

The Modern Invention of ‘Dynasty’: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Historians tend to take ‘dynasty’ for granted. It is assumed that ‘we’ know what ‘dynasty’ is; and that the concept unproblematically corresponds to the empirical reality of a historical institution present in all rulerships across time and place. Taking as its point of departure the peculiar and little-researched history of the word itself, which acquired its current meaning only as recently as the second half of the eighteenth century, this article sets out a research agenda for historicising ‘dynasty’. Introducing the special issue on the global intellectual history of the modern invention of ‘dynasty’, it argues that ‘dynasty’ is not simply a neutral historical term, but a political concept that became globally hegemonic in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the expansion of European colonialism. The article maps out three main trajectories for rethinking both past and present beyond the totalizing and falsely transparent concept of ‘dynasty’. First, it points toward a more complex and less hierarchical vision of pre-capitalist, including and especially extra-European, societies. Second, it considers how exactly capitalism produced new modes and ideologies of hereditary transmission of sovereignty and property and theorises a link between ‘primitive accumulation’ and the political form of the royal/princely ‘House’. Third, it centres the role of colonialism – European imperial expansion as well as anti-colonial non-European nationalisms – in globalizing ‘dynasty’ as a category of power. The article concludes on a political and ethical note: a global intellectual history of the invention of ‘dynasty’ ultimately has the polemical aim of denaturalizing, demystifying, and provincializing hierarchy and inequality.

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‘Dynasty really means power (*Dynastie signifie proprement puissance*)’, claimed Voltaire in a heated exchange with Pierre Henri Larcher, a classicist, who criticized his *Philosophy of History* published in 1766. Voltaire continued: ‘And therefore one can use this word, in spite of Larcher’s cavils. “Dynasty” came from the Phoenician “dunast”; and Larcher is an ignoramus who does not know either Phoenician, or Syriac or Coptic’.¹ This diatribe was a response to Larcher’s note that ‘one never used the word “dynasty” to refer to the state of a dynast in Greek, and even less so in French. In the latter, it means a line of kings from the same family (*une suite de Rois de la même famille*)’.² Here, as in a snapshot, we can see a clash between the old meaning of the word ‘dynasty’ appealed to by Voltaire, and its new definition, much more familiar to us, as used by Larcher. This semantic change towards the new understanding of ‘dynasty’ had been happening since at least the middle of the eighteenth century, as Natalia Nowakowska demonstrates in her article in this forum. We shall return to the important question of chronology later, but why this angry episode in intellectual history matters first and foremost is because it can help us to estrange ‘dynasty’. For a long time, historians have assumed that we automatically know what ‘dynasty’ is, that the term does not require a definition or critical interrogation, and that it unproblematically corresponds to both a concept and an institution that did exist in all historical monarchies across time and place.

Instead, and this is our most basic argument, ‘dynasty’ needs to be historicized and problematized. One possible way to go about this task is through intellectual history, the history of the word and the concept, the contested existence of which is vividly pointed out by the debate between Voltaire and Larcher. This route seems even more alluring against the background of the curious lack of research on ‘dynasty’ within two classic paradigms of intellectual history: Koselleckian *Begriffsgeschichte* and the Skinnerian/Cambridge school of history of political thought. It is indicative that ‘*Dynastie*’ does not even have its own entry in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, edited by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck.³ In our special issue, Dina Gusejnova interrogates this absence in her article on conceptions of ‘dynasty’ in modern German intellectual history. But here we can already suggest one meta-reason for the omission of ‘dynasty’ by different schools and tendencies in intellectual and conceptual history. In fact, ‘dynasty’ is a strange concept: it is simultaneously relegated to the past (both chronologically and conceptually), while also being banalized and therefore rendered ubiquitous in the present, mainly through routine references to political, business, and sports ‘dynasties’ in contemporary mass media. These two tendencies conspire to make ‘dynasty’ deceptively transparent, turning it into a neutral descriptor of institutional realities, and not a political and historical concept that should be investigated and perhaps provincialized. This needs to be changed.

