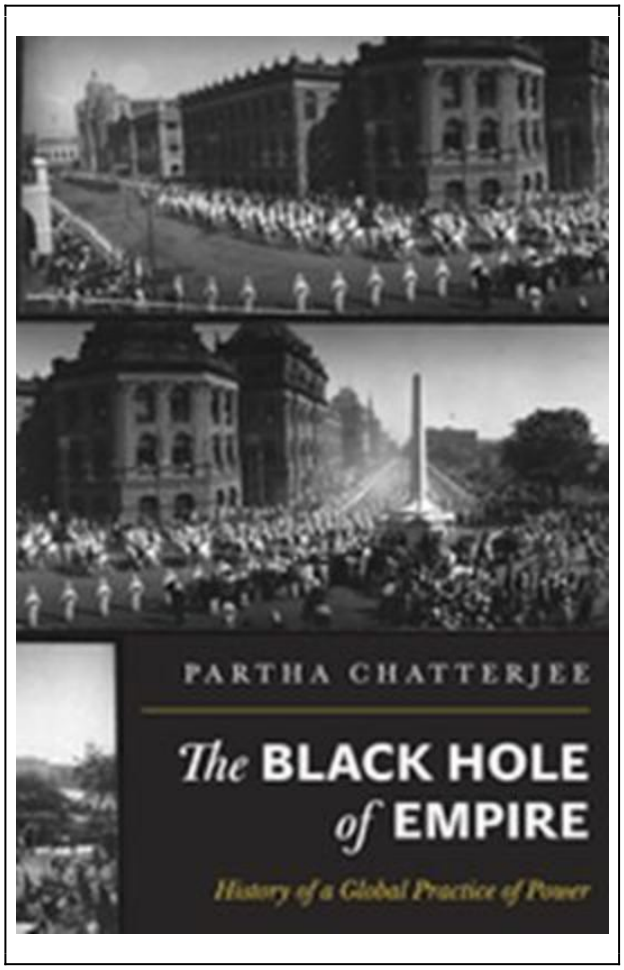
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Empire as a Practice of Power: An Interview□□権力行使としての帝国

Partha Chatterjee, Ayça Çubukçu



Empire is an Inseparable Part of Modern Political Theory

When Siraj, the ruler of Bengal, overran the British settlement of Calcutta in 1756, he allegedly jailed 146 European prisoners overnight in a cramped prison. Of the group, 123 died of suffocation. While this episode was never independently confirmed, the story of "the black hole of Calcutta" was widely circulated and seen by the British public as an atrocity committed by savage colonial subjects. Partha Chatterjee's *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton, 2012) follows the ever-changing representations of this historical event and founding myth of the British Empire in India, from the eighteenth century to the present. Chatterjee explores how a supposed tragedy paved the ideological foundations for the "civilizing" force of British imperial rule and territorial control in India.

Chatterjee takes a close look at the justifications of modern empire by liberal thinkers, international lawyers, and conservative traditionalists, examining the intellectual and political responses of the colonized, including those of Bengali nationalists. The two sides of empire's entwined history are brought together in the story of the Black Hole memorial: set up in Calcutta in 1760, demolished in 1821, restored by Lord Curzon in 1902, and removed in 1940 to a neglected churchyard. Challenging conventional truisms of imperial history, nationalist scholarship, and liberal visions of globalization, Chatterjee argues that empire is a necessary and continuing part of the history of the modern state.

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Black Hole Memorial restored by Lord Curzon

Introduction: The Legitimation of Imperial Practices

Ayça Çubukçu: How would you describe the field and the genre which *The Black Hole of Empire* fits, or else, wishes to inspire? What is the craft you practiced when writing *The Black Hole*? Is this a book in Anthropology and Asian Studies as the Princeton University Press catalogue claims?

