

Introduction

SWEDEN'S COLONIAL EXPERIENCE



The Lundin Affair

On October 18, 2018, the Swedish government made an unusual announcement: it had decided to approve the prosecution of Lundin Petroleum, a Swedish oil company, for its contribution to “gross human rights violations” in southern Sudan between 1997 and 2003. During that period, the company had been one of the most prominent oil explorers and producers in what was then still a single Sudanese state. According to the prosecutors, the company had cooperated with the controversial Khartoum regime in “securing” large areas where drilling was conducted. In this context, tens of thousands of local people had been forced to leave their villages, which subsequently had been burned down and destroyed, and thousands of civilians had been killed in the process. The prosecutors claimed to have ample evidence that Lundin Petroleum, whose directors were now held responsible and faced a possible lifetime prison sentence, had assisted in “mass killings” and “crimes against humanity.”¹

The Lundin family had been in the oil business for over thirty years, initially under the leadership of Adolf H. Lundin (1932–2006), a Swedish mining engineer educated at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Having worked for Shell and Nynäs Petroleum in the 1960s and 1970s, he had become an independent oil man in 1981. In 1997 his company, International Petroleum, was restructured and renamed Lundin Oil (from 2001: Lundin Petroleum; from 2020: Lundin Energy). At that time, its areas of involvement spanned the North Sea, Malaysia, Vietnam, Libya, and the Falkland Islands/Malvinas, while it was also starting up prospecting and exploration activities in Sudan. Adolf Lundin was widely admired in Swedish business circles and in 1998 received official recognition

for his achievements, being named the “International Swede of the Year” by His Royal Majesty the King.²

A year later Lundin struck oil in Sudan, through a discovery in the Thar Jath structure (“Block 5A”) in southern Sudan. The find was so promising that Adolf Lundin and his son, Ian Lundin, to whom actual leadership of the company was being passed, took the radical decision to concentrate all of its exploration efforts on this single region of the world. Southern Sudan, however, was a risky and dangerous area to operate in. A bloody civil war had raged there since 1983 between forces loyal to the central government in Khartoum and a number of separatist guerrilla groups. The south, whose population was mainly black and Christian, dreamed of forming its own state, independent of the Muslim-dominated Khartoum government. It was also in the south that the country’s oil wealth resided, and this wealth was a main focus of the war. Khartoum needed oil to finance the war against the south, while the oil companies, for their part, depended on military protection for their exploration and production activities. The relationship was synergetic. Although the oil companies were not—or did not want to be—fully aware of it, the government was helping them by “preparing” entire areas through a scorched-earth strategy. Numerous villages were ransacked; further intensification of oil drilling by the companies went hand in hand with escalating violence. Human rights observers were alarmed, and from 1997 the United States, under the Clinton administration, banned all American companies from investing or operating in Sudan. The ensuing Bush administration, pushed by powerful Christian organizations with ties to southern Sudan, strengthened that campaign. By 2001 all Western oil companies had left the country, with two notable exceptions: the Canadian company Talisman Energy, and the Swedes.³

To strengthen its position in Sudan, Lundin and its owners recruited a number of board members with far-reaching experience in international business and politics. One of them was the former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt, who joined Lundin in 2000. In this position he contributed, among other things, to the strategic corporate decision to focus on Sudan and sell off the company’s stakes elsewhere. The Lundin directors judged that Bildt’s extensive political experience and personal networks might be of great use in negotiations with Khartoum for drilling rights and privileges of various kinds. They knew that oil exploration and production depended critically on smooth relations with the regimes that controlled the oil regions.

Lundin eventually gave up its Sudanese venture in 2003, and Carl Bildt resigned from the board a few years later upon his return to Swedish politics (he was appointed Swedish foreign minister in 2006). But human rights groups continued to investigate how the company, with Bildt on the board, had acted during its activities in southern Sudan. In 2018, by which time



Figure 0.1. Work is in full swing at Lundin Oil's oil drilling site in Sudan, April 2001. Source: Photo by Paul Hansen / TT, reproduced with permission.

South Sudan had achieved its goal of political independence, the protracted attempts to bring Lundin to court were finally successful.⁴

The general public was shocked to learn about the involvement of a Swedish company and high-level Swedish politicians in the Sudanese oil industry. Most news about oil in Africa in the early twenty-first century centered on the activities of large international oil companies, such as BP, Shell, Exxon, and Total, and the large state-owned Chinese oil companies, which increasingly challenged the latter on the African continent. Critics claimed that the increasingly aggressive activities of non-African companies and governments in African oil amounted to a new wave of colonialism in Africa. So what were a Swedish company like Lundin Oil and Swedish politicians like Carl Bildt doing there? Sweden, a small North European nation, was widely known as a peaceful, prosperous country that made advanced technical products, awarded the Nobel Prizes, lived in harmony with nature and enjoyed one of the lowest levels of corruption in the world. In world politics it offered itself as a morally superior counterpart to the great powers; Carl Bildt, in one of his speeches to Parliament, had proudly stated that Sweden was a “humanitarian superpower.”⁵ It was a country that had not been at war for two hundred years and whose diplomats—including Bildt himself—were often called upon, in their capacity as benign, trustworthy, and neutral parties, to mediate between enemies in wars and conflicts. Sweden was a safe haven for refugees from war-torn regions, a society spearheading social and gender equality—and one that lacked a dark colonial past. A Swedish oil company, with a former Swedish prime minister on its board, being accused of “crimes against humanity” did not really fit into that picture.