In fact, such historiographical change is already happening, and here we would like to add an important caveat. When we observe that historians take ‘dynasty’ for granted, we do not claim any primacy in making this argument. There are at least two trajectories which have laid to our global intellectual history project: a Europeanist one, and a South Asianist/postcolonial one. In the Europeanist context, we are building upon the contributions of the European Research

Council project ‘The Jagiellonians: Dynasty, Memory and Identity in Central Europe’ (2013–18), conceived and led at the University of Oxford by Natalia Nowakowska. First, we should note Nowakowska’s initial observation that ‘dynasty’ remains fundamentally under-theorized in comparison to many other key concepts in late medieval and early modern political history (‘court’, ‘monarchy’, ‘state’, ‘power’ and so on). We are also indebted to the collective work of the project (in which Afanasyev took part as a researcher), which revealed a whole set of problems relating to the standard view of ‘dynasty’. These include the (almost complete) absence of the word itself in medieval political discourse; the very late or even retrospective emergence of ‘dynastic’ collective names and identifications; various gaps between the complexity of multiple medieval genealogical and familial terms and the flattening universality of the textbook use of ‘dynasty’; and the primacy of royal/princely office in medieval political representation, which has been greatly obscured by historiographical fixation on ‘dynasty’.⁴ In this forum, Nowakowska presents the first systematic European conceptual history of ‘dynasty’, looking at the changing historic semantics of the term, its historiographical usages, as well as offering an alternative conceptualization of ‘dynasty’ from the perspectives of Renaissance political culture and global history.

Regarding Europeanist discussions, some other influences and parallel developments must be noted as well. Perhaps the most important of them is the last work of Cliff Davies, who observed, initially in a short *Times Literary Supplement* review, that the name ‘Tudors’ can barely be found in sixteenth-century sources. Concomitantly, he showed that it was the critics of the royal regime who used it, while the so called ‘Tudor’ monarchs preferred to represent themselves as ‘the kings and queens of England’.⁵ In the same review, Davies also pointed out, albeit very briefly, that the word ‘dynasty’ itself was very rare at the time and used predominantly to refer to Egypt and China.⁶ These original observations are not simply anecdotal glosses. Rather, they highlight the necessity of a more critical perspective on ‘dynasty’. The same intention characterised the workshop ‘Medieval Dynasties’, organized by late Ruth Macrides in May 2018. Robert Bartlett’s keynote lecture, based on his forthcoming book on medieval dynasties and dynastic politics, reflected a new attention to the history of the word ‘dynasty’ and its evolving semantics in ancient and medieval political discourse.⁷ Bartlett also addressed the complex issue of ‘dynastic’ names, which, as we already mentioned above, often appeared much later than is presupposed by standard narratives of the beginnings and ends of various ‘dynasties’.

The other trajectory leading to our special issue emerges from a postcolonial, or more specifically South Asianist, impulse. Banerjee was part of the project ‘Nationising the Dynasty: Asymmetrical Flows in Conceptions of Government’, coordinated by Barbara Mittler, Gita Dharampal-Frick, Thomas Maissen, and Bernd Schneidmüller at Heidelberg University. Banerjee’s doctoral dissertation (2010–14), conducted as part of this project, focused on a socially-contextualized intellectual history of ideas of rulership and sovereignty in colonial India: it has subsequently been published as *The Mortal God: Imagining the Sovereign in Colonial India* (2018).⁸ Banerjee and his colleagues in the project explored intellectual-cultural and political interactions between ‘dynasties’ and nationalisms/nation-states across Europe and Asia.⁹ In the course of his research – and influenced by the focus on transcultural interactions and global history at Heidelberg – Banerjee realized that notions of ‘dynasty’ in Indian history

and historiography need to be radically re-interpreted. Drawing upon Subaltern Studies and postcolonial theory, Banerjee emphasized the colonial construction of notions of dynasty – what he called the dynasticization of governance – in modern India, and especially in the northeastern Indian princely state of Tripura across the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In his research, he also drew upon the works of other historians of South Asia, who had observed how the British introduced new norms of male primogeniture across the Indian Empire. Finally, Banerjee drew upon Subaltern Studies to theorize about Indian peasant ideas and realized how radically polycentric and collectivist notions of peasant community, rulership, and regal lineage existed in South Asia, which could not be captured through the modern European concept of ‘dynasty’. The task of provincializing ‘dynasty’ is thus rooted in a broader postcolonial impulse of provincializing Europe and critiquing colonial power relations underlying concepts and practices of power.