Partha Chatterjee: This is like asking a magician to reveal his tricks. But actually that is not a good analogy, because there are no secrets behind my craft. Is this a book in Asian Studies? Yes, it is. Is this a book in Anthropology? I am not sure. But I would certainly claim that it is a book on Modern World History. In any case, I have tried to do something that is not very easily done, namely, combine within the same text a narrative history alongside a serious engagement with the history of a concept. The usual way of approaching the latter problem would have been to place the modern concept of empire within a frame of intellectual history. But I have been concerned in this book to deal with empire as a *practice* rather than merely as a concept. Hence, I needed to take the discussion out of a strictly intellectual history framework and instead show how conceptual changes were connected to actual practices of power in imperial settings and also of resistance to empire. I chose to do this by picking the story of the Black Hole of Calcutta as the narrative spine of the book.

In each chapter, I move away from this evolving story to pick out instances of discursive shifts as well as shifts in the techniques of imperial power, only to return to a new episode in the Black Hole story and what was happening in and around the fort in Calcutta. That is the craft. I suppose I have employed narrative techniques I have learnt from literature and the theatre, but that is the privilege one enjoys when one writes narrative history instead of theoretical social science. But I have also done something that I learnt while doing Subaltern Studies—namely, to interrogate in theoretical terms the elements of popular culture. Hence, I was able to connect the theoretical foundations of imperial policy and anti-imperial politics with the everyday forms of mass culture. No intellectual historian would consider the popular theatre or football as subjects of serious study. But I have tried to show that they were as effective historical forces as—who knows, perhaps more effective than—the writings and speeches of intellectuals and political leaders.

Çubukçu: "This book," your preface declares, "braids two histories: a little history and a grand one." The little history is local, tracing

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the career of the English East India Company's fortified settlement in Bengal from the eighteenth century, while the grand history is global, following the phenomenon of modern empire from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. How would you characterize the "method" which governed the way you braided these two histories? How does one write a *History of a Global Practice of Power,* as your book's subtitle has it?

Chatterjee: Let me elaborate on my answer to your first question. The two histories actually require two different methods. For the first, I could have written a straightforward political history of the colonial city of Calcutta, beginning with the fortified British settlement in the early eighteenth century, Siraj's attack on the fort, the British reconquest and founding of the empire in India, the emergence of Calcutta as the capital city of the British empire and the centre of colonial capitalism, all the way to nationalism and the end of British rule. This political history has been already written by others. And as for the second, I could have done a conceptual history of modern empire—an old subject of intellectual history. But I wanted to bring them together into the same discursive space through a focus on the practices of empire. Hence the braiding of the two histories. But I had to be selective on both sides, since every switch from one register to the other required a discursive shift. To try to do both histories in the conventional way in the same book would have been utterly unmanageable—in fact, impossible. So I narrowed down the local political history to the history of the Black Hole story and Fort William. On the other side, I moved selectively through the historiography of British India, the history of Western political theory and political economy, of international law and international institutions, insofar as they had a bearing on the evolution of actual practices of empire. My attempt was to show that while many of my narratives of actual practices were local, they had a strong relationship with evolving conceptual changes in those disciplinary knowledges of power. That is my method. To a large extent, I had to invent it. Whether it works or not is for readers like you to judge.



English officers in the Black Hole

Çubukçu: In a memorable formulation, you observe that "modern empire was not an aberrant supplement to the history of modernity but rather its constituent part," and that "it will continue to thrive as long as the practices of the modern state-form remain unchanged." Why is this the case? What is it about the modern state-form, which lends itself to empire?

Chatterjee: This is a claim I could only have supported by explicitly making the connection between the two histories, not otherwise. The field of imperial history (even, I would suggest, the revisionist "new imperial history") has defined itself as a special subject separate from

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the history of the modern state which is a narrative supplement to the history of modern political theory—a classic field of intellectual history. I have discussed this in my book *Lineages of Political Society* (2011). The fundamental claim of imperial history is that the problems encountered in overseas colonies were of a special kind that required pragmatic, on-the-spot solutions that, even though they were often rationalized and packaged in theoretical terms for consumption in the metropolis, lacked a proper grounding in theoretical knowledge. In other words, what imperial historians claim is that there really can be no theoretical history of empire. The exception to this is, of course, the Marxist tradition of the history of imperialism. But that has been bound to the twentieth-century history of finance capital, which is a rather specific history if you want to think of modern empire as going back at least to the beginning of the nineteenth century, if not earlier.

