville wrote several reports for the French Parliament on the new Algerian colony. In 1842 he insisted that France could not abandon the colony without signaling its own "decline" and "falling to the second rank." The Algerians, he wrote, must be fought "with the utmost violence and in the Turkish manner, that is to say, by killing everything we meet" and employing "all means of desolating these tribes" (2001, 59, 70–71). Tocqueville rejected the social evolutionary view in favor of a theory of unbridgeable cultural difference, arguing against the possible fusion of Arabs and French into "a single people" (2001, 25, 111). His anti-evolutionary stance pointed toward colonial native policies of "indirect rule". Tocqueville also insisted that securing French control of Algeria would require a sizable settler community. Following the example of the Roman empire, these settlements should be smaller copies of the core metropolitan city and should be scattered through the colony.

Karl Marx offered an influential account of the sources of European global expansion and

the effects of colonial rule on the colonies. Anti-imperialist critics of Marx have focused on his occasional articles for the *New York Post*, in which he described colonialism as clearing away the cobwebs of Oriental despotism and feudalism and allowing capitalism to take root (Marx 1969). But Marx's more serious writing on empire is contained in *Capital*, volume one. Here Marx argued that capital accumulation is an inherently expansive process leading to the "entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and with this, the growth of the international character of the capitalist regime" (1976, 929). Marx also argued that "the chief moments of primitive accumulation" were linked to "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins." Marx suggested that colonialism played a "preponderant role" in the period of manufacture, but that its importance receded in the era of machinofacture (Marx 1976, 915, 918). He died in 1883, however, just as the second wave of overseas colonization was beginning. Marx's analysis of imperialism as global expansion, primitive accumulation, and extreme exploitation was picked up by many later Marxists.

### *Gumplowicz and the Origins of the Militarist Theory of the Formation of States and Empires*

A signal contribution to the analysis of empire was made by the Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909). Some commentators have misleadingly described Gumplowicz as a proponent of 19th century race theory, a Social Darwinist, or even a forerunner of fascism (Johnston 1972, 323–26; Lukács 1981, 691). In fact, Gumplowicz criticized analyzes of society as a biological organism, insisting that the "laws of social life were not reducible to biological... factors, but constituted a field of investigation *sui generis*" (Weiler 2007, 2039). Gumplowicz described human history as an eternal "race struggle" (*Rassenkampf*), but he defined "race" [*Rasse*] not as a natural phenomenon but as a "social product, the result of social development" (Gumplowicz 1879, 254). Warfare was not determined by some prior racial categories but imposed a racial format on struggles between warring groups (Gumplowicz 1883, 194). Social classes in western countries thus "behave[d] toward one another as races, carrying

out a social race struggle" (Gumplowicz 1909, 196–97, note 1). Warfare and domination were the "compelling" (*zwingende*) "pivot" of the historical process (Gumplowicz 1883, 194, 218). The culmination of the process of "almost uninterrupted warfare" is the creation of states, which tend to grow ever larger (Gumplowicz 1883, 176). Sociologists such as Tilly (1975, 73–76; 1990), Collins (1978, 26), and Mann (1986) have followed Gumplowicz in arguing that states are driven to expand through warfare.

Reading Gumplowicz symptomatically we can also extract some useful ideas for distinguishing between modern states, empires, and overseas colonies. Territorial political organizations that originate in conquest have to deal with ethnic or cultural heterogeneity. Gumplowicz distinguished between states in which "a more or less general culture has covered up the originally heterogeneous component parts" and states "with a 'nationally more mixed' population," like the Austro-Hungarian empire (Gumplowicz 1883, 206). This second set of "mixed" states was characterized by the fact "that the heterogeneous ethnic components relate to one another in a condition of super- and subordination, that is, in a relationship of domination" (*Herrschaftsverhältnis*; Gumplowicz 1883, 206).

### Five Periods of Sociological Research on Empires: 1890–1918

The second period began with the partitioning of Africa and ended with the collapse of the Ottoman, Russian, German, and Austrian empires. This period saw the emergence of sociology as an academic field, the creation of the first university chairs in sociology, and the founding of sociological associations and departments. Key figures in each of the national sociological fields contributed to the study of empire before World War I (Connell 1998; Steinmetz 2013a).

#### *Sociologists and Practical Imperial Policy*

Social scientists only rarely played a direct role in imperial policymaking before 1918, with the notable exceptions of Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill (Tunick 2006). Nonetheless, metropolitan social scientists reflected extensively on imperial and colonial policy, and their ethnographic portraits of non-western cultures profoundly shaped colonial native policymaking (Steinmetz 2002, 2003b, 2007; Goh 2005). In his own study of colonialism, Schäffle distinguished between what he called "passive