Bringing together these conversations emerging from two different sites – Europe and South Asia – created the first seeds for a global intellectual history of the term ‘dynasty’. In September 2017, we organized the conference ‘The Modern Invention of “Dynasty”: A Global Intellectual History, 1500–2000’ at the Birmingham Research Institute for History and Cultures.¹⁰ This forms the immediate basis for this special issue. Given the multi-sited genealogy of the project, global history lies at the very centre of our vision. When we say that ‘dynasty’ must be historicized and seen not so much as a neutral descriptor of a transhistorical institution of monarchical power, but as a problematic concept that has its own modern history and political valency, we also insist that this should be done on the global, planetary, scale. The main goal of our forum is to initiate such a discussion within and beyond the field of global intellectual history, through both theoretical reflections on ‘dynasty’ and case-studies originating in different intellectual, linguistic, spatial, and political contexts. Simultaneously, as our case studies show, there are rich ‘connected histories’ – to draw upon Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s famous term¹¹ – to be written about how the term dynasty came to be globalized through conceptual transfer, expropriation, and contestation. We of course do not claim universal and systematic coverage: there are many unfortunate gaps, not least, the absence of Islamic regions and traditions, the underrepresentation of Africa and so on. In general, that would not have been possible in the format of a special issue for the obvious reasons of space. Instead, our forum is an invitation for a systematic investigation of how ‘dynasty’ has become a concept that not only structures but also emplots the standard metanarratives of world history.

Historians explicitly use ‘dynasty’ to explain the structure of monarchical power and its reproduction via familial succession, as well as rulers’ self-representation. But the main role of the standard concept of ‘dynasty’ in historical meta-narratives is arguably something else. Here ‘dynasty’ serves as the foil for ‘modernity’, especially when ‘modernity’ is equated with the ‘nation-state’. The paradigmatic and influential example of this model is found in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, where ‘dynasty’ functions as the universal and totalizing temporal ‘other’ of ‘the nation’: a fundamentally different form of constructing power and identification that forms a chronologically-defined dichotomous binary with ‘the nation’. Anderson presents this both time- and form-wise neat opposition of ‘dynasty’ and ‘the nation’

as a self-evident fact, only superficially obscured by nationalist myths.¹² However, this dichotomy itself can be seen as a myth that simultaneously ignores the central role of monarchical, imperial, and dynastic imaginaries and institutions in modern and contemporary nationalisms, and the key function of national ideologies and discourses in the political practice and culture of medieval and early modern polities, including those labelled ‘dynastic states’ by historians. (Although it is a side note, we would like to emphasize that we do not imply here that ‘nations’ existed before ‘modernity’. In our view, this would be an answer to an incorrectly formulated question, since we consider ‘nations’ as ideological fictions and abstractions that must not be reified through historians’ insistence on their ‘existence’ in any period – an existence that can be proved or disproved on the basis of some objective characteristics of a given historical polity). Tellingly, the use of ‘dynasty’ as a totalizing designation of the ‘pre-modern’ other of ‘the nation’ and modernity is typical for such divergent models of imagining history as various structural narratives of modernization and cultural histories of power.

It is in an opposition to this standard usage of ‘dynasty’ as the other of ‘the nation’ that we talk about the *modern* invention of ‘dynasty’. This move is, in a sense, ironic, rather than purely factual: by putting the words ‘dynasty’ and ‘modern’ alongside each other we are trying to challenge and unsettle the problematic dichotomy constituted by the twin pairs ‘dynasty’/‘pre-modern’ (‘medieval’) vs. ‘the nation’/‘modernity’. We are not at all attempting to make a reductive historical argument that ‘dynasty’ as either a concept or an institution (or both) was invented *ex nihilo* in ‘modernity’. For one thing, we, in the first place, do not treat ‘modernity’ as a real historical condition, which can be dated or even described as an ‘ideal type’ (at best, the standard rhetoric of ‘modernity’ is a mystification of capitalism). Rather, our insistence on the ‘modern’ invention of ‘dynasty’ refers to three underappreciated aspects: first, the fact that the habitual meaning of the word ‘dynasty’ is relatively recent (emerging in the eighteenth century, as we already pointed out and will explore in a bit more detail in the next section); second, that this quirky history of the word itself should help us to see that ‘dynasty’ is a political and historical concept, which should in its own right be historicized and interrogated, rather than treated as a neutral description of a paradigmatic past institution. Third, that the frequent uses of ‘dynasty’ as a metaphor to exoticize the familial forms of power in the modern and contemporary world portray them as an exceptional presence in the normative order of ‘democratic’ or ‘national’ politics. In contrast to this tendency, we suggest exploring the history of ‘dynasty’ – as both a concept and an institution – as an essential part of ideological, material, and power landscapes of the globalised world in the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries.