So my answer was to find a way of tying modern empire as a history of actual practices to its history as a concept. I found a way of doing this through my braiding of the two histories—one a local history of imperial and anti-imperial practices and the other a conceptual history firmly located within the history of the modern state, namely, in the disciplines of political theory, political economy, international law and sometimes anthropology. I try to show that what imperial powers do in their colonies have everything to do with what they think they are as modern European nation-states. Not only that, what anti-colonial movements do against empires also have everything to do with what they think they want to create as new sovereign nation-states. Empire, as I say, is immanent in the nation-state. This is not merely a happenstance, a matter of historical chance. It is inherent in the modern conceptualization of state power. Empire is a fundamental part of modern political theory, even, as I try to show in my last chapter, in our present era when everyone wants to disavow empire.

Çubukçu: Offering a typology of European overseas empires, you distinguish between three kinds—white settler colonies, plantation colonies, and Oriental colonies—to argue that colonies of the Oriental kind posed unprecedented conceptual problems for (imperial) political thought in the late eighteenth century. What was so particular about Oriental colonies? How do the "conceptual problems" that materialized through the Haitian Revolution in a plantation colony of revolutionary France, for example, compare with those addressed by British rule in India?

Chatterjee: It is interesting that you raise the question of the Haitian Revolution in this context. The Haitian Revolution actually produced, I think, the first postcolonial condition in our contemporary sense, as my friend Michel-Rolph Trouillot (who, sadly, passed away recently) tried to suggest. Because the revolt of African slaves and freemen at the turn of the nineteenth century in a French Caribbean colony was a very different thing from the revolution of white settlers in British North America or the Creole revolutions in South America. The latter were seeking to create political conditions inspired by the most modern European political thought of the time. They had no place in their scheme of things for the political institutions or practices of Native Americans and certainly not those of their African slaves. The failure of the Haitian Revolution made the subsequent history of that country utterly marginal to the history of the Americas. But things had to unfold very differently in the European overseas empires in the East. For reasons of the sheer size, complexity and density of their presence, the institutions and practices of the defeated peoples of the Asian colonies could not be simply swept aside. They had to be incorporated within the ruling structure of the European empires in Asia and later in Africa –

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whether Dutch or British or French (I am leaving aside the Portuguese colonies because they present somewhat peculiar problems for the history of modern European empire). This is what I was referring to when I said that conventional imperial history wants to treat this subject as distant and more or less unrelated to the history of the modern European state, because so much of its actual material seems to be neither European nor modern. But my claim is that it is actually an inseparable part of the history of the modern state because the techniques that were developed to rule over these empires were thought out *within* the modern fields of disciplinary knowledge such as political theory, political economy and international law, not to speak of anthropology which, of course, became a classic colonial discipline.

Empire as ideology and as technique

Ayça Çubukçu: In contradistinction to nationalist projects that would be fashioned during *the colonial modern*, in a formation you distinguish as *the early modern*, various "native" figures in British India—among them Rammohan—were campaigning for liberty and equality as subjects of the British Crown, with a certain kind of faith in the emancipating mission of British rule. What is the significance of such early modern imaginaries of political community, which you observe to have been "doomed"? Why do they resist attempts to subsume them in nationalist historiographies of modernity?

Partha Chatterjee: I think I have advanced here a quite novel idea as far as the existing historiography goes. I have been careful to define the term "early modern" as precisely as possible. It is not quite a period with exact dates. I have preferred to talk about the early modern in the domain of the political, leaving aside the possibility of the early modern in the domains of literature or art, for instance, which might have quite different characteristics and dates. Further, I have distinguished between two different early modern tendencies: the absolutist and the anti-absolutist. The absolutist tendency I trace through the eighteenth century, culminating in Tipu Sultan. Tipu's military defeat marks, I think, the historical end of this tendency. But it remains a suppressed discourse that is revived in late nineteenth-century nationalism when the connection is made by Indian writers through the economic theories of the German historical school between national sovereignty and economic independence. I think Tipu's memorialisation after independence has a lot to do with state-led industrialization as the hallmark of national sovereignty. On the other hand, the anti-absolutist early modern represented by Rammohan Roy is very similar to the republicanism of the American revolutions. There was a large element there of the championing of the rights of the British subject to representation in government (republicanism in the English sense did not necessarily mean the elimination of the monarchy as in the French Revolution: Rammohan, for example, was very careful in both displaying and hiding his sympathies on this matter). The question was, once more, a peculiar one in the Eastern colony. The Native American and African were not part of the republican nation in revolutionary America. Could the Indian be an equal part of the body of British subjects seeking representation in India? Rammohan thought so. His British friends did not. That was the end of the anti-absolutist early modern: it lasted for perhaps thirty years or so in the early nineteenth century. But once again, its memory was revived in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism. The question here was not sovereignty but the quality of government—the classic liberal question posed by utilitarians like Bentham and James Mill. No matter who rules, what would the government be like? This was the question raised by liberal nationalists in the twentieth century when they were thinking of a new constitution for independent

