Empire, Ministry, Indigeneity

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My late colleague Samuel Huntington wrote of an impending clash of civilizations, but it might be more apt to consider the specter that confronts us as a clash of empires. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the threats that Putin has broadcast across the European theater; China's massive military build-up and its projection of designs upon democratic Taiwan and much of the western Pacific; India's rapid emergence onto the global stage as a nuclear power and its authoritarian turn at home, combined with its ever more invasive rule over its Indigenous peoples and even its expatriates; Venezuela's authoritarian consolidation and its threat to invade Guyana; the jeopardy that Donald Trump, possibly re-elected President of the United States later this year, would deploy the American military in ways that regulate, police and attempt to "pacify" Mexico and, possibly after that, much of North America if not the western hemisphere – all of these developments and others remind us, not merely of the conflict of "major powers" but also the aspirations of these major powers to swallow up or ally with the other ones. To become even larger powers. To become empires.

My predecessors in this position – Kimberly Morgan, Peter Trubowitz and Cathie Jo Martin – each reflected on the link between politics and history and the emerging threats or challenges of our time. I'm going to follow their lead here and pass along some thoughts about what I've been reading and, as well, some research questions that I find generative. As I've sketched these thoughts and consider broader trends in scholarship on empire, I come away amazed at what scholarship in politics and history has accomplished in recent years. Studies of democracy, yes. And of freedom. But also of rule, and of unfreedom, and the expansion of the two. Every part of our section and our subdiscipline has been involved, and for many decades – comparative historical analyses of empire, bureaucracy and colonial legacies (Karen Barkey, David Bateman, Deborah Boucoyannis, Anna Gryzmala-Busse, Tomila Lankina, Adria Lawrence, James Mahoney, Lachlan McNamee, Theda Skocpol, Yuhua Wang); historical political economy analyses of empire, state and violence (Volha Charnysh, Evgeny Finkel, Sean Gailmard, Scott Gehlbach); political development narratives of rule, state and empire centered upon national and regional histories, including American political development (Devin Caughey, John Dearborn, Megan Francis, Paul Frymer, Jacob Grumbach, Ira Katznelson, Desmond King, Robert Lieberman, Suzanne Mettler, Robert Mickey, Colin Moore, Jonathan Obert, Karen Orren, Martin Shefter, Stephen Skowronek, Rogers Smith, Chloe Thurston).[1]

At the interstices of these real-world developments and my reading, I'm penning some thoughts about empire, ministry and indigeneity. My reflections are about the link between empires and the institutions still with us, about the centrality of bureaucratic governance both in animating empire but also in constraining it (an important brake upon authoritarian tendencies in the coming years will be how much bureaucrats are faithful their office as opposed to the personality of certain leaders),

[1] I could list a hundred more scholars here; polite regrets to those whom I've omitted.

and about one set of populations that have often borne the brunt of imperial expansion, Indigenous peoples (and in the cases to which I will refer, Native North Americans).

Empire

Attempted or attained, empire and its models will be with us for centuries to come. It is useful at this moment to consider what the legacies of these constellations have been. The Roman version created the linguistic foundations of Europe and parts of Asia and, though later empires, of North and South America. The Christian Church centered at Rome was its own empire and spawned many an administrative innovation that was later adopted consciously or less so by monarchies. The religious foundations of much of the modern world were also created in the imperial Roman Catholic Church and its allied empires and monarchies. As Karen Barkey, Theda Skocpol and others have demonstrated, patterns of modern state bureaucracy were embedded in Roman, Christian and Ottoman Empires, and revolutions and other developments that toppled those empires often strengthened the state structures and forces embedded within them.[2] Indeed, much of what James Scott described as forms of state-seeing and legibility also (and often first) arose in state structures that we now regard as imperial.

What distinguishes these imperial models from more reduced models of the state – by degrees and not by binary absolutes – are the aspirations and attempts of empires (1) to grow, in part by annexing or forcibly incorporating adjacent spaces and peoples and (2) to homogenize markets, language, culture and other forms of practice within their claimed borders.