colonization", meaning the activities undertaken by missionaries, traders, and explorers in the centuries leading up to formal colonial annexation of Africa in the 1880s, and "active political colonization" (Schäffle 1887, 126). Alfred Vierkandt, who held the first Sociology chair at Berlin University, published a study of the categories that guided German colonial native policy: *Kulturvölker* and *Naturvölker*, or "cultural and natural peoples" (Vierkandt 1896). Max Weber's hyper-imperialist political views were directed toward support for Germany's projection of power on a world stage, and not toward overseas colonialism (Mommsen 1984). Weber (1891) wrote his habilitation thesis on the formation and devolution of the Roman Empire. His brother Alfred argued that German capitalists could profit handily by doing business in other countries' empires and did not even need German colonies (A. Weber 1904). During World War I, Max and Alfred Weber strongly supported Friedrich Naumann's (1915) plan for achieving indirect hegemony over Mitteleuropa, a project in which "Germany would respect the freedom of the smaller nations and renounce annexation," creating a "transnational federation of states led by 'leading nations'" (A. Weber, quoted in Demm 1990, 207, 209). The Dutch sociologist Sebald Steinmetz (1903) analyzed indigenous "customary law" in European colonies. Patrick Geddes, who before 1950 was the most frequently cited sociologist in the pages of the *British Sociological Review* (Halsey 2004, 174), devised a theory of imperial urbanism and a practical approach to ameliorative colonial urban planning (Geddes 1917, 1918). German sociologist Robert Michels explained Italy's turn toward colonial aggression with reference to population pressure, national pride, and the "natural instinct for political expansion" (Michels 1912, 470, 495).

#### *The Comparative Sociological Method, Evolutionary Social Theory, and Imperialism*

Emile Durkheim's circle was closely connected to colonialism as analytic object, research setting, and data source. Durkheim used information on non-western and colonized peoples gathered by European travelers, missionaries, and colonial officials to build his evolutionary theory. Nineteenth century sociologists assumed that their nascent discipline should seek general laws along the lines of the imagined natural sciences. According to Pareto (1893, 677), "it is by comparing civilized with savage society that modern

sociologists... have been able to lay the basis for a new science." Russian sociologist Maksim Kovalevsky compared the various peoples of the Russian empire, viewing them as exemplars of the different temporalities of a universal process of social evolution (Semyonov *et al.* 2013).

Although sociologists nowadays disparage theories of social evolution as empirically feeble and politically conservative, these approaches were not always reactionary in their own era. In the context of Third Republic France after the Dreyfus Affair, Durkheim's evolutionary analysis suggested a common humanity in all cultures, from Australian Aborigines to contemporary Frenchmen. Evolutionary sociology offered a critique of "superstitions and errors" by suggesting that backwards Russia would one day converge with liberal western societies, according to sociologist Evgenii de Roberti (Resis 1970, 226). Evolutionary theories of the state and society were revived after 1945 under the guise of modernization theory, and again, this framework was partially progressive in its rejection of European colonialism—although it simultaneously laid the intellectual groundwork for the global American empire (Gilman 2003). Anti-evolutionary perspectives, which see civilizations as developing along differing paths, were already discussed in the 18th century and Romantic eras (Herder 1784), and have reemerged periodically since then.

### *Imperialism as a Function of Capitalism and as the Ruin of Democracy*

The most famous contribution from this period is Hobson's *Imperialism* (1902). Hobson was a member of the editorial committee of *Sociological Papers*, attended meetings of the British Sociological Society, and published in journals such as *American Journal of Sociology*. Hobson exercised a huge influence on all later discussions of imperialism by redefining it as a primarily economic phenomenon. This perspective was carried forward by Hilferding, Luxemburg, Bukharin, Lenin, and a host of other Marxists. Hobson argued that imperialism was driven by capital overaccumulation, underconsumption, and the search for new markets and investment outlets. Imperialism marked a repudiation of free trade. Imperialism did not benefit capitalism as a whole, but only sectional interests, especially finance. Imperialism could be eliminated by redistributing wealth domesti-

cally and raising consumption levels. Hobson also continued to refine his views during the interwar period, and he concluded later that "power-politics furnish the largest volume of imperialist energy, though narrow economic considerations mainly determine its concrete application" (Hobson 1926, 192–93).

The second half of Hobson's great book focused on imperialism's effects, which Hobson saw as catastrophic. The sources of the "incomes expended in the Home Counties and other large districts of Southern Britain," he wrote, "were in large measure wrung from the enforced toil of vast multitudes of black, brown, or yellow natives, by arts not differing essentially from those which supported in idleness and luxury imperial Rome" (Hobson 1965, 151). Politically, the trend in the colonies was toward "unfreedom" and "British despotism", except with regard to the white settlers (Hobson 1965, 151). Turning to the homeland, Hobson argued that imperialism struck "at the very root of popular liberty and ordinary civic virtues" in Britain and checked "the very course of civilization" (Hobson 1965, 133, 162). Governments use "foreign wars and the glamour of empire-making, in order to bemuse the popular mind and divert rising resentment against domestic abuses" (Hobson 1965, 142). Imperialism overawes the citizenry "by continual suggestions of unknown and incalculable gains and perils the... sober processes of domestic policy" (Hobson 1965, 147–48). Jingoistic ideology cemented a hegemonic bloc that united various social classes in support of empire (Hobson 1901). Empire degraded daily life in the metropole through the cultivation of a military habit of mind that "unfits a man for civil life" by training him to become "a perfect killer" (Hobson 1965, 133–34). British children were taught a "'geocentric' view of the moral universe" and their playtime was turned "into the routine of military drill" (Hobson 1965, 217).