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India. They wanted to trace a lineage to Rammohan. But actually there is no continuous history of liberalism from Rammohan to the Indian constitution of 1950. That is a problem that nationalist historiography will never manage to resolve.

Çubukçu: You argue that a new paradigm in justificatory logics of empire—based on the global, comparative, and normative theory of government inaugurated by Bentham—became established by the mid-nineteenth century. You also suggest that this nineteenth century paradigm continues to frame, "right down to the present day," the legitimation of imperial practices. What accounts for this paradigmatic shift and the leading role you accord in it to Bentham's social and political thought?

Chatterjee: I think the crucial step that Bentham took was to conceptually open up the entire field of government everywhere in the world, no matter where and in what kind of society, to comparative evaluation. This was radically different from the kinds of comparisons made in the eighteenth century by Montesquieu, for instance. Bentham found the key to comparison in the common measure of utility. This made possible the normalization of government everywhere—to measure them against a common norm. It also allowed for evaluating governments by the consequences of policy rather than by asking "who rules." In other words, the utility-based consequentialist comparison separated sovereignty from government. Needless to say, this provided a completely new justificatory basis to modern empire. The question now became not "who rules" but "who rules better." I also show how, through the nineteenth and twentieth century, what was only implicit in Bentham was explicated and elaborated, namely, the implications of the two senses of the norm. The norm as the empirical mean or average ranked countries as deviations from the norm—as higher or lower than the average. The norm as the normatively desirable could then designate deviant countries as requiring policies based on the suspension of the universally desirable norm—declaring the colonial exception. The norm-deviation empirical knowledge thus became the ground for the norm-exception policy prescription. The history of colonial government is replete with examples. Thus, freedom of speech might be the universally desirable norm but a fanatical people easily aroused to violence might require stringent controls on public speech. Public health policies should normally elicit voluntary compliance, but for a people with rigid and backward cultural practices, forcible compliance may be necessary. Free mobility of capital and labour may be the desirable norm for good economic policy but a tribal society unfamiliar with commercial practices might require a government policy that prohibits outsiders from doing business in that area. Most generally, the universally valid liberal norm was representative government, but for countries that were empirically found to be socially backward, there had to be an exception: the best exceptional form was enlightened despotism. I think this structure of thinking remains in place even today, long after the old colonial empires have disappeared.

Çubukçu: According to the definition of modern empire you offer, "*the imperial prerogative lies*, one could say, *in the claim to declare the colonial exception*" (original emphasis). How does this conceptualization of the imperial prerogative differ from the sovereign prerogative as conceptualized by Carl Schmitt? To pose the question more abstractly, what is the difference between a modern empire and a modern state—say, with "minorities"? You emphasize that the concept of modern empire is limited to "the domain of inter*national* relations" (original emphasis) and that "instances of declaring the exception within contexts that are taken to belong to the sphere of the domestic politics of states are not, in this sense, colonial-imperial." But whose "take" is to count here? In effect, doesn't the

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latter emphasis reinstate the problem, which involves the very difficulty of establishing, as a matter of fact and law, what is a "domestic" matter, and what is not?

Chatterjee: Schmitt's idea of exception lies at the heart of modern Western constitutional states (Schmitt had no qualms in declaring that non-Western countries did not have proper constitutional states at all). He argued that in order to protect the very existence of the state, normal constitutional procedures would have to be suspended in an emergency: the state of exception was implied in the very founding of the constitution. The colonial exception is quite different. It is the suspension of a global norm in the exceptional circumstances of an empirically deviant country. It could mean, for instance, a *normal* condition of absolutism or despotism (colonial rule by others, military dictatorship, authoritarian rule), not the exceptional suspension of an otherwise extant constitution. The colonial exception is declared from *outside* the constituted state, not from within, and is justified by the need to rule better.