As postcolonial historiographies have demonstrated, ‘the modern’ has been systematically coded as ‘Western’/‘European’, set against the essential ‘non-modernity’ of the rest of the world in a move that has obviously served as a justification for colonialism, imperialism, and global inequality. Against this background, and in the context of the ingrained association between ‘dynasty’ and ‘pre-/non-modernity’, we are suspicious of various historiographical attempts to construct the new global history as the history of ‘dynasty’ or dynasties. Instead, we would like to ask as to what extent ‘dynasty’ as a hegemonic concept obscures the other forms of politics, including those potentially offering radical alternatives, in the historical records of non-European worlds. We are also interested in the colonial uses of ‘dynasty’ to reimagine and reorganize power relations for the purposes of the more effective exercise of

imperialist domination by Western powers across the planet – a theme empirically and conceptually investigated in various South Asian contexts by Priya Atwal and Milinda Banerjee in our forum. Here, ‘modern’ again designates a critical perspective that considers ‘dynasty’ not as a primordial institution but as a violent colonialist innovation. Equally importantly, we are interested in the appropriations of this newly globalized concept of ‘dynasty’ by non-European polities. As Egas Moniz Bandeira, David Malitz, and Sara Marzagora show in their explorations of East-Asian, Siamese/Thai, and Ethiopian case-studies in this special issue, power relations were institutionally and conceptually restructured through what one may call ‘dynastic’ matrix, in response to the threat of Western colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To sum up, we are interested in the long history of different languages and practices of power – on a planetary scale – and how they changed, including in moments of hegemonic subsumption, assisted by the imposition of totalizing concepts such as ‘dynasty’: a process we see as part of the material history of capitalism and colonialism. Talking about ‘the modern invention of dynasty’ helps us to centre two such moments in particular: ideological reconfigurations around the time of the French Revolution and the hegemony of Western imperialism.

It was on the eve of the Age of Revolutions that the word ‘dynasty’ started to acquire its current meaning. As a few contributors to our forum have noted, ‘dynasty’ originated in the political idiom of ancient Greece and had a range of different meanings for most of its history: power or domination in general (perhaps, somewhat arbitrary in its form), a specific type of oligarchy in Aristotle’s nomenclature, a territorial lordship of some early-modern European maps, and so on. One particularly influential tradition, began by the *Aegyptiaca*, a Hellenistic text ascribed to Manetho, firmly associated ‘dynasty’ with Egypt – a usage that seems to be predominant in medieval Latin texts. It was still a very common reference point for ‘dynasty’ in the early modern period, as observed by Cliff Davies, now also alongside China.¹³ As late as 1755, the bulk of the entry dedicated to ‘dynastie’ in the famous *Encyclopédie* consisted almost exclusively of a discussion of various ‘dynasties’ in Egyptian history. But, as Nowakowska points out in her article in this special issue, that encyclopaedic entry also included a new definition of the term, much closer to the one we are used to today: ‘a line of princes from the same race [i.e. lineage in this context] who reigned over one country’.¹⁴ To stay with the Francophone context, the *Dictionary* of the French Academy for the first time included ‘dynastie’ in its second edition, published in 1718. Here, the word meant ‘a line of kings reigning over a country’, also specified as applicable, in particular, to the ancient rulers of Egypt.¹⁵ The third and fourth editions of the *Dictionary* in 1740 and 1762 retained this definition unchanged. However, the fifth edition, which appeared in 1798, registered the newer definition of the word as its second meaning: ‘one also uses [dynastie] to denote the succession of sovereigns from the same family’ (only in the sixth edition dating to 1832 this became the first definition of ‘dynastie’).¹⁶ The entry suggestively provided an example referring to the revolution in England in 1688, which ‘brought about a change in dynasty’. The choice of an illustrative phrase emphasises the new contemporary and European pertinence of the concept, contrasted with its preceding ‘ancient’ and ‘Orientalist’ connotation.

This revolutionary reference (to 1688) is significant too. It seems that it was in the 1790s that ‘dynasty’ in its new meaning became increasingly widespread: exactly in the context of the debates on sovereignty intensified by the unfolding of the French revolution. Curiously, ‘dynasty’ appeared to be a useful concept for the representatives of very different political ideologies. To provide illustrative examples from the three key strands of conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism, we can quote Edmund Burke, Charles Stuart Fox, and Louis Antoine de Saint-Just. Arguing in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) against Richard Price’s notion that the British monarch ‘owes his crown to the choice of his people’, Burke invokes ‘dynasty’. ‘At some time or other, to be sure, all the beginners of dynasties were chosen by those who called them to govern... But whatever kings might have been here or elsewhere a thousand years ago, or in whatever manner the ruling dynasties of England or France may have begun, the king of Great Britain is at this day king by a fixed rule of succession, according to the laws of his country...’¹⁷ Burke’s usage is rather peculiar though, not least in its clear distinction between ‘dynasty’, on the one hand, and the laws of succession, on the other hand – a distinction that may seem counter-intuitive from the perspective of the standard historiographical understanding of ‘dynasty’. It was in a direct response to Burke that Fox claimed that ‘they [a Convention speaking the sense of the people] erected the House of Brunswick, not individually, but by dynasty; and that dynasty to continue while the terms and conditions on which it was elected are fulfilled, and no longer.’¹⁸ Finally, in 1794, Saint-Just published a pamphlet that directly attacked those who, according to the author, conspired to reduce the French revolution to a mere change of ‘dynasty’.¹⁹