Hobson's argument that "autocratic government in imperial politics naturally reacts upon domestic government" (1965, 146–47) was echoed by his sociologist colleagues Leonard Hobhouse (1902) and Herbert Spencer (1902, 157–88) and by a number of other British Radicals and Liberals (Porter 1968). This argument also anticipated discussions of the reflux of empire into metropolitan culture and Arendt's (1950) theory of imperialism as prefiguring totalitarianism.

*Hintze, Weber, and the Non-economistic Explanation of Ancient Empires and Modern Imperialism*

Resistance to the economistic narrowing of imperialism set in quickly among German social scientists. An alternative account was proposed by Otto Hintze (1907), who insisted on imperialism's inherently political character and distinguished between "ancient imperialism" and "modern imperialism". The former was oriented toward political expansion and world domination and based on a "relatively closed civilization," one "that refuses the right to exist of everything foreign that cannot be assimilated" (Hintze 1970). Modern imperialism, by contrast, seeks a balance among the great powers. Napoleon sought to create a "great federative system" of empires rather than accepting British global domination. After 1815 a liberal era of free trade and industrialism "seemed to replace the era of mercantilism and militarism." Toward the end of the century, however, Britain began to reorganize its colonial empire in the face of mounting challenges to its global power. The goal of present-day imperialism was not a single world empire, Hintze concluded, but a system of smaller world empires co-existing side-by-side. This resonated with contemporary discussions of "Imperial Federation" (e.g., Hobson 1965, 328–55).

In his habilitation thesis Weber analyzed Rome's expansion as a process of conquest and colonization. Weber identified a movement away from a compact, contained state toward a far-flung empire of conquests and a decentralized, scattered structure of manorial power within Italy. The impetus for Roman expansion was both political and economic: "Rome provided for her landless citizens (*cives proletarii*), the peasantry's offspring," through "distributions of land and colonial foundations" (Weber 1998b, 307). The inhabitants were treated differently in each of the "citizen colonies," sometimes being "simply incorporated into the ranks of the colonists," elsewhere being "reduced to the status of commoners" or to some other unequal status (Weber 2010, 46–47). Weber's account of Rome's decline paid equal attention to core and periphery, centralizing and decentralizing impulses. There was a shift in the political center of gravity from the cities to the countryside and a move from a predominantly commercial economy to a static, subsistence-oriented "natural economy". Over time the slavery-based rural estate became an autarchic "*oikos*"

that was "independent of markets" and satisfied its own consumption needs (Weber 1998b, 359; 2010, 151). Whereas "the basis of Roman public administration" had earlier been located in the cities, the rural estates came to be "removed from urban jurisdiction," and "great numbers of rural properties... started to appear alongside the cities as administrative units." The large landowners gained a "new prominence in the policies of the Later Roman Empire" (Weber 1998, 401, 360). The central state was increasingly organized along "a natural economy basis," with the *fiscus* "producing as much as possible what it needed" and relying on tribute and in kind payments (Weber 1998, 405). The Roman cities "crumbled" and "came to rest on [the rural manors]" like "leeches" (Weber 2010, 164, 166).

Weber's discussion of imperialism in *Economy and Society* paid more attention to the economistic approach, noting that "one might be inclined to believe that the formation as well as the expansion of Great Power structures is always and primarily determined economically" (Weber 1978, 913). Capitalism, he argued, had shifted from a generally pacifist orientation to an aggressively imperialist stance. But while "the economic importance of trade was not altogether absent" in the formation of empires, Weber insisted that other motives had played their part in a process that "does not always follow the routes of export trade" (Weber 1978, 914–915). Geopolitical expansion was driven by concerns deriving from the "realm of honor" or the quest for "prestige of power" (Weber 1978, 910). And while the expansive drive might be reinforced by capitalist interests, it was also true that "the evolution of capitalism may be strangled by the manner in which a unified political structure is administrated"—as in the late Roman Empire (Weber 1978, 915). Echoing Ibn Khaldun's (1967, 128–29) theory of imperial overstretch, and Alfred Weber's analysis of the economic irrationality of colonialism (A. Weber 1904), Weber suggested that "countries little burdened by military expenses... often experience a stronger economic expansion that do some of the Great Powers" (Weber 1978, 901).

**Five Periods of Sociological Research on Empires: 1918–1945**

The third period saw the consolidation of colonial rule in Africa and Asia and the rise of anticolonial movements. At the beginning of this period, *fin-de-siècle* discourses of cultural pessimism and



degeneration combined with the collapse of the traditional land empires to reinvigorate ancient theories of *imperial cycles*. A number of German sociologists proposed non-economic explanations of imperialism. Ethno-sociologists theorized colonial cultural syncretism or hybridity and anticolonial resistance. Some social scientists discussed the emergence of a new form of empire involving geospatial spheres of influence without territorial annexation. And after 1940, social scientists began analyzing Nazism as an empire.