As for your second question, my argument applies only to recent history when the nation-state has become recognized as the universal normal form of the modern state. The assumption is that on the ground of sovereignty, all nation-states are formally equal. This is the current foundation of international law and international organizations. The exact conceptual equivalent is the idea of formally equal citizenship within the modern state. Now, of course there are contestations over how nation-states are currently defined, who falls within them and who doesn't, whether their borders should be defined differently, and so on. But then there are contestations over equal citizenship too—and still the idea of equal citizenship as the foundation of popular sovereignty of the state remains intact. Similarly, my argument is that the foundation of our present states system is the formally equal sovereignty of all nation-states, even if the actual boundaries of states may be contested or redefined.

Now, there will still remain open questions about how the boundary between the international and the domestic is to be drawn. I can see that you are thinking of current debates about intervention. The crucial question is: does the conceptual ground of equal sovereignty provide a criterion for judging what is legitimate intervention and what is not? This is disputed. The most radical challenge is posed by those who question the very idea of national sovereignty today. In terms of the history I have presented, this challenge goes against the historical trend laid down by the anti-colonial movements and harks back to the consequentialist criterion suggested by utilitarian imperialism, namely, "who rules better" rather than "who rules."

The Legitimation of Imperial Practices

Ayça Çubukçu: Considering the impressive common ground shared by what you differentiate as liberal and antiliberal ideologies of empire, why would it be incorrect to interpret what you name an *anti*-liberal ideology of empire as an articulation *internal* to liberal imperialism? What are your criteria for distinguishing between liberal and antiliberal ideologies of empire on the one hand, and "techniques" and "ideologies" of imperial practice, on the other?

Partha Chatterjee: I think the distinction between ideology and technique is important in order not to dismiss or misunderstand the very real debates that took place within the field of imperial policy. The fights, for instance, between Gladstonian liberals and conservatives like Stephen and Maine in late nineteenth-century Britain were very serious, affecting domestic party politics, the pace of institutional changes in the colonies as well as debates and alliances among anti-colonial nationalists. For a historian, it would be a bad mistake to simply

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ignore the distinction by saying that they are two sides of the same coin. What the distinction between technique and ideology achieves is the separation between actual practices and their justification. By the nineteenth century, imperial policies had to be justified before several publics. The grounds were often ideological, since they became entangled with party politics and international diplomatic alliances, even though every side tried to find "scientific" arguments based on empirical knowledge in the various disciplines. But even when the justifications differed, the techniques were from a repertoire available to all. It is interesting to note (as I do in the book) that even though the Indian nationalist leaders at the time of independence in 1947 were fervent anti-imperialists, that did not stop them from using some of the same techniques of power used by the British, such as, for instance, in the integration of the princely states into the new nation-state, even using armed force in the case of Hyderabad and Kashmir. This is an important finding, but it only confuses things if one simply concludes that the Indian nationalists were every bit as imperialist as the British.

Çubukçu: Are you suggesting that in forcing Hyderabad and Kashmir into the domestic realm of their new nation-state, Indian nationalists were acting as imperialists technically, but not ideologically? I ask this question of clarification in reference, once again, to your distinction between imperial "techniques" and "ideologies" on the one hand, and your definitional assertion that the "domestic" politics of states cannot be considered colonial-imperial, on the other.

Chatterjee: Yes, the distinction would allow for an accurate but nevertheless critical evaluation of the Indian government's actions. At the level of technique, the Indian nationalist leadership was simply following the tradition the British had established of making treaties with Indian rulers as though they were equal members of the family of nations but subsequently regarding them as subordinate powers, not fully sovereign, and therefore subject to British policy rather than international law. The new Indian state took over the idea that international law did not apply to the various Indian princes who were under British protection. Hence, when the ruler of Kashmir asked for Indian military assistance when raiders from Pakistan attacked his state, the Indian government insisted that he first sign the agreement of accession to India before Indian troops and planes would be sent. Thus, the Indian state's position would be that it was taking action to protect a part of India's sovereign territory. And when the ruler of Hyderabad refused for more than a year to join India, Indian forces simply moved in and took over the territory.