So, while just a generation earlier, even the meaning of the word ‘dynasty’ was unclear (as witnessed by the exchange between Voltaire and Larcher from which we began), by the 1790s the term seemed to be both self-evident and useful for the representatives of competing ideologies. Such a convergence during the revolutionary conjuncture is conspicuous. In fact, there was an author who made an explicit link between the word ‘dynasty’ and the revolution already in the 1790s. In his anti-Jacobin treatise published in 1796–8, William Playfair, more famous for his role in the invention of the graphical methods of statistics (including the bar chart and the pie chart) as well as his espionage activities, claimed that the revolutionaries imposed the following linguistic change. ‘The family reigning had been called the dynasty, and under that name of Chinese origin, the people were taught to adopt doctrines about the destruction of the royal family, which, under the usual terms of language, would have been attended with horror in the first times of the revolution’.²⁰ So, according to Playfair, the introduction of ‘dynasty’ formed a part of the general revolutionary policy of changing the social reality through the practice of renaming, most famously exemplified by the new calendar. Playfair’s orientalist etymology is self-evidently wrong, but significant. Building on the already-noted long tradition of associating ‘dynasty’ with non-European polities and China in particular, the author tapped into the Orientalist imaginary of ‘Eastern despotism’ to attack the revolutionaries’ attempts to delegitimise ‘royal family’. While the facticity of the story is highly doubtful (albeit perhaps deserving a further investigation), it is highly instructive in explicating a link between the new meaning of ‘dynasty’ and the wider ideological debates and transformations connected to the revolution and its radical questioning of monarchical sovereignty. We should not, however, exaggerate this break: the ideology of monarchical

sovereignty did survive the Age of Revolutions, and by no means only in the form of Santner's 'royal remains'.²¹ Throughout the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries, both old and new monarchies across the globe reasserted themselves (with divergent rate of success and longevity), not least through the recuperation of 'dynasty': simultaneously as an idea and an institution inscribed in constitutional law. Some relevant cases are explored in this forum for East and South-East Asia. Others – for instance, post-Ottoman monarchies in the 'Arab world' and their twentieth-century legalistic dynasticization – should also be taken into account.

If the revolutionary crisis of monarchical sovereignty provided the key context in which the meaning of 'dynasty' changed, we should also consider why did that happen at that moment? Of course, there cannot be a non-speculative answer to this question. Moreover, as such, the fact of a word changing its meaning is quite banal and does not necessarily have a precise reason. Still, it is tempting to offer a hypothesis. Perhaps, this linguistic shift had something to do with the wider transformations which Michel Foucault famously outlined as the 'mutation of Order into History' occurring at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.²² With the epistemic shift towards privileging historicity and temporal dynamism, the old term 'dynasty' may have had a suggestive diachronic aspect that made it an attractive word for both renaming and reconceptualising the existing institutions and concepts in the sphere of kinship and rulership. While 'House' (to which we shall return below) or 'royal family' acquired by the eighteenth century some of the key meanings we associate with the standard historiographical concept of 'dynasty', they lacked any temporal connotation. On the other hand, 'dynasty' in its old meaning and, in particular, in its usage as a measure of chronology of both ancient (Egypt) and existing polities (China) had an evident temporal dimension. Thus it ideally suited a new tendency towards historicism and therefore quickly spread in its novel meaning.

From its reinvention around the very end of the eighteenth century and up until very recently, the most striking feature of 'dynasty' was the almost complete lack of any explicit attempts to theorize this new concept. With the partial exception of Hegel, whose more reflective usage of 'dynasty' is discussed by Banerjee in this forum, 'dynasty' was generally not interrogated and debated, but simply taken for granted.²³ 'Dynasty' was construed as a neutral historical term, but not a political concept. It was invested with an allegedly unproblematic empirical reality, and, simultaneously, strongly associated with the past. Curiously, this implicit ideological move worked for both the opponents and the proponents of monarchical rule during the Age of Revolutions. For the former, 'dynasty' became another traditional institution with historical legitimacy to be defended from radical changes. For the latter, 'dynasty' was a manifestation of the decidedly non-modern and therefore no more legitimate nature of 'monarchy'. Eventually, a metaphorical meaning of the concept emerged as applied to non-royalty: e.g. business families successfully reproducing over several generations or politicians from the same family winning electoral offices over several generations. But this usage, while in a sense political, has remained non-analytical. Moreover, it can be anti-analytical: calling such families 'dynasties' substitutes a proper investigation of the interplay between property and authority with an ironic label, disavowing the ongoing reproduction by capitalism of this allegedly 'non-

modern' form of the wealth-power nexus. The mystification of contemporary regimes of power through the media discourse of 'dynasty' is mirrored by historians' projection of the logic of 'family business' back onto medieval 'dynasties. Together, these tendencies form a closed circle of pseudo-explanation, all the while failing to problematize the concept at its centre: 'dynasty'.