### *Discourses of Degeneration and the Cyclical Rise and Fall of Empires*

The period around World War I saw a resurgence of ancient theories of imperial cycles. Western Empires have been shadowed since Virgil and Polybius by anxiety about their inevitable demise (Hell 2009, forthcoming). These arguments gained a new urgency at the end of the 19th century with theories of cultural degeneration. One of the most influential statements of imperial decline was Spengler's (1920–1922) *Decline of the West*, a wide-ranging narrative of the rise and fall of civilizations and their crystallization as empires in their final, degenerate phase.

### *Sociological Accounts of Imperialism as Power Politics*

At least one leading sociologist of the Weimar Republic, Franz Oppenheimer, accepted the Marxist argument about the capitalist roots of imperialism. Oppenheimer also followed Gumpowicz, however, in arguing that the state is a “social institution that is forced by a victorious group of men on a defeated group, with the sole purpose of regulating the dominion of the former over the latter and securing itself against revolt from within and attacks from abroad” (1919, 10). This was a universal theory: “all States of world-history have to run the same course or gauntlet, torn by the same class-struggles . . . through the same stages of development following the same inexorable laws” (1944, 551). Oppenheimer argued that “primitive giant empires,” which were assemblages of even more primitive conquest states, typically collapsed back into a “pile of individual states” (1926, 584). The final volume of Oppenheimer's *System der Soziologie* described *colonialism* as a continuation of a “politics of plunder” (1935, 1292). Capitalism in “its highest stage” was essentially “imperialist” (1926, 788). Wages in the capitalist countries were

too low to ensure that workers could “buy back their products,” so capitalists were driven to seek foreign markets and to seek surplus profits from the “proletarians of foreign countries” (1926, 789–90).

The second generation of European sociologists tended to reject economic accounts of colonialism and empire. Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter, who moved to Bonn University in 1925 (and to Harvard in 1932), published an influential essay on imperialism in 1919 in Max Weber's *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. Schumpeter defined imperialism as the “objectless disposition on the part of a state to unlimited forcible expansion” (1951, 6). He traced the “birth and life of imperialism” not to capitalist economic motives but to the atavistic drives of the declining former aristocratic ruling class and to appeals to the deeper “instincts that carry over from the life habits of the dim past,” the “instinctive urge to domination” (1951, 7, 12). Imperialism was therefore “best illustrated by examples from antiquity” (1951, 23). Against Hobson and Lenin Schumpeter insisted that “the bourgeois is unwarlike” and that imperialism could “never have evolved by the ‘inner logic’ of capitalism itself” (1951, 96–97). Marxist accounts were part of a broader rationalist disavowal of the irrational, primitive human urge to dominate.

Schumpeter's arguments were seconded by Frankfurt University sociologist Walter Sulzbach (1926), who distinguished “sharply between the political elite and the business leaders and stipulate[d] antagonistic interests of the two” and argued that “the imperialism of modern capitalist countries can be regarded as an out-flow of the policies of military and political leaders who, pretending to represent the vital national interests of their peoples, are *using entrepreneurs and foreign investors as pawns* in order to justify their policy of aggression” (Hoselitz 1951, 363). Nationalist fervor rather than capitalism was the source of imperialism (Sulzbach 1929). Sulzbach continued to argue that the bourgeoisie “everywhere defended disarmament and agreement between nations” and that “really big capitalists” had very little interest in territorial expansion” (1959, 158, 210). Along similar lines, Arthur Salz (1931) defined imperialism politically, as an effort to expand state power through territorial conquest. Imperialism existed *before* capitalism, Salz argued, and capitalist accumulation was often peaceful and non-statist.

French sociologist Georges Davy, a member of the original group around Durkheim, also rejected the economic approach to empire in his book *From Tribe to Empire: Social Organization among Primitives and in the Ancient East*, coauthored with Egyptologist Alexandre Moret. They relied on Durkheim's theory of totemism to make sense of the centralization and monopolization of power in ancient Egypt, adding a symbolic dimension to discussions that had hitherto focused almost exclusively on politics and economics (Moret and Davy 1926). Their central argument, according to historian Henri Berr (1926, xix, xxiv), was that "the enlargement of societies is accomplished by violence" and that "imperialism" was itself "inspired by the will to growth"—a brutal will."

### *Theories of Colonial Transculturation, Mimicry, and Anticolonial Resistance*

Theories of colonial hybridity, syncretism, and transculturation might not seem central to the history of sociology if one limited one's vision to the past twenty years, when these discussions have been dominated by postcolonial critics and cultural anthropologists. The pioneers of these theories, however, included Marcel Mauss' students, some of whom defined themselves as sociologists, such as René Maunier, Maurice Leenhardt, and Roger Bastide.

More and more researchers became interested in processes of colonial transculturation and stopped looking for pristine, untouched native cultures. The background for this shift is complex. Colonial governments had been intensely concerned with the dangers of the partial assimilation of colonized subject populations during the 19th century. Concern about code-switching and cultural "illegibility" was a central motive behind the colonial state's focus on "native policy", whose aim was to urge the colonized to adhere to a stable, uniform definition of their own culture (Steinmetz 2003b, 2007). Some social scientists oriented their research specifically toward the colonial state's project of eliminating cultural instability and provided a portrait of a coherent "traditional" culture that native policy could then seek to reinforce. As a result, heteronomous colonial social scientists looked for "pure" natives. More autonomous social scientists were also interested in unassimilated natives either as evidence for theories of evolutionary development (Durkheim) or for aesthetic, primitivist reasons (e.g., in the *Collège de*

*sociologie*; Moebius 2006). But by the time Claude Lévi-Strauss published *Tristes Tropiques*, the figure of the idealized "noble savage" no longer seemed plausible. Lévi-Strauss could only allude wistfully to his "great disappointment" in the Amazonian Indians, who were "less unspoiled than [he] had hoped" and whose culture seemed to him "a compromise" entirely lacking in "poetry" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 154, 172).