And yet the Lundin affair was by no means the only case of twenty-first-century Swedish involvement in controversial projects beyond its own borders. A few years earlier in Tanzania, for example, a company called Svensk Etanolkemi AB (SEKAB) had spearheaded a huge biofuels project, centering on large-scale sugarcane plantations and an adjacent bio-ethanol processing plant. The complex was to be located right next to an ecologically sensitive national park. Many Tanzanians and foreign observers found the project disturbing due to its similarities with classical European imperial undertakings in Africa. SEKAB's idea was not so much to assist Tanzania in its agro-industrial modernization efforts as to reap a handsome profit from harvesting Tanzanian sugarcane and exporting refined bio-ethanol to customers in Europe. While this was linked to Swedish and European efforts to cope with climate change, critics argued that the project came at the expense of environmental degradation in East Africa, and that the economic benefits for the Tanzanians were marginal at best. For this reason, SEKAB was accused of “neo-colonialism.”⁶

In Chile, meanwhile, eight hundred inhabitants of the city of Arica were suing Boliden, a Swedish mining company, for \$10 million USD. The background was a murky business agreement, concluded back in the 1980s, that had allowed Boliden to export to Arica very large volumes of smelter sludge, stemming from the company's copper, zinc, and lead processing plant at Skellefteå in northern Sweden. The need to dispose of this dangerous toxic waste product, which contained large concentrations of arsenic and mercury, had been quite a headache for Boliden's managers. Accordingly, they had been happy to see the sludge disappear beyond the horizon on large cargo ships, destined for a distant continent. According to the agreement, a Chilean firm, Promel, would receive the toxic waste and then process the material. But in the early 1990s Promel went bankrupt—before the waste had been processed. And so it remained where it was, gradually producing a series of unwelcome environmental and health problems for Arica's population.⁷

Another controversial case concerned Sweden's large-scale imports of uranium ore from Namibia. Sweden was one of the world's most heavily nuclearized countries, relying on nuclear power for nearly half of its total electricity needs. This had helped Sweden to keep its electricity prices low and improve the competitiveness of its energy-intensive export industry—one of the central pillars on which the country's economic and social prosperity rested. Although Sweden held some of the world's largest uranium reserves on its own territory, domestic uranium mining had shut down in 1969 because it was considered unprofitable and, above all, environmentally hazardous. Seeking a way around those problems, the country's nuclear fuel supply agency, which featured strong state participation, had forged uranium import deals with various colonial and postcolonial regions, enabling uranium from mines in Canadian First Nations territories, Australian Aboriginal lands, the Central Asian steppe, and, in particular, the immense Rössing uranium mine in Namibia, to find its way into Swedish nuclear reactors. The nuclear operators were subject to severe criticism from human rights groups and environmental NGOs for their lack of awareness and control of the quasi-colonial conditions under which Sweden's Namibian uranium was mined and refined.⁸

And then there was Eastern Europe, where the Swedish state-owned energy company Vattenfall, to the surprise of observers at home and abroad, had become deeply involved in large-scale lignite mining. Through a series of much-publicized company takeovers in the years around 2000, it had, among other things, come into possession of the former GDR's vast lignite mining complex, comprising both the mines themselves and an array of lignite burning power plants erected next to the mines. Other European energy and mining companies had been reluctant to take on these infamous remnants of the ex-communist country's extractive industry, which had

been scaled up during the Cold War under what Western observers had regarded as a semi-colonial relationship between Moscow and East Berlin. The lignite mines became the basis for Vattenfall's rise to one of Europe's largest electricity companies in the years that followed. The company's activities made headlines in both Swedish and German media, especially when one or the other German village was sacrificed for the steadily advancing lignite extraction frontier. However, Vattenfall and the Swedish government were reluctant to close the controversial mines, because they generated a sizeable annual profit that fed the Swedish state treasury.⁹

From Sudan and Namibia to Chile and East Germany—it seemed that Swedish actors were all over the place. They were engaged in exploitative projects on all continents, often with the active participation of Swedish state agencies—and typically under conditions that critics described as, in one way or another, colonial.

Sweden's Colonial Experience

This book develops the argument that the cases above are in no way exceptional when it comes to Sweden's global experience. On the contrary, it reveals that Swedish participation in foreign exploitative projects, especially in the (post)colonial world, forms one of the pillars on which Sweden as a modern, industrial nation rests—and that it has done so for at least a century and a half. The book explores the historical underpinnings of ongoing Swedish exploitation of foreign lands, scrutinizing the ways in which cases such as Lundin Oil's explorative ventures in southern Sudan, shocking and exceptional as they seemed to many, were deeply rooted in habits and traditions established over the past 150 years. Uncovering these legacies, we set out to tell a story that is at odds with conventional narratives of Sweden and its past. It is a darker and more uncomfortable tale than the ones Swedish schoolchildren are presented with in their history classes and, indeed, a very different story from the ones that figure in public narratives, let alone the nation-branding activities that Swedish state agencies promote these days. It is a story that needs to be told.