Naturally, all of this is not to say that historians should not use 'dynasty' as a technical term to conceptualise the politics of succession, the structuring of power through kinship, or the cultural history of rulers' identifications. But one should be aware that as a hegemonic concept 'dynasty' creates an illusion of the transparency and unity of historical record, which, in fact, obscures a much more complex picture. There are three main rationales for reconfiguring our understanding of the past beyond the totalizing notion of 'dynasty'. First, it offers a more complex understanding of pre-capitalist, including and especially extra-European, societies. Second, it presents a better understanding of how exactly capitalism produced new modes and ideologies of hereditary transmission of sovereignty and property. Third, it centres the role of colonialism – European imperial expansion as well as anti-colonial non-European nationalisms – in globalizing 'dynasty' as a category of power.

Jeroen Duindam's recent book *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300–1800* (2016), argues: 'Throughout history, rule by a single male figure has predominated... Chiefs, kings, and emperors reigned over most polities across the globe for the last 10,000 years... In whichever way royal leaders actually emerged or represented their origins, the dynastic organisation of power lasted.'²⁴ Such a narrative naturalizes 'premodern', precolonial, or non-European polities as primordially hierarchical. The ruler-subject relation is cast as the natural order of things, something people have traditionally accepted in an uncritical manner. He remarks: 'Why did ordinary people accept the dominion of dynasty and court? The most important answer undoubtedly is that it fitted their view of a harmonious social order, sanctioned by heaven and celebrated in collective ritual. More than the consequence of top-down propaganda or coercion, support for dynastic power was ingrained in a widely shared mentality present in all social settings.'²⁵ Such a reading radically underestimates the importance of (relatively) horizontal, acephalous, and polycentric forms of power present in many (certainly not all) precapitalist/precolonial social formations. Duindam's liberal teleology sees the modern 'Western' world as a democratic disruption of a millennial heritage of monarchic hierarchy.

In our view, such a reading mystifies social reality. Precapitalist/precolonial societies have been characterized by vertical hierarchies of authority as well as (relatively) horizontal, polycentric, and acephalous modes of distributing power. Scholars like Ranajit Guha and James Scott, to name just two celebrated figures, have adequately demonstrated this.²⁶ Precapitalist/precolonial societies are characterized as much by profound forms of political community and solidarity between peasants, pastoralists, and other labouring actors, as by monarchs and courts. To write a global history of power which emphasizes one to the occlusion of the other presents an excessively conservative picture. Our bone of contention with this is not just academic – presenting a more complex historical reality – but also, and more importantly, political. Forms of subaltern political community and resistance across the world

today – from lower caste, ‘tribal’/Adivasi, and ultra-left rebellions in India, to indigenous politics in Australia and the Americas, to the Kurdish freedom movement – draw upon precapitalist forms of horizontal political community, while operating through as well as against modern-capitalist structures of political and economic organization. As historians, we are facing a political and ethical choice: we can continue to reproduce histories centred on monarchs and courts or we can create the complex social portraits of past power in order to intellectually support actually existing political struggles.

Despite such complexities, how and why did the ‘dynastic’ view of the precapitalist/precolonial past become commonplace? One major reason is that the capitalist mode of production and exchange privileges and universalizes the hereditary transmission of property. It is a truism to say that capitalism depends on the constant accumulation of capital. This hinges on the secure transmission of property and wealth, especially big property and wealth among elites. Capitalism also depends upon the construction and perpetuation of strong sovereign states which do not crumble easily, but can provide the military, political, and legal infrastructure necessary to guarantee the secure transmission of (especially, but not exclusively, big elite) property and wealth. The modern logic of citizenship – as practised in nation-states – of course also weaves together the hereditary transmission of sovereignty and property through biologically-defined and transmitted notions of hereditary rights. Citizenship – ‘the people’ – is generally defined by the state in terms of exclusionary filiation, not in terms of borderless and heterogenous multitudes. The Others of this order include refugees and migrant labourers, minorities, and subaltern rebels, who disrupt homogenous and majoritarian models of hereditary transmission of political-social power. Within this broader context, it should be obvious why historians too read the precapitalist/precolonial past – falsely – as dominated exclusively by hereditary transmission of sovereign power.