One of the first sociological analysts of colonial transculturation and resistance was Maurice Leenhardt, who interpreted the messianic "Ethiopian" church movement in Southern Africa as a form of subaltern resistance through appropriation of the colonizer's culture (Leenhardt 1902). Leenhardt subsequently situated New Caledonian culture within a historical narrative of colonialism. Following an initial period of expropriation and cultural decimation, the French colony had become a syncretic society. Transculturation ran in both directions between the Europeans and Melanians in a process Leenhardt called a "*jeu des transferts*" ("play of [cultural] transfers"; Leenhardt 1953, 213). Jacques Soustelle studied the Mexican Otomi Indians, who "were not so much renouncing their old beliefs as incorporating them into a new body of faith and ritual," forging a "Hispano-Indian and Christiano-pagan syncretism" in a veritable "*choc de civilisations*" (Soustelle 1937, 253, 1971, 121, 137). René Maunier conceptualized colonization as a "social fact" involving "contact" between two "hitherto separated" societies ([1932] 1949, 5–6). Maunier discussed the reciprocal imitation between colonizer and colonized, adumbrating a theory of colonial mimicry or "*mixité*". For Maunier, mixing included not just the "fusion" or "racial and . . . social blending of the two groups" but also the "conversion of the conqueror by the conquered" (1949, 124, 535). Maunier was one of the first to notice that French colonialism had "organized the space" of Algerian anticolonial nationalism (Henry 1989, 143).

American and German social scientists came to similar conclusions about cultural mixing. Robert Park (1919, 1928) analyzed American cultural hybridization. Gilberto Freyre, a student of Boas and the founder of Brazilian sociology, analyzed Brazil as a "hybrid society" (Freyre [1933] 1946). Melville Herskovits, who published widely in sociology journals, developed theories of "acculturation" under conditions of colonial slavery and argued that the mixing of European and African

traditions was a “fundamental...mechanism in the acculturative process undergone by New World Negroes” (Herskovits 1941, 184–85; 1937, 1938). Eventually Herskovits substituted the idea of “reinterpretation” for “syncretism”, defining the former as “cultural borrowing” that permits “a people to retain the inner meanings of traditionally sanctioned modes of behavior while adopting new outer institutional forms” (Herskovits and Herskovits 1947, vi). German ethnosociologist Richard Thurnwald analyzed the “crisis” in native life that had been precipitated by sustained contact with the colonizer’s culture and technology (Thurnwald 1931–1935, 1: 21–22). In 1936 Thurnwald discussed the “crisis of imperialism” and the emergence of African anticolonialism and argued that “the ‘hybris,’ the overbearing insolence of the dominant stratum” in the colonies “inescapably leads to its nemesis” in the guise of “a new generation of natives has grown up which has been educated in schools by Europeans, in ways of thought that are European, and in using devices introduced by Europeans” (1936, 80, 84).

#### *Nazi Germany and the USA as Empires*

After 1918 it was noticed that emerging empires relied on indirect and informal control of peripheries rather than conquest and permanent occupation. Arthur Salz discussed the highly “elastic” form of American imperialism in Latin America which “leaves its victims with the appearance of political autonomy and is satisfied with a minimal amount of political violence” (1923, 569). Langhans (1924) diagnosed an emerging pattern of informal US dominance in Latin America in which “the more powerful (ruling) state [imposes] a protective relationship over the weaker (protected) state that is in many respects the equivalent of annexation, while carefully avoiding the appearance of being the actual ruler of the area it dominates.” Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in a book written during World War II, described American imperialism similarly as a model in which “one power may seek to expand its military area of control by establishing naval and air bases abroad without assuming overt political responsibility” over “foreign political bodies” (1953, 205).

Many of the same ideas were used to theorize Nazi Germany as empire. Maunier (1943, 141) compared US hegemony over the western hemisphere with German plans to dominate Central Europe. Neumann’s *Behemoth* (2009, 130–218) compared

Hitler’s foreign policy to the US Monroe Doctrine and sketched a theory of imperial “great spaces”. Neumann noted that empires often eschew conquest in favor of something “midway between influence and outright domination” (2009, 136). “Geo-jurisprudence,” he wrote, was reformulating “international law in terms of vassals, dependencies, protectorates, and federations worked out on geopolitical principles” (2009, 151). Neumann’s chief example of this doctrine was Carl Schmitt, who developed his theory of the political *Grossraum* after 1933 (Schmitt 1991; Hell 2009). Members of Karl Haushofer’s geopolitical school also elaborated theories of political “great spaces” (Ebeling 1994; Murphy 1997; Steinmetz 2012b).