Colonialism and imperialism are terms that make us think of a few well-known Western powers and the multitude of colonies these established around the world, starting around five hundred years ago. Portugal and Spain, the history books tell us, emerged as the modern era's first colonial powers. They were followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the Netherlands and Britain. France followed suit in the nineteenth century. Russia also emerged as a large imperial power, although in this case the urge to colonize new territories did not involve overseas expansion, save for its

move into Alaska. Belgium, Germany, and the United States emerged as colonial forces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as did Japan. Current debates about “neo-colonialism,” for their part, tend to center on Chinese, Russian, and American ambitions to dominate various regions in Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

In recent years, however, historians and others have become increasingly preoccupied with how the smaller nations—or, more precisely, those that never developed any colonial empires of their own—fit into the wider history of colonialism and imperialism. A growing number of scholars have come to the conclusion that these countries, too, have a colonial past. This is evident not least for the Nordic countries. Magdalena Naum and Jonas Nordin, for example, note that while Sweden and Denmark—the two most powerful Nordic countries—had “relatively few and generally short-lived overseas colonies,” they remained “active players in the trans-oceanic trade, engaged in extensive exploitation projects at the fringes of their dominions, and they participated and contributed to the international intellectual debates justifying slavery, exploration and taking possession overseas.”¹⁰ Janina Priebe, likewise, shows how Denmark, at the turn of the twentieth century, was deeply involved in “economic imperialism” in both close and distant lands.¹¹ Kirsten Alsaker Kjerland and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen make similar observations about Norway, exploring, among other things, the critical role of the Norwegian shipping industry in connecting the metropolises of Europe’s imperial powers with their overseas colonies and the multitude of Norwegian plantations that proliferated in both Africa and Oceania in the decades around 1900.¹² Switzerland is another country whose history has recently been problematized in relation to modern imperialism. Lea Haller, for example, has shown how Switzerland became the “clearing house” for a huge part of Europe’s colonial trade in products from coffee to petroleum—a powerful role that the Swiss maintain to this day.¹³ The history of Central and Eastern European countries, too, has become subject to critical historical analysis from a colonial point of view.¹⁴

These research efforts are highly welcome not least in view of what they add to our understanding of the *diversity* of colonialism and imperialism, which, as emphasized by Robert Young, “were nothing if not heterogeneous, often contradictory practices.”¹⁵ The cases referred to above seem to confirm that we cannot grasp the imperial and colonial histories of the smaller countries by generalizing or extrapolating from the experiences of Britain, France, or Spain. We need to explore them as colonial histories in their own right and with their unique characteristics. Moreover, as we will argue in this book, findings about the colonial histories of the smaller nations can significantly enrich existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks about colonialism and imperialism.

Sweden's colonial past is most visible in the early modern period, and this period is also the one that has been best studied so far by Swedish colonial historians. Thanks to these research efforts we now know a great deal about Swedish colonial ventures overseas in the period up to the early nineteenth century.¹⁶ The period comprises a range of colonial undertakings, starting with the establishment of Swedish settler colonies on the opposite shores of the Baltic Sea and ending with ambitions to obtain colonies further away. The literature features multiple works on short-lived colonies such as New Sweden in North America (1638–55) and the trading posts at Cabo Corso in Africa (also known popularly as the “Swedish Gold Coast” (1650–63)). An impressive range of studies have explored Sweden's possession of the tiny Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy, acquired in the late eighteenth century.¹⁷ In 1878, however, this Swedish colony was sold to France, and since then Sweden has not had any formal colonial possessions at all, either in the Baltic Sea region or in the non-European world.

And yet Sweden's colonial history can hardly be said to have ended in 1878. On the contrary, the 1870s mark the beginning of a new phase in the country's overseas endeavors—a phase that, as the ensuing chapters will demonstrate, became even more intense and dynamic than the preceding one. This is hardly surprising if seen in relation to the well-established fact that, as authors such as Corey Ross remind us, it is only with the onset of what economic historians refer to as the Second Industrial Revolution that European, American, and Japanese empire-building takes off in earnest; the period before the 1870s was in essence a mere prelude to what was to come.¹⁸ As we will see, Sweden scaled up its colonial activities accordingly during the decades that followed.

To understand how this was possible we must, to begin with, acknowledge that colonialism is about much more than taking formal possession of foreign territories. Historians have long since agreed that colonialism and imperialism can be much more informal, yet real, and that, as both academics and politicians have argued with fervor, colonialism as a system of domination does not necessarily end with formal decolonization. Various terms have been put forth by scholars in their attempts to understand and theorize these phenomena, including the Leninist notion of “semi-colonialism” as an intermediate stage in the historical development of some regions; John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson's “imperialism of free trade”;¹⁹ and Jean-Paul Sartre's and Kwame Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism (or neo-imperialism).²⁰ The most important and widely used theoretical term, however, is that of “informal empire.”