Unthinking ‘dynasty’ as a totalizing concept, which encompasses all ‘pre-modern’ rulerships, may also help us to conceptualise in a more specific manner a historic link between, to use Julia Adams’ term, ‘familial state’²⁷ and what Marx called ‘primitive’/‘original’ accumulation in the transition to capitalism.²⁸ A hypothesis, which we would like to hint at here, would be that the ‘familial’/‘dynastic’ state of early-modern Europe was a new and peculiar political form in the long period of ‘primitive accumulation’, rather than simply a manifestation of the universal ‘pre-modern’ dynastic organization of power. The concept and institution of royal/princely ‘House’ (‘domus’ in Latin) is especially interesting from this point of view. Until the late middle ages, ‘house’ simply referred to royal ‘household’. However, from the thirteenth century and increasingly in the fourteenth – fifteenth centuries it emerged as a legalistic concept for an institution of princely/royal family, invested with jurisdictional agency to make claims to lands and offices.²⁹ Our, at this stage somewhat speculative, suggestion is that this newly conceptualised royal/princely ‘House’ served as a political form through which the reconfigured historic bloc of monarchical rulers, nobility and new financial/merchant elites was establishing its hegemony in late medieval and early modern Europe and beyond. This struggle for political hegemony fought out at the time through ‘dynastic’ claims to territories, enabled by the legalistic reinvention of royal/princely ‘House’, was underwritten by the ‘primitive accumulation’ (not least through the financiers’ funding of various ‘dynastic’ take-overs) and enabled its further proliferation, including via colonialism.

A focus on the role of colonialism reminds us that the globalization of ‘dynasty’ as a concept has not happened through some superior logic of abstraction and rigour inherently possessed by the concept, but through the aid of relentless violence. European colonial-capitalist expansion is responsible for the globalization of ‘dynasty’ as a concept, as a way of interpreting and ordering history. It is well known that European colonizers sought to monarchize, or at least hierarchize, textures of governance in the colonies: intensifying the authority and power of local elite collaborators who were defined and remodelled as native ‘princes’, ‘chiefs’, and so on. David Cannadine’s book *Ornamentalism* offers a paradigmatic analysis of this trajectory for the British Empire.³⁰ Imagining the past (and present) of the colonized as fundamentally hierarchical and dynastic, allowed colonizers to legitimate their own vertical forms of sovereignty and property, as well as heredity-based “ordering of difference”³¹: dividing up and arraying supposedly heredity-based races, ethnicities, castes, and tribes, against each other, with a hereditary racially-defined elite – frequently, even a monarch – at the top of the pyramid. In colonized societies like India, as well as in societies trying to stave off colonialism, such as Japan, Korea, China, Thailand, and Ethiopia – as essays in our special issue demonstrate – political elites expropriated and vernacularized the model of ‘dynasty’, thereby re-reading their own past and present, to create nationalist models of heredity-based transmission of sovereignty. The Gulf monarchies exemplify how older forms of British colonial-capitalist support and intensification of monarchic state power have left enduring legacies. Today, these monarchic polities nourish structures of global capitalism, based significantly upon the labour of disenfranchised migrants: the subaltern Others of the hereditary order of dynastic monarchy, ethno-tribal filiation, and national citizenship.³² Yet, as Banerjee shows in the case of India (in his article in this special issue), older modes of conceptualizing rulership and power in polycentric, collectivist, and inclusive ways have often also had remarkable resilience, successfully challenging colonial and postcolonial ruling classes and models of monistic state sovereignty.

A global conceptual history of ‘dynasty’ thus points beyond intellectual history: to global political, social, and economic histories – to histories of the globalization of the sovereign state model, of capitalism, and of nationalism. Interrogating these broader social processes has been at the centre of agenda of the nascent domain of global intellectual history. As Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori have emphasized in their field-setting volume *Global Intellectual History* (2013), global intellectual history may aim to study “not merely the channels that make mobility possible but also the social transformations that make specific intellectual practices and concepts plausible and meaningful across large spatial extensions.”³³ However, there is sharp dissensus about the nature of the processes which make conceptual spread and globalization possible. On the one hand, Andrew Sartori has emphasized the role of the capitalist mode of production and exchange in globalizing concepts and arguments, such as about the role of human labour in constituting property.³⁴ In contrast, Samuel Moyn and Shruti Kapila have emphasized the importance of human political agency, especially manifested through competition, agonism, and conflict, in globalizing ideas: they have questioned the primacy given by Sartori to the capitalist-economic as main motor of intellectual spread.³⁵