As we consider the present moment and the specter of authoritarianism, it is worth noting one simple fact: not all empires are authoritarian and not all authoritarian governments qualify as empires (though many have such aspirations). As a political scientist I prefer the term *authoritarianism* (used by the likes of my colleagues Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt) to the term *tyranny* (used by historians like Timothy Snyder). There is a historical specificity to modern authoritarianism, in part due to the rise of forms of authoritarianism that rely upon elections as both legitimation and surveillance devices (Levitsky and Way's competitive authoritarianism brings lessons to the table that general invocations of tyranny do not). We might later call tyrants those who devour their democracies from within, but that is a dynamic better explained by authoritarianism than by tyranny.

Yet to the extent that authoritarian forms of rule characterize our present and our future, scholars in politics and history will be required to do what we have always done and to shed light upon these dynamics by illuminating their structures in the past. Empires can provide many lessons in this work. What have expansionary imperial states done? Recent research by Jennifer Davis and Sean Gailmard point to enduring problems of hierarchy, control and agency in imperial settings. Davis's research shows how Charlemagne facilitated reports upon his subordinates, assigning overlapping jurisdictions to these officials to permit comparisons between their performance. Similar dynamics played out in the history of the Western Frankish kingdoms after the Carolingian period, as Jeffrey Koziol has shown. Gailmard's fascinating study of the British empire shows how many of the

[2] Many of these themes, including the study of state structures under an imperial lens, have been known for some time; see the insightful review of Jennifer Pitts, "Political theory of empire and imperialism," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010): 211-235.

institutions we today regard as democratic, liberal or republican have their origins in agency problems through which the British Crown attempted to control governors in colonies and colonial assemblies themselves. As recent work on British India and French Canada shows, empires used petitions to adjudicate claims and also to keep an eye on imperial officials.

The imperial origins of many "inclusive institutions" should be examined further. They plausibly include assemblies, courts, petitions, and compendia of laws and regulations that both include and circumscribe rights.

Ministry and Empire – the *Longue Durée*

Analyses of empire will place great role upon bureaucracies, whether they are party bureaucracies, organizations of diplomats, armies or teams of surveillance bots. New analyses of imperial state structures (including Yuhua Wang's excellent *The Rise and Fall of Imperial China*) point to the detailed architectures of rule that different empires adopted, with intricate appointment structures, quasi-Weberian modes of rule and detailed laws and regulations. Examining the church-state in medieval Europe, as scholars extending from Robert Benson to Geoffrey Koziol to Anna Gryzmala-Busse have done, shows how medieval bishops and abbots were every bit as advanced in technologies of rule as were the emperors and kings with and for whom they ruled.

In the United States, Paul Frymer's important study of empire in the United States – *Building an American Empire* (2017) – refocused much of the lens of American political development scholars upon the logic of "territorial expansion." More than other APD scholars before him, Frymer showed how the consolidation of military power and state capacity after the Civil War led the United States to rapidly expand and, later, to end the era of treaty-making; this is a major theme in recent works in Native American historical scholarship such as Ned Blackhawk's and Michael Witgen's. What is critical in this argument, and deserves further examination, is the role not only of military officials and militias in this expansion, but also that of other American bureaucrats. Colin Moore's fascinating study of American empire in the Philippines and Puerto Rico shows the development and deployment of highly sophisticated administrative apparatuses to develop colonial economies and govern subaltern populations.

As domestic models of authoritarianism become of greater interest, it is worth keeping in mind that some of the most important lessons of our section's scholars are that bureaucratic institutions are deeply involved in their operation. I'm thinking here of Robert Mickey's classic *Paths Out of Dixie*. Mickey showed that southern authoritarian party government depended not only upon state party organizations during Jim Crow but also the enmeshment of party with the apparatus of Southern order, especially state governments, country governments and sheriff's offices (Mickey, Chapter Six, 206-9). My co-teacher Devin Caughey has aptly demonstrated the electoral stability of these arrangements.

The historical literature on authoritarian modes of governance in the American states is rapidly growing, with an emergent focus on the transformations that have taken place among state legislatures and state parties in recent years. Jacob Grumbach's *Laboratories Against Democracy: How National Parties Transformed State Politics* (Princeton, 2022) is the latest and one of the very best examples of this emerging thread of research. What political scientists know a lot less about is

whether state parties can easily impose their will upon state administrative agencies or whether there are some agencies that can retard authoritarian policy, whether intentionally or through the operations of bureaucratic slack. As scholars Aziz Huq and Tom Ginsberg have argued, much of the future of democratic and republican forms of governance depends upon the administrative rule of law.