The literature models informal empire as a form of domination that hinges on latent threats of violence (“gunboat diplomacy”), harsh diplomatic pressure, and privileges of various kinds as codified in “unequal treaties.”

It sometimes involves the right to station troops in the host country and intervene in its military affairs—without laying formal claim to the land. The imperialist power is frequently able to place its own representatives or “advisors” in the host country’s government while at the same time relying on local “collaboration elites.” The ultimate purpose of informal empire, the literature tells us, is usually linked to (the protection of) sizeable economic interests (trade, investments, loans), typically in mining or other forms of primary production.²¹

It is difficult to identify any real-world informal empire that actually matches this list of typical features; as Jürgen Osterhammel points out, “informal empire”—just like its “formal” counterpart—constitutes an ideal type and the list of conditions might well be “understood as constituting a sliding scale which would allow special features of particular historic cases to be pinpointed and contrasted with similar or related ones.”²² In other words, we are likely to find, in world history, an impressive diversity of informal colonial experiences. Adding the smaller European nations to the analysis of informal empire should be a natural part of exploring this diversity. While we might not be able to find a “perfect” case of Swedish informal empire anywhere in the world, this book examines numerous cases where the relevance of “informal empire” as a term deserves attention. In the ensuing chapters we will meet, for example, several large-scale Swedish extractive enterprises that sought to dominate and control a poorer country’s or region’s economic life. We will be introduced to a range of Swedish diplomats and foreign policymakers who intervened in the internal political affairs of poorer states, along with Swedish scientists and other supposedly non-political experts who accepted powerful “advisory” positions, including in military affairs. We will see how Swedish actors provided various forms of “aid” to poorer states, often linked to a strategy of turning such aid into power and profits. Most strikingly, we will see how Swedish state actors, industrial managers, and scientific and technical experts repeatedly joined forces in carefully orchestrated—though not always successful—attempts to profit, economically and politically, from deep engagements with the colonial world. Seen individually, the cases to be discussed may look like peculiar exceptions to the established truth that Sweden does not have a colonial history in the industrial age; seen collectively, they allow us to discern a pattern of informal colonial undertakings in Swedish history since 1870.

Closely linked to the notions of informal empire, semi-colonialism, and neo-colonialism is the concept of “internal colonization.” It is a useful term that helps us to understand another important trait of Swedish colonialism in the industrial age. Internal colonization is usually thought of as colonialism that does not involve expansion into foreign territories, but rather takes

place within already defined political domains. At focus are, in particular, internal domains inhabited by indigenous peoples. For the latter, the theoretical distinction between external and internal colonialism may, admittedly, appear irrelevant. For the historian, however, it is crucial to include internal colonialism in the overall analysis; otherwise the colonial-style phenomena that over the years have been omnipresent in many parts of the world are invisibilized. Typical cases of internal colonization are China's imperial rule in Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang; Brazil's quest for control of Amazonia; and Russia's colonization of Siberia.²³

Sweden, as well as Norway and Finland, also pursued internal colonialism in their northern regions, in Sápmi, home to the indigenous Sámi people. Resources from Sápmi, including minerals, forests, and dammed rivers, have been used to benefit the state and businesses for hundreds of years, leaving the locals with the consequences of resource exploitation. This development has been studied by numerous historians.²⁴ In the twenty-first century it is still ongoing. It is now being referred to as “green colonialism,” since the vast resources of the northern regions, this time, are being used to enable an energy transition. Just as before, the internal colonial activities in the north disregard the impact on the residents who live and work in the Arctic.²⁵ In 2021 the Swedish state launched the Truth Commission for the Sámi People, aiming to investigate the impacts of Swedish state policies on the Sámi, examining historical as well as current policies. In most of these cases the notion of internal colonialism remains subject to heated debate both among historians and in the realm of political debate. While we will not address Sweden's internal colonization of Swedish-ruled Sápmi in this book, the notion of internal colonialism is highly relevant for our analysis. This is because Swedish actors, during the period in focus, were very active in internal colonization processes elsewhere in the world—notably in Russia, Turkey, and China.

This brings us to another important theme: the transnational entanglements between Swedish and non-Swedish actors in colonial history. Colonial historians have long recognized that colonialism and imperialism are deeply transnational phenomena—not only in terms of the cross-cultural encounters between European and non-European polities and peoples, but also in terms of the chaotic multitude of European nationals that contributed to the making of one or the other colonial region. Maria Paula Diogo and Dirk van Laak, in this context, point to the need for a multi-actor or multi-polar approach.²⁶ Jürgen Osterhammel and Jan C. Jansen, for their part, observe that there were a multitude of “transfers, negotiations, and exchange relations” between the colonial powers. On-site personnel were in no way nationally homogeneous: “ship crews, colonial troops, and missionary societies were made up of many nationalities.”²⁷ Already in the