#### **Five Periods of Sociological Research on Empires: 1945–1970**

After 1945, sociology was refounded in Europe, and American sociology dominated the global sociological field. Modernization theory emerged in the 1950s and was subsequently challenged by theories of dependency, underdevelopment, modes of production, and the capitalist world-system, and more recently by multicausal, historical analyzes of empires (Mann 1986, 2003). Social scientists from the former colonies became increasingly prominent in discussions of colonialism (e.g., Abdel-Malek 1971; Hermassi 1972; Alavi 1981; Chatterjee 1993; Mamdani 1996; B. Magubane 1996; Z. Magubane 2003; Goh 2007).

#### *Modernization Theory and Neo-Marxist Responses*

After 1945 modernization theory was closely articulated with American foreign policy, which rejected European colonialism in favor of a view of all cultures as equally suited for democracy, capitalism, and the American way of life (Williams 1959; Sulzbach 1963; Louis and Robinson 1993). Modernization theory subsequently came under attack as imperialist and neocolonialist (Mazrui 1968). Marxists began analyzing the exploitation of the global peripheries through mechanisms like unequal exchange, which obviated the need for direct colonial rule (Frank 1969).

#### *The Historical Sociology of Colonialism, 1945–1970*

A new historical sociology of colonialism emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in France and its colonies. Georges Balandier (1951, 1955a) analyzed colonialism as a unique, overdetermined social formation and compared the differing responses to

colonialism by the Gabonese Fang and the Bakongo of the French Congo. The Fang had become “unemployed conquerors” lacking any central leadership, while the Bakongo had been involved in the slave trade and were more rooted in their territory, more hierarchical, and better acquainted with other tribes. The French government attempted to curtail the prominence of Bakongo in the colonial administration during the 1930s but ended up strengthening the modernist elite’s anticolonialism, which filled “the ‘political void’ that resulted from the diminished authority of the traditional chiefs” (Balandier 1955a, 354–55). In his second doctoral thesis Balandier focused on Bakongo urbanites who had resettled in Brazzaville. He found that they did not abandon their traditional culture or connections to rural countrymen and that they developed a “precocious awareness of the inferiority created by the colonial situation” (Balandier 1955b, 388). Balandier’s colleague and co-author Paul Mercier rejected linear developmental models and emphasized the “multiple determinants, sometimes in contradiction with one another” in the development of colonial societies (1954, 65, 57). Cultural practices “that seem to be ‘traditional’ in [colonized] societies actually represented ‘responses’ to relatively recent ‘challenges’” (1966, 168, note 1). Mercier criticized the application of western concepts like social class and nationalism to African societies (Mercier 1965a; 1965b). A final example of the new historical sociology of colonialism came from the French sociologist Éric de Dampierre, who combined decades of participant observation with research in the French colonial archives to make sense of the transformations French colonialism brought to three Bandia kingdoms of the Central African Republic (Dampierre 1972).

In *Sociologie de l’Algérie* Pierre Bourdieu described the Kabyle as a historical society that had been continuously reshaped by episodes of conquest by Arabs and Europeans (1958, 16). Discussing Algeria’s Arab speakers, he argued that few societies “pose the problem of the relations between sociology and history more sharply,” since they had “suffered the most directly and the most profoundly from the shock of colonization” (1958, 60). In the book’s second edition he included a discussion of French land annexations and settlements, which produced a “tabula rasa of a civilization that could no longer be discussed except in the past tense” (Bourdieu 1961a, 125, 107–

118). Bourdieu insisted on the “special form this war acquired because of its being waged in this unique situation,” namely, a colonial one (1961a, 28–29). Bourdieu and Sayad examined the radical transformation effected by colonial uprooting, resettlement, and war (1964).

Theorists of the “articulation of modes of production” argued that colonialism typically combined capitalist and noncapitalist modes of production in ways that lowered the costs of reproducing labor power and yielded higher profits (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1969, 1988; Wolpe 1980). Alavi (1981) labeled this combined formation a “colonial mode of production”. Despite the theory’s residual economic reductionism and functionalism, it was more open to the complexity and uniqueness of historical processes and events than earlier Marxist approaches.

The “peripheralist” or “excentric” approach to imperial history stressed the causal importance of resistance and collaboration by the colonized in determining the shape and likelihood of European colonial rule (Robinson 1972, 1986). Collaboration is connected to the reinforcement of traditional social structures in the colonies (Robinson 1986, 272, 280).

#### **Five Periods of Sociological Research on Empires: 1970–Present**

The period since 1970 has been marked by the crisis of American hegemony, the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the exacerbation since the turn of the century of American military imperialism. In the early 1970s there was a brief uptick in historical sociological studies of imperialism, while the period since 2000 has seen a wave of interest among sociologists worldwide in colonialism, empire, and the possibility of a “postcolonial sociology” (Steinmetz 2006; Connell 2007; Reuter and Villa 2010)

#### ***The Historical Sociology of Empire, 1970–Present***

The historical sociology of empire has drawn on various elements of the literature sketched above and has been correspondingly heterogenous. One set of approaches is broadly Marxist. Hermassi (1972) emphasized the effect on nationalist movements in North Africa of the differing length of colonial occupation, the class identities of colonial rulers, the character of native policies, and the strength of the precolonial autochthonous state. Mamdani (1996) built on the articulation of



modes of production framework to analyze South African Apartheid, arguing that “indirect rule” led to “decentralized despotism”, “customary law” and “tribalization”. The urban zones, by contrast, were economically capitalist and were ruled directly, with Africans being excluded from civil freedoms. Here racialization rather than tribalization ruled the day.