But from these facts it would be a mistake to conclude that the post-colonial Indian state was imperialist in the same way that the British had been. (This is a trap into which even Perry Anderson has fallen in his recent review essays in the *London Review of Books*.) The justifications for its actions were completely different. First, it would say that the Indian princes were remnants of an old monarchical order propped up by the British for their own purposes; they had no place in the new republican order of post-colonial India. Second, it would say that organized popular movements within the princely states were against the old monarchies and in favour of joining the larger political space of the Indian nation. This was factually true for some of the princely states, though not all. In Hyderabad, the most powerful mass movement was led by the Communists in Telangana. After the Indian army occupied Hyderabad, the Communists suspended the movement, surrendered arms and joined parliamentary politics. In Kashmir, the popular National Conference led by Sheikh Abdullah was in favour of joining India in 1947. So I have made the point in my book that while many of the techniques of power adopted by

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the post-colonial state were the same techniques developed in the colonial period, the ideological ground of justification was now anti-imperialist. I might add that the Indian government used full-throated anti-imperialist arguments in 1960 to take over the Portuguese colony of Goa by force, claiming that international law and treaties had no validity in this case.

Çubukçu: Upon reviewing various theories of imperialism, you propose that "what most of these theories of imperialism seem to have underestimated was the ability of the emerging capitalist global order to adjust to political resistances and to modify accordingly its own governmental structures and policies." If so, should we think of the official espousal and adoption of the right to national self-determination during the League of Nations era—by figures ranging from Wilson to Lenin—as part of such an adjustment at the global level? Given your critique of the historical role played by international law and its conceptual apparatus in advancing European imperialism, how should national sovereignty as a legal artefact that maintains the appearance of sovereign equality be evaluated?

Chatterjee: There is no doubt that the acknowledgement of national self-determination in the League of Nations was made in the face of growing nationalist movements in Central and Eastern Europe. Left to themselves, the European imperial powers might have made the necessary adjustments without conceding the ideologically grounded principle of national self-determination. But Wilson pushed the principle down their throats. And even though he was thinking only of the European parts of the Austrian and Ottoman empires, the principle acquired a life of its own. Wilson admirers see in this his role as a visionary leader imagining continued Western dominance in a world after empires. Others see an unintended consequence in what came after. I think the League of Nations did provide a skeletal framework for a global order in which equal sovereignty of nation-states would be the basic form but in which British hegemony would be superseded by a collective dominance of Western powers led by the economic dominance of the United States. Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* is an instructive lesson in the underlying changes that were taking place in the inter-war years in the global system.



Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Woodrow Wilson arriving at Versailles at the end of World War I

Once again, continuing my analogy with equal citizenship within the nation-state, I will say that the recognition of the principle of formal equality of national sovereignty was a great historical advance achieved by the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century. But just as formally equal citizenship in the nation-state does not eliminate real differences in civil society, so does formally equal sovereignty not erase the continued possibility of declaring the colonial exception. We see this every day. Equal sovereignty remains a powerful criterion in evaluating international action, whether diplomatic or military, even though it might not be the only one and even though the specific conditions of its application might be disputed.

Çubukçu: Finally, if I could turn the

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conversation away from imperial pedagogies of violence and culture to anti-imperial ones: what *should* provide, in your judgement, a foundation for anti-imperialism today? Are we to repeat what you identify as "the old logic of protecting the sovereign sphere of national power" and "the old rhetoric of anti-imperialism"? What could be the political grounds, if anything, of an anti-nationalist anti-imperialism that does not fall into the imperial traps of a righteous politics "for the happiness of mankind"?

Chatterjee: I must be careful in answering this question because I know you are trying to trap me. Let me first restate what I just said in answer to your previous question. The principle of formal equal sovereignty was a great historical victory won through the anti-imperialist struggles of colonial peoples all over the world. I believe it would be a great loss to give up that principle and return to some form of colonial good governance (the Americans call it nation-building, as in Iraq and Afghanistan). But I would be the first person to argue that formal equal sovereignty of nation-states always leaves open the room for declaring the colonial exception. How does one get out of the bind?