Indigeneity

It can be fascinating and entertaining to study empires, and that fun and fascination risk blinding us to their very real human and non-human damage. Modern empires impose some of their greatest weight upon Indigenous peoples – the Irish and India under the British Empire, Indigenous peoples of North America and African peoples under various European empires. For some years I have been reading the work of Arundati Roy, less her more famous novels *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* – those are amazing, no doubt – and more some recent collections of essays, notably *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009) and *Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction* (2020). Roy has been one of the loudest voices in India calling attention to how nationalist politics in India has co-evolved with a more extractive model of economic development, leaving India's Indigenous peoples, especially Adivasis, driven off their ancestral lands. Whether modern India qualifies as an empire is another question, but Roy's work and others tie extractive and expansive models of state development with Indigenous dispossession.

It's in the interaction of empires and Indigenous peoples that we see new forms of politics and new forms of rule. More so than with other subject populations, American bureaucrats intervened intentionally and forcefully in the attempted transformation (and often erasure) of Indigenous cultures and societies. As Claudio Saunt's marvelous study on Native American removal documents so clearly, removal was a deeply bureaucratic process: ruthlessly efficient, intricately planned and thoroughly administered, in ways that we might expect of the "policy state" that Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek have described, and long before the examples they use to describe it. The forcible removal of thousands upon thousands of Native American children from their homes – to be sent to government-run or -funded boarding schools where abuse and corruption were rampant – was a deeply bureaucratic enterprise. Its history in Canada as well as in the United States – where it lasted until quite late in the twentieth century – deserve far more analysis by historical political scientists than it has received.

There are important lessons that emerge from the study of empires and Indigenous peoples, and some of them counsel circumspection about the terms that scholars of history too often use without sufficient care. It has become fashionable to throw the term "settler colonialism" around a range of studies, including in a number of writings where the Australian historiography on which it is based has clearly been neither read nor cited. There may be cases where the term fits well, such as to the world of Australia that Patrick Wolfe examined and where the legal regime of *terra nullius* plausibly applies. The British North American colonies in New England, as narrated by Lisa Brooks in *Our Beloved Kin*, also plausibly qualify under this model. Yet other North American imperial enterprises most surely would not, including New France and much of the United States. These places were not those to which the doctrine of *terra nullius* pertained, as Richard White, Allan Greer, Bethel Saler and Salima Belmessous have shown. As Lachlan McNamee has argued, moreover, settler colonialist arguments have a remarkably weak and thin conception of the state. Simplified settler colonialism

narratives advance vast claims about Indigenous erasure but offer no solid account of the apparatus that would be required to carry that out.

And it is critical to note that Indigenous peoples have, in many cases, found both allies and institutions with which to protect, even if partially, their spaces and peoples. These activities – what the Ojibwe theorist Gerald Vizenor describes as modes of *survivance* – take up too little space in studies invoking settler colonialism. Political scientists, with their analysis of agenda-setting, coalition-building, "divide and conquer" strategies used by the weak as well as the strong – have much to offer and add to accounts by historians here. Take treaties. Treaties have little place in simplistic settler colonial arguments – if the land is truly *terra nullius* then no international agreement would be required to acquire them – but Native American governments fiercely protect treaties and they have also figured centrally in Indigenous politics in Canada and New Zealand. Treaties acknowledge an originary and enduring sovereignty and often support contemporary economic development. Many contemporary Native American economies depend massively if not entirely upon treaty rights (the Seneca Nation of Indians is the fifth largest employer in western New York). The engagement of Indigenous peoples in claims-making, including petitioning, began long before their violent confrontation between European empires. And some of that model owes to diplomatic traditions among Indigenous peoples themselves. But the Spanish, French and British empires also drew Native peoples into complaint-making and petitioning in many ways, and in those activities lay the foundations of later alliance-making, coalition-building and modern lobbying by Native American nations.

Conclusion

Whatever the future of our democratic republic and of the free world, the study of empire must continue to occupy a central place in the study of politics and history. This will be true across the many subfields that compose our section. That study, as I have suggested, should include empire's institutions and its interactions with governed and subjugated peoples. Neither a "bottom -up" nor a "top down" model of analysis will suffice. Knowing empire, in the end, might be a precondition for resisting empire, and perhaps ultimately for defeating it.

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