An alternative Marxist approach was developed by Immanuel Wallerstein. After writing during the 1960s mainly as an Africanist, Wallerstein began to ask why postcolonial Africa was failing economically and politically (Wallerstein 1971). Wallerstein argued that there are two kinds of world-systems or inter-societal divisions of labor: “world-empires” with a single political authority and “world-economies”, organized politically as a plurality of competing sovereign nation-states (Wallerstein 2004, 57; 1979, 5). The capitalist world economy initially treated Africa as an “external area”. Starting around 1750 Africa became a “periphery” providing slaves to the core. After 1800 “the slave trade was gradually abolished,” facilitating “the reconversion of [African] production to cash cropping” and preparing the continent for the “imposition of colonial administration,” which “made it possible to establish [European] primacy” in African “economic transactions” (Wallerstein 1986 [1970], 14–16). World system theory explains the historical ebb and flow of colonial annexations and decolonizations in terms of shifts in hegemony within the global core. If a hegemon dominates the core economically and politically it enforces free trade and eschews colonialism, but when there is no hegemon, each core state erects protectionist barriers and seeks exclusive access to markets and raw materials in the periphery, often by setting up colonies (Bergesen and Schoenberg 1980).

Another set of interventions is broadly institutionalist. In *Bandits and Bureaucrats* (1994), Karen Barkey showed how endemic banditry challenged the Ottoman state and how that state managed its relations with these former mercenary soldiers through deals and patronage. In *Empire of Difference* (2008), Barkey developed a “hub and spoke” model of the Ottoman approach to rule. In an empire shaped like a rimless wheel (Moytl 2001), the cultures located at the end of each “spoke” are connected only to the core but not to one another, explaining the empire’s ability to persist for such a long time. Steinmetz (2005) argued against the

Wallersteinian theory that great powers usually pursue a mixture of imperialist and colonialist strategies. For example, during the 18th century the Austrian Empire treated the Austrian Netherlands in an *imperialist* manner as a pawn in a future game of “territorial barter”, while treating Hungary as a *colony* whose best lands were redistributed “to foreigners, mostly German nobles” (Kann 1974, 89, 74). American foreign policy at the end of the 19th century reveals a combination of imperial technologies, with formal colonialism in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific islands and a non-colonial approach to China (the “Open Door” policy) and Latin America (the Monroe Doctrine).

Another set of approaches is broadly culturalist. Writing inspired by Said (1978) has emphasized the impact of European representations of the non-West on colonial and imperial activities. Mitchell (1988) argues that a generic European modern consciousness was replicated in the self-modernization of 19th-century Egypt and other parts of the Near East. Steinmetz (2003b, 2007) and Goh (2005, 2007) show that precolonial archives of ethnographic images and texts codetermined subsequent colonial native policies. Go (2008) looks at the ways the American colonial project of “democratic tutelage” in Puerto Rico and the Philippines was reinterpreted by colonized elites.

More recently, colonial historians have drawn on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social fields. If the metropolitan state is analyzed as a bureaucratic field, as Bourdieu (1996) suggested, overseas colonial states may represent a distinct type of field characterized by competition for specific forms of symbolic capital and by particular forms of relative autonomy from the metropolitan state and other fields in the colony (Steinmetz 2008). Colony and metropole are also linked via transnational fields of science (Steinmetz forthcoming).

The most comprehensive approach to empire has been developed by Michael Mann, who examines the impact of ideological, economic, military, and political sources of social power and traces the ways events and higher-order formations of power result from accidents, contradictions, and non-universal patterns (1986, 503). Mann rejects approaches that see military, political, and cultural imperialism as emanations of economic imperialism. He draws on Marx and Hobson for his theory of the profitability of empire, on historical sociologist Wolfram Eberhard (1965) for his notion of

world time (Mann 1986, 30), on Weber for his historicist methodology of contingent multicausality (Mann 1993, 55), and on militarist theories of the state for his analysis of empires' coercive power (Gumpłowicz, Oppenheimer). States' territorial boundaries, according to Mann, "give rise to an area of regulated interstate relations" which take two forms—"hegemonic empire" and "multistate civilization" (Mann 1986, 27). The expansion of empires is driven by warfare, conquest, and the "caging" of populations. Mann distinguishes between "empires of domination", which lack both a true core and extensive control over the entire territory, and "territorial empires", of which Rome is the only true European example (Mann 1986, 338). Mann rejects any notion of a general evolutionary path and treats the historical development of empires as a dialectic of strategy and counter-tendencies. At the most general level there is a dialectic of centralization and decentralization, a cycling between empires and "multi-power-actor civilization". The multi-power-actor civilization may in turn "generate its own antithetical, interstitial force," leading to a new round of empire-formation (Mann 1986, 161, 167, 537). Empires generate four additional contradictions "unconsciously" or "unintentionally" (Mann 1986, 363, 537): (1) between particularism and universalism, (2) between projects of cultural uniformity and cultural diversity or "cosmopolitanism", (3) between hierarchical organization and egalitarianism, and (4) between drawing a sharp line against external "barbarians" and a civilizing orientation toward barbarians.