eighteenth century, a prominent colonial venture such as the Caribbean sugar industry was run by a virtually pan-European community of plantation managers, including one or the other Swedish planter. But that was only the beginning. The transnational entanglements increased dramatically over time and became ever more chaotic following the worldwide trend towards free trade in the nineteenth century. This led, for example, to German capitalists investing heavily in British colonies, while Russian colonial railway building was financed largely by French and Belgian banks.²⁸ In this sense Belgium, on the eve of World War I, was not merely a colonial power in the Belgian Congo, but also in Russia's colonization of Siberia and Central Asia. As we will see in this book, Swedish capitalists behaved no differently: just like the Germans, the French, the Belgians, and many others, they invested massively in (non-Swedish) colonial regions all over the world, from Siberia and Hong Kong to Algeria and East Africa. Needless to say, Swedish trading houses were also intensively involved in the global trade in "colonial commodities" and raw materials of various kinds—from guano and rubber to petroleum and rare metals—while earning handsome profits from exporting Swedish industrial items to the colonial world, often brought there on Swedish keels. Many of these items, such as Swedish-made weapons, mining tools, and railway and telecommunications equipment, became powerful "tools of empire," to use Daniel Headrick's term,²⁹ in the respective colonies—that is, they were put to use in the very process of colonization and in order to sustain and extend already established colonial rule. A surge in the transnational mobility of people mirrored these spiraling colonial trade relations. Swedish missionaries, adventurers, soldiers, doctors, skippers, scientists, and engineers were active everywhere, contributing to the colonial efforts of the imperial powers.

Even more intriguing, from a theoretical point of view, is the very opposite of participation in other Western nations' empire-building efforts, in the form of Swedish cooperation with the (formally or informally) colonized countries. It is here, arguably, that we find the most powerful Swedish strategy in navigating colonial orders. Striking deals with political leaders in colonized territories and, in the context of decolonization, newly independent nations was often identified as an alternative to cooperation with the great powers, although the ultimate goal remained the same: to profit—economically, but also politically—from the exploitation of one or the other poorer country. Swedish political and industrial actors often sided with the poorer countries in their struggle for freedom from Western (formal and informal) imperial rule. The Swedes—be it in early Republican China, Interwar Turkey, or postwar Africa—pointed to themselves as being different from the great powers, emphasizing that they lacked undue

military or geopolitical ambitions and that they could hence be trusted. They mobilized the international image of Sweden as a benign, neutral, non-aligned, and innocent state with high moral standards and impressive scientific and technical competence—strengths that they were happy to share with the poorer states. The result was, paradoxically, that the poorer states repeatedly invited Swedish actors to take on a role that resembled that of a dominant imperial power. For example, Swedish experts took up powerful advisory positions in one or the other poorer state's government, Swedish policemen were called upon to build up security forces, while Swedish industrial companies set out to exploit the poorer state's natural resources, lay new railway lines and build other strategic infrastructure, and even erect military arsenals. Mutual trust and understanding laid the foundation of all this. It was an arrangement that was as far away as one could get from the harsh antagonism and "gunboat diplomacy" of the "real" imperial powers. It was the empire of a small and neutral state.

Outline of the Book

The chapters in this book explore Swedish colonialism in the industrial age specifically through the lens of *natural resource exploitation*—a theme that has always been central in analyses of colonialism and imperialism and which, as we will show, allows us to understand and disentangle the complexity of Sweden's (post)colonial activities. Guided by the conceptual discussion above, we examine Swedish involvement in different segments of colonial resource supply chains, from the prospecting, exploration, and extraction of colonial resources to their refining, transportation, and marketing. We will see how Swedish actors participated in negotiations about access to colonial resources, how they sought to contribute to establishing the "rules of the game" for colonial resource extraction, and how they sought to extend their involvement in resource supply chains to other parts of the colonial economy. Last but not least, the chapters trace repeated Swedish attempts to use involvement in colonial extractivism as a lever to strengthen Sweden's political power in the (post)colonial world.

The book is divided into two main parts, targeting Swedish activities in Africa and Eurasia. For each of these two macro-regions, we tell the story of Swedish colonialism from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century through several in-depth case studies. Together, these offer a multi-faceted view into Swedish colonialism in the industrial age.

Part I, which focuses on Africa, starts out by addressing Sweden's participation at the notorious 1884–85 Berlin Conference on West Africa (Chapter 1). The conference, at which political leaders and diplomats from

all the major Western powers came together, was a seminal event in the process of European empire-building in Africa. Laying down the international framework for colonizing the continent, it marked the starting point for the “Scramble for Africa.” None of the standard Swedish history books makes any mention of the fact that Swedish diplomats played an active role in the Berlin Conference. Seeking to guard Sweden’s African interests in terms of politics and trade, they participated in the negotiations and eventually signed the main treaty resulting from the conference: the General Act. Sweden also signed a separate bilateral treaty with Belgian King Leopold’s International Congo Association. Although Sweden never acquired any African colony of its own in this brave new era, the outcome of the conference was celebrated by Swedish diplomats and businessmen as an important achievement, seen to protect Sweden’s future business interests in the region, especially in view of a potentially lucrative trade in natural resources.