An assertion of the primacy of the political runs its own risk, of underplaying the intellectually constitutive role of socio-economic transformations. Our intervention goes beyond this divide. It emphasizes the importance of capitalist-colonial modes of production, exchange, and exploitation in globalizing the concept of ‘dynasty’, but simultaneously and equally, emphasizes the role of human political agency and conflict, including in relation to expropriating as well as challenging the hegemonic model of ‘dynasty’. In other words, ‘logics often exist in dialectical tension with counterlogics.’³⁶ The conceptual logic of ‘dynasty’ has faced challenges, especially from colonized and subaltern perspectives, in the course of its global spread, and thereby been expropriated and dialectically transfigured. We thus need to conjunct the political and the socio-economic in understanding the globalization of concepts, but do so without falling into the trap of either asserting the primacy of the political or the overdetermining role of the economic. This special issue outlines different methodologies and case studies for triangulating intellectual, socio-economic, and political transformations, without sliding into any one form of determinism and teleology. The implications, especially in emphasizing counter-hegemonic logics and polycentric realities, as we outlined before, are as much political and ethical, as historical and academic. The task of global intellectual history, in an epoch of ever deepening and globalizing capitalist and neocolonial inequality, exploitation, and statist domination, may well be to extend support to actually existing political battles. A global intellectual history of the invention of ‘dynasty’ thus ultimately has the polemical aim of denaturalizing, demystifying, and provincializing hierarchy and inequality.

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¹ Voltaire, "Le Taureau Blanc," 296.

² Larcher, *Réponse*, 37.

³ Brunner, Conze, Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

⁴ These results will be presented in the project's forthcoming monograph: Nowakowska et al., *Dynasty in the Making*.

⁵ Davies, "A Rose by Any Other Name", 14–5.

⁶ Ibid. See also Davies' research articles exploring this theme in more detail: Davies, "Representation, Repute"; idem, "Tudor: What's in a Name?".

⁷ Bartlett, *Blood Royal*.

⁸ Banerjee, *Mortal God*.

⁹ This resulted in a conference 'Nationizing the Dynasty – Dynastizing the Nation' at the University of California Los Angeles in April 2012. Selections from the conference, in conjunction with other articles, were published as an edited volume *Transnational Histories of the 'Royal Nation'* (2018). See: Banerjee, Backerra, Sarti, eds., *Transnational Histories*.

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¹¹ Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories".

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 19–22.

¹³ Davies, "A Rose by Any Other Name".

¹⁴ Diderot, d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, v, 176.

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- ¹⁵ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 2nd ed., i, 510.
- ¹⁶ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 5th ed., i, 450.
- ¹⁷ *Works of Edmund Burke*, i, 387.
- ¹⁸ *Senator*, vi, 270.
- ¹⁹ Saint-Just, *Rapport*.
- ²⁰ Playfair, *History of Jacobinism*, ii, 778.
- ²¹ Santner, *Royal Remains*.
- ²² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 220.
- ²³ Bourdieu's lectures *On the State* do provide an interesting attempt to theorize 'dynasty' with a special focus on the 'king's house' and its reproduction. See: Bourdieu, *On the State*, 235–63.
- ²⁴ Duindam, *Dynasties*, 2-3. See also Duindam's "A Plea for Global Comparison" for the most recent restatement of the project of conceiving the global history as the history of 'dynasty'.
- ²⁵ Duindam, *Dynasties*, 294.
- ²⁶ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*; Scott, *The Art*; Scott, *Against the Grain*.
- ²⁷ Adams, *Familial State*. While Adams' book focuses on the Netherlands, her definition of the 'familial state' also includes such polities as the Kingdoms of France and England.
- ²⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 873–940.
- ²⁹ On the development of the concept and institution of princely 'House' in the late middle ages see: Moeglin, "Les dynasties princières."
- ³⁰ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*.
- ³¹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*. For another classic statement, see Mamdani, *Define and Rule*.
- ³² On the British colonial influence, see, for example, Blyth, *Empire of the Raj*, and Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*. On the contemporary political economy of the Gulf monarchies, see, for example, Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*; Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*; Krane, *Energy Kingdoms*.
- ³³ Moyn and Sartori, "Approaches", 24.
- ³⁴ Sartori, *Bengal in Global*; Sartori, "Global Intellectual History"; Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire*.
- ³⁵ Moyn, "Nonglobalization of Ideas"; Kapila, "Global Intellectual History".
- ³⁶ Banerjee, "Sovereignty as a Motor", 18.