In the second volume of *The Sources of Social Power* Mann implied that the modern world is a world of states rather than empires. He deals with European overseas colonialism only peripherally there. In his more recent work, however, Mann draws on his earlier framework to analyze contemporary US geopolitics as imperial. He emphasizes the multiple sources of social power and their contradictions. Mann argues that the American neo-liberal, floating dollar offensive that began during the 1970s and the military imperialism that has intensified since the late 1990s were pushed by different interest groups with different motivations and had very different consequences (Mann 2008). Moreover, the imperialist expression of each of the social power sources gives rise to contradictions, undermining the overall efficacy of empire. For example, the United States outguns

its rivals militarily but its overseas interventions spawn guerrillas, terrorists, and weapons of mass destruction in rogue states (Mann 2003, 29–45). US economic protectionism and neo-liberalism produce "political turmoil and anti-Americanism" (2003, 70).

### Conclusion

Perhaps the most general lesson is that the state is not necessarily, or even typically, the dominant form of political organization. The "historical sociology of the state" needs to be articulated with the "historical sociology of empires". And indeed, as this chapter has shown, sociologists have been writing about the forms, trajectories, effects, and determinants of empires throughout the discipline's history. With respect to "typologies" of empire, Hintze and Weber distinguished between ancient empires and modern imperialism and Mann distinguished between empires of domination and territorial empires. Hintze, Hobson, and Schmitt considered the alternative possibility, a system of multiple coexisting empires. Colonialism was distinguished from ancient empires and modern imperialism in terms of the permanent seizure of foreign sovereignty by the conqueror and the implementation of a "rule of colonial difference". Various theorists identified the emergence in the 20th century of an "informal" approach to empire that leaves the dominated state in local hands while infringing on its sovereignty in less continuous or obvious ways.

Sociologists also offered differing accounts of the "developmental trajectories and effects" of empires. Gumpłowicz and his followers claimed that warfare led to the centralization of political power and the "agglomeration of states into larger units." Arendt identified a passage from overseas imperialism to continental totalitarianism. Other writers focused on cycles of empire or hegemony. Writers from Ibn Khaldun to Kennedy (1987) analyzed imperial overreach and decline. Comte, Hobson, and others argued that empire empowered militarization and despotism in the imperialist countries. Theories of imperial blowback see imperial interventions returning to haunt the core. Karl Marx argued that colonial exploitation paradoxically paves the way for the development of capitalism and modernity in the colony. Later theorists thematized the "development of underdevelopment" and "dependency". Another group of writers from Herder to Eisenstadt (2002) have

described civilizations as moving along separate paths, rather than being arranged along a progressive, linear scale.

This chapter also reviewed a number of “explanatory” theories of the forms and trajectories of empire. Broadly *economic* theories trace imperialism to capitalist interests, including the need for new markets, investment opportunities, sources of cheaper labor power, and sites for new rounds of primitive accumulation. Broadly *political* theories emphasize a general tendency toward warfare and expansion and the creation of “great spaces”. Theorists of “social imperialism” trace the ways in which empire is used to integrate masses and classes within the imperial core. Broadly *sociological* theories of empire emphasize four main causal processes: (1) an atavistic urge to domination rooted in the class habits of older social strata; (2) patterns of collaboration and resistance and other social-structural features of the peripheries as determinants of imperialism; (3) network structures; (4) the colonial state as a Bourdieusian “field of competition” for field-specific symbolic capital. Theories of *cultural* forces driving empire emphasize the impact of dreams of conquest; racism and Orientalism; and precolonial ethnographic representations of the colonized.

These political, economic, cultural, and social mechanisms should not be understood as mutually exclusive. The most recent historical sociological work on empires, like the earlier analysis by Max Weber, has rejected any idea of transhistorical general laws in favor of a historicist strategy that identifies contextual patterns and contingent concatenations of mechanisms as the sources of imperial strategies and forms. Future research should remain open to comparison, but as Goldstone (1991, 40) argues, it should not emulate a poorly understood form of natural science. Comparisons can be carried out “across mechanisms” (Steinmetz 2004), not just across empirical “events”. Such “mechanism tracing” can explore the differing ways in which a single mechanism works in diverse contexts. Comparison may also be used to “focus on what is of central importance in a society, despite all analogies, and use the similarities of two societies to highlight the specific individuality of each” (Weber 1998, 341). With these more historicist forms of comparison in hand social scientists should be well equipped to push imperial analysis in new directions.

## Notes

1 On the periodization of sociology as a university field see Goudsblom and Heilbron (2004); on criteria for including authors within an academic field see Steinmetz (2009). The overwhelming majority of thinkers discussed in this chapter were (*inter alia*) sociologists, according to this “sociological” definition of the discipline.

2 The noun *imperium* originally signified the power to command and punish, specifically the power of princes, magistrates, and officials (Weber 1978, 650, 839).

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