Theoretically, it would mean nothing less than grounding the forms of self-government in something other than the sovereign nation-state. But that is more easily said than done (although in some countries it cannot even be said very easily). Not only that, merely challenging the principle of national sovereignty without simultaneously working out a credible alternative form of collective government is, under present circumstances, only to invite the declaration of the colonial exception. So my opinion is that small steps must be taken and the results tested before proposing any grand alternative visions. The grandest experiment made so far to surmount national sovereignty–the European Union–seems to be falling apart. I would suggest that the place to experiment might be with minorities who straddle international borders, such as Kashmiris or Kurds. Could neighbour states be pressured to relax the stringency of borders so as to allow greater freedom of movement, and hence a greater degree of autonomy, to such people, outside the rigid framework of national sovereignty–creating zones of regional autonomy across international borders, that is to say? That would be a great start. But I have to say that the signs are not hopeful. I know, for instance, that the border between India and Nepal has been largely open, with relatively free mobility and settlement of people on both sides. The reactionary monarchy of Nepal was not too bothered about this. But the revolutionary Maoists who have come to power there recently are acutely sensitive to loopholes in national sovereignty and will, I think, try to police their borders more rigorously. So a genuinely progressive domestic change still seems to call for a deepening of national sovereignty. My sense is that the history of nationalism has not been played out yet. I know that many of my readers, including you, will find this view pessimistic. But I can't help it.

AFTERWORD

Chatterjee. I wish to add a few words to my interview with Ayça Çubukçu for readers of the *Asia-Pacific Journal*. For reasons that should be clear, the bulk of my discussion of modern empire and nation-states has been built around the history of Britain's rule over India. When I talk about the changes in the global order in the twentieth century, I do mention the rise of Japan as an imperial power in East Asia and the Pacific, but my focus remains on the process of the dismantling of the European empires after World War II. Do Japanese imperialism and the recent rise of China as a global power change the story of *The Black Hole of Empire*?

My sense is that although the rhetoric of anti-Westernism, and as a corollary that of Pan-

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Asianism, played a role in Japanese imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century, the techniques of power it adopted were exactly the same as those followed by Western powers. Japan's rulers obsessively compared the strength of their nation-state with those of others, using the same measures that Western states were using. Needless to say, they justified their authoritarian structure of government, their forced industrialization and the rapid building-up of their military capabilities by the claim that they had to be strong and self-reliant. More significantly, they made exactly the same comparisons of their own status as a nation-state with other countries of Asia as the Europeans did – the others were indolent, submissive, weak and therefore defenceless against Western imperial powers whereas Japan had risen far above the prevailing Asian standards. In producing this comparative knowledge of Asian countries and peoples, Japan indeed created its own Orientalism in which the cultures of China and South-East Asia became marked by backwardness and inferiority. I am sure there were significant differences too between Japanese and Western imperialism (and the former existed for a much shorter time than the latter), but the broad parameters, I would say, fall within my account of modern empire as a global practice of power.

As for China's position today, I have spoken in the closing sections of my book of the possibility of the global imperial role being shared regionally between different great powers. Needless to say, China is a prime candidate. What would be interesting to see is whether or not there emerges a new ideological justification of the Chinese use of imperial techniques of global power. Thus far, China's international role has been marked by a fierce defence of national sovereignty. It seems unlikely that it can easily adopt a US-style rhetoric of "war on behalf of humanity". The Soviet Union had used the ideology of anti-colonialism in the service of its frequently imperial practices of power. Already, we hear that their rapidly expanding business dealings with African countries are being described by the Chinese as significantly different from the way the Americans or Europeans do business there. Do we see a new imperial ideology emerging here that the world has not seen before? After all, Chinese capitalism and its associated forms of governance have marked sociological differences with the normative forms of capitalist society in the West.

But I am speculating too much.

This dialogue on empire by Ayça Çubukçu and Partha Chatterjee originated in *Humanity*. It is presented here with an afterword by Chatterjee reflecting on the Japanese empire and the significance of the rise of China.

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