Immediately after the Berlin Conference, Sweden’s African activities started to take more concrete form, as further explored in Chapter 2. A range of Swedish scientists and explorers set out to map several West African regions and collect information of industrial and political significance. While there had been a few Swedish expeditions to West Africa before the industrial era, things were now scaled up. Sponsored by private Swedish companies and/or state agencies, the explorers studied—their scientific interests aside—the possibilities for future colonial investments in Africa and for large-scale shipments of African natural resources from the continent’s interior to the coast and onwards to world markets. Initially, these explorative activities did not result in any concrete projects or trade arrangements, and the Swedish business press complained about the lack of Swedish entrepreneurial initiative in Africa’s colonial world. The 1910s, however, saw a wave of Swedish investments in large-scale African plantation ventures, especially in British and Portuguese East Africa. This was followed, in the 1920s, by bold Swedish mining investments in French North Africa.

Sweden’s interest in Africa’s colonial resource riches increased further after World War II. Chapter 3, written by our guest author Karl Bruno, scrutinizes the most important Swedish-led extractive project on the African continent during this period, targeting Liberia’s untapped iron ore deposits. Swedish industrialists built the iron ore mine at Nimba, near the border with Guinea, from scratch, complete with a 250-kilometer railway from this landlocked location to Buchanan on the coast, where a new port was built to facilitate ore exports. At its height around 1960, twelve thousand people were involved in the project. The Swedish foreign ministry—and Swedish development aid organizations—played critical

roles in assisting the Swedish industrial actors, believing the project to be of utmost importance for Swedish-Liberian—and more generally Swedish-African—political relations. The perception of Sweden as a small, neutral, and geopolitically benign country was crucial in this context. From the mid-1960s, however, new political trends made the huge iron project increasingly controversial in both Liberia and Sweden, and in the 1980s it was eventually abandoned. The chapter then zooms out by placing the case of iron ore in the broader context of a more general Swedish postwar campaign for access to and profits from (post)colonial Africa's resource riches in a turbulent age of decolonization and rapid industrialization worldwide.

Sweden's early African interests were part of a more general phenomenon. At the time when the Berlin Conference was held, Swedish diplomats, business enterprises, and scientists were also becoming active in several other colonial regions of the world. Part II, which targets Eurasia, starts out with the story of how a number of Swedish scientific and industrial actors pioneered large-scale Russian resource colonialism (Chapter 4). Russia's colonialism was mainly internal, spanning vast multicultural territories such as Siberia, Central Asia, and Caucasia. In Caucasia, Ludvig and Robert Nobel, Swedish engineers-entrepreneurs at home in Imperial Russia, came to play the leading role in establishing the Russian petroleum industry. Sweden's best geologists were called upon to explore Russia's colonial oil wealth, and Swedish shipyards built innovative tanker ships designed to distribute Baku's colonial oil to Russia proper and abroad. When Baku's oil fields showed signs of depletion in the early 1900s, the Nobels pushed the colonial resource frontier by investing in prospecting and exploration on the opposite shores of the Caspian—in Russian Turkestan (present-day Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). The Nobel company's assets were eventually nationalized in 1920–21 following the Bolshevik revolution and the Civil War.

Shifting the focus further east, Chapter 5 turns to Swedish natural resource interests in semi-colonial China after the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Japan and the Western great powers had radically strengthened their presence in China, setting up colonial settlements along the coast and dividing mainland China into spheres of interest. Sweden wanted to be part of this, albeit without military action. Our story begins in 1914, when Swedish diplomats managed to nail down a unique agreement with the new Chinese rulers, through which Johan Gunnar Andersson, head of the Swedish Geological Survey, was entrusted with the task of setting up a Chinese Geological Survey modeled after its Swedish counterpart. Sweden's perceived neutrality and geopolitical weakness played a key part in making this possible, as the Chinese were

extremely suspicious of scientific advisors from Japan, the United States, and Europe's imperial powers. Andersson promised the new Republican Chinese government to help China take control of its own resource riches and put Western and Japanese resource colonialism in China to a definite end. Swedish businesses, however, wasted no time in seeking to capitalize on Andersson's appointment. In what followed, a heterogeneous Swedish alliance of scientists, diplomats, banks, and industrial companies worked feverishly to establish a quasi-colonial Swedish presence in China, centered on the extraction of iron ore and other metals mined in China's interior.

In the 1920s, Swedish diplomats and industrial actors tried to emulate their Chinese experience in the newly established Turkish Republic, as detailed in Chapter 6. The Ottoman Empire's natural resources had been subject to far-reaching exploitation by Western Europe's imperial powers in the decades around 1900. In the new Turkish era, Sweden tried to catch up with the latter powers by forging close diplomatic relations with Atatürk's government, profiling itself as a small, neutral, and friendly partner interested in cooperative arrangements. Their cooperation was launched when Swedish political and industrial interests joined forces with Danish businesses to build two long-distance railways designed to enable the exploitation of Turkish forests and copper deposits. This was soon followed by another remarkable project, in which Sandvikens Jernverk—a leading Swedish steel producer—set out to secure its need for chromium ore (of key importance for advanced steel production) from Turkish sources. At the time, Sandviken sourced its chromium from British and French colonies. However, the company feared the British Empire's growing dominance in the global chromium ore market. Thus, in 1928 Sandviken joined forces with several other Swedish steel producers, forming a consortium that, with ample help from Swedish foreign policy actors, managed to establish an independent source of chromium ore in Turkey by launching several mining projects in Anatolia. Initially these were hailed as a triumph for Sweden and its steel industry. Subsequently the Swedish chromium ore mining company started to make big losses; after a series of heated debates among those involved, it was ultimately abandoned. We conclude that the project failed because of changes in the world chromium market, the global economic crisis, cultural clashes, and not least the Swedish reluctance to scale up its mining activities so that they might compete successfully with Rhodesian, New Caledonian, and Baluchistani ore.

