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978-1-107-10946-9 - Legacies of Empire: Imperial Roots of the Contemporary Global Order

Edited by Sandra Halperin and Ronen Palan

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Legacies of Empire

The nation state is a fairly recent historical phenomenon. Human history over the past two to four millennia has been dominated by empires, and the legacies of these empires continue to shape the contemporary world in ways that are not always recognized or fully understood.

Much research and writing about European colonial empires has focused on relationships between them and their colonies. This book examines the phenomenon of empire from a different perspective. It explores the imprint that imperial institutions, organizational principles, practices and logics have left on the modern world. It shows that many features of the contemporary world – modern armies, multiculturalism, globalized finance, modern city states, the United Nations – have been profoundly shaped by past empires. It also applies insights about the impact of past empires to contemporary politics and considers the long-term institutional legacies of the ‘American empire’.

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Acknowledgments

This volume is a product of a collaborative research project sponsored by the Leverhulme Foundation, the International Studies Association and the British Academy.

The origins of the project are the result of a Leverhulme Foundation Research Grant Project entitled *Global Development: The Role of Trans-National Elites in Afro-Eurasia*. This project involved research by Sandra Halperin and two colleagues (Yasmin Khan and Stephanie Ortmann) on the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Russia and Central Asia. Its aim was to make visible a *horizontal* or transnational set of connections, relations and processes that much historiography and social science tends to obscure. We pursued this aim by studying transitions from empire to independent states in the post-Ottoman Middle East (MENA), post-colonial India and post-Soviet Russia and Central Asia, and explored through comparative-historical study how these moments were shaped by, and worked to extend and reproduce, trans-national networks. Our hypothesis was that if these networks survived the transitions from empire to ‘national independence’ in MENA, South Asia and Russia and Central Asia, we should find evidence that trans-local/cross-regional networks played a larger role and exerted much more cultural and economic influence in these transitions than traditional periodization and nationalist narratives usually convey. Our plan of work involved much discussion and comparison of our individual findings and the securing of additional funds to support workshops and other activities that would enable us to present our findings and receive feedback from a broader community of scholars.

This is where Ronen Palan entered the picture, bringing with him the notion of ‘legacies of empire’ to characterize a salient dimension of our work. The term had resonance and, with it, we succeeded in piquing the curiosity of a group of scholars from the UK, Europe

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and the USA who were intrigued by the notion that the sorts of things they have been exploring within their own areas of expertise might better be understood as linked to the institutional inheritances and impacts of empires. We were also able to secure grants to support two workshops. The first was a Workshop Grant from the International Studies Association that enabled us to hold a day-long workshop, entitled *Legacies of Empire*, at the International Studies Association 53rd Annual Convention, 1–4 April, 2012, in San Diego, California. The second was a British Academy Small Grants Scheme award that enabled us to follow up with a second workshop in June 2012 at Royal Holloway University of London's central London base in Bedford Square. We wish to thank all the participants who attended these workshops: Tarak Barkawi, Alexander Cooley, Marcus Daeschel, Yasmin Khan, Ronnie Lipschutz, Craig Murphy, Iver Neumann, Stefanie Ortmann, Herman Schwartz and Einar Wigen. Though not all were able to contribute their papers to this volume, all participated in the discussions that inspired it, to many of the ideas included in its introduction and conclusions and to the overall conception, which we hope will be the basis for an ongoing programme of research.

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