In Chapter 7, we conclude the Eurasian part of the book by returning to Russia. The 1917 Bolshevik revolution, the demise of Imperial Russia, and the rise of the Soviet Union spelled disaster for numerous Swedish businesses involved in resource extraction across the vastness of the tsar's domains. But the chaotic years of the revolution and the Civil War

(1917–21) and the relatively open period of the New Economic Policy (1921–28) also opened up new opportunities for resource-related investment in and trade with Russia. For example, Swedish industries were quick to secure a deal with the Bolsheviks for the sale of a thousand (!) Swedish locomotives, which Lenin's new government hoped would help revive the rail transport of crude and refined natural resources from distant colonial regions in Siberia, Central Asia, and Caucasia to the main industrial regions. Another deal ensured Swedish delivery of key equipment to aluminum smelting facilities in the Russian Far North. During the Cold War, then, in which Sweden took a neutral stance, these deals were radically scaled up as Swedish companies, assisted by foreign policy actors, supplied a plethora of advanced transport, extractive, and resource-processing technologies to the Red Empire. The arrangement took the form of countertrade deals. More specifically, in return for its industrial exports to the Soviet Union, Sweden began importing vast volumes of Soviet minerals and fossil fuels, most of which were extracted in the Soviet Union's colonial regions. The Swedish industrial actors involved, let alone the general Swedish public, were happily unaware of the actual conditions under which the Soviet resources were extracted and refined.

The concluding chapter of the book discusses the Swedish colonial experience as a whole, putting it into a wider historical and theoretical context. Sweden's recent accession to NATO, which marks the end of nearly two centuries of Swedish neutrality, is seen to raise new questions about Swedish colonialism. Drawing on the diversity of case studies discussed in the preceding chapters, we set out to delineate the Swedish "style" of participation in global exploitative colonialism. We then compare this style with the styles of other countries, large and small. Finally, we elaborate on how the study of smaller nations' colonial experiences can help enrich the wider academic and popular discourse about colonialism and imperialism.

Notes

1. "Regeringen godkänner åtal mot Lundintoppar," *Dagens Nyheter*, October 19, 2018.
2. E.g., "Lundin erövrar världen," *Dagens Nyheter*, May 6, 2000.
3. They were accompanied by three Asian oil companies: China's CNPC, Malaysia's Petronas, and India's ONGC Videsh. Yet oil production increased and Sudan emerged as an oil exporter. A Human Rights Watch report published in November 2003 stated that Sudan "has been using its \$500 million annual oil income to obtain arms, including Russian attack helicopters, and build its own military industry." See "Oil Companies Urged to Hold Back on Sudan Investment," *Financial Times*, November

- 25, 2003. See also Kerstin Lundell, *Affärer i blod och olja: Lundin Petroleum i Afrika* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2010), 32–41.
4. Following five years of preparations, the trial in the Stockholm District Court began in September 2023 and is scheduled to last until February 2026, making it the longest main hearing ever held in Sweden.
5. Carl Bildt, “Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs,” February 13, 2013, available at <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/a41f70194e7447ccbfec3d2c76e2fbe3/statement-of-government-policy-in-the-parliamentary-debate-on-foreign-affairs-2013/> (accessed December 12, 2024).
6. See, e.g., Seif Maliondo, Salim Madoffe, Faustin Maganga, Elifuraha Mtalio, Fred Midtgård, and Ian Bryceson, “Biofuels and Neo-Colonialism,” <https://sverigesradio.se/diverse/appdata/isidor/files/3345/5829.doc> (accessed December 12, 2024). See also Roger Southall and Henning Melber (eds), *A New Scramble for Africa? Imperialism, Investment and Development* (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2009).
7. “Swedish Court Rules in Favor of Boliden in Chile Waste Export Case,” *Reuters*, March 8, 2018.
8. Naturskyddsföreningen/Swedwatch, “Namibias uran bakom svensk kärnkraft: en rapport om Vattenfalls uranimport,” *Swedwatch Report* no. 36, 2010. Cf. Anna Åberg and Maja Fjæstad, “Chasing Uranium: Securing Nuclear Fuel on a Transnational Arena in Sweden, 1971–1984,” *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7, no. 1 (2020): 29–38.
9. Per Högselius and Arne Kaijser, *När folkhemselen blev internationell: Elavregleringen i historiskt perspektiv* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 2007).
10. Magdalena Naum and Jonas Nordin (eds), *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena* (New York: Springer, 2013), 14; cf. Magdalena Naum, “Colonial Entanglements: Crossroads, Contact Zones and Flows in Global Scandinavian History,” special issue in *Itinerario: Journal of Imperial and Global Interactions* 43, no. 2 (2019).
11. Janina Priebe, “From Siam to Greenland: Danish Economic Imperialism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of World History* 27, no. 4 (2016): 619–640.
12. Kirsten Alsaker Kjerland and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen (eds), *Navigating Colonial Orders: Norwegian Entrepreneurship in Africa and Oceania* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).
13. Lea Haller, “Globale Geschäfte: Wie die ressourcenarme Schweiz zur Drehscheibe für den globalen Rohstoffhandel wurde,” *NZZ Geschichte* 4 (2016): 80–95; Lea Haller, *Transithandel: Geld- und Warenströme im globalen Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019).
14. See, e.g., Piotr Puchalski, *Poland in a Colonial World Order: Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939* (London: Routledge, 2021), and Zoltán Ginelli, “Hungarian Experts in Nkrumah’s Ghana,” *Mezosfera* 5 (May 2018), available at: <http://mezosfera.org/hungarian-experts-in-nkrumahs-ghana/> (accessed June 8, 2021).
15. Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 15th anniversary edition (Chichester: Wiley, 2016), 15.
16. The growing interest in the history of Swedish colonialism is reflected in several recently published edited collections and special issues: Naum and Nordin, *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity*; Naum, “Colonial Entanglements”; Johan Höglund and Linda Andersson Burnett (eds), “Nordic Colonialisms,” special issue in *Scandinavian Studies* 91, no. 1–2 (2019); Gunlög Fur and John L. Hennessey (eds), “Svensk kolonialism,” special issue in *Historisk tidskrift* 140, no. 3 (2020). Also:

- Joachim Östlund, *Saltets pris: svenska slavar i Nordafrika och handeln i Medelhavet 1650–1770* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014).
17. Ale Pålsson, *Our Side of the Water: Political Culture in the Swedish Colony of St. Barthélemy 1800–1825* (Stockholm: Department of History, Stockholm University, 2016); Holger Weiss, *Slavhandel och slaveri under svensk flagg: koloniala drömmar och verklighet i Afrika och Karibien 1770–1847* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2016); Victor Wilson, *Commerce in Disguise: War and Trade in the Caribbean Free Port of Gustavia, 1793–1815* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2015); Fredrik Thomasson, *Svarta St Barthélemy: människöden i en svensk koloni 1785–1847* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2022).
 18. Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
 19. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953): 1–15.
 20. Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Panaf, 1965); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 3rd edition (London: Routledge, 2015).
 21. See, e.g., the authoritative account by Jürgen Osterhammel and Jan C. Jansen, *Kolonialismus: Geschichte, Formen, Folgen*, 7th edition (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2012).
 22. Jürgen Osterhammel, "Semi-Colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards a Framework of Analysis," in *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, edited by W. J. Mommsen and J. Osterhammel, 290–314 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).
 23. E.g., Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011); John R. Chavez, "Aliens in Their Native Land: The Persistence of Internal Colonial Theory," *Journal of World History* 22, no. 4 (2011): 785–809; Judd C. Kinzley, *Natural Resources and the New Frontier: Constructing Modern China's Borderlands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).
 24. Rebecca Lawrence, "Internal Colonisation and Indigenous Resource Sovereignty: Wind Power Developments on Traditional Saami Lands," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32 (2014): 1036–1053; Per Axelsson, Peter Sköld, and Corinna Röver, "Ethnic Identity and Resource Rights in Sweden," in *The Politics of Arctic Resources: Change and Continuity in the "Old North" of Northern Europe*, edited by Carina Keskitalo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Isabelle Brännlund and Per Axelsson, "Reindeer Management during the Colonization of Sami Lands: A Long-Term Perspective of Vulnerability and Adaptation Strategies," *Global Environmental Change* 21, no. 3 (2011): 1095–1105; Patrik Lantto, *Lappväsendet: Tillämpningen av svensk samespolitik 1885–1971* (Umeå: Centrum för samisk forskning, Umeå Universitet, 2012); Veli-Pekka Lehtola, "Sámi Histories, Colonialism, and Finland," *Arctic Anthropology* 52 (2015): 22–36; Åsa Össbo and Patrik Lantto, "Colonial Tutelage and Industrial Colonialism," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 36 (2011): 324–348; Åsa Össbo, *Nya vatten, dunkla speglingar: Industriell kolonialism genom svensk vattenkraftsutbyggnad i renskötselområdet* (Umeå: Institutionen för idé- och samhällsstudier, 2014); Åsa Össbo, "Hydropower Histories and Narrative Justice: State-Owned Energy Companies' Narratives of Hydropower Expansion in Sápmi," *Water History* 15 (2023): 201–219.
 25. Camilla Sandström, "Green Transformation or Green Colonialism: Contrasting Perspectives on How to Address the Climate and Nature Crisis," *Tidskriftet Utmark* 1 (2024): 126–138; Eva Maria Fjellheim, "Wind Energy on Trial in Saepmie: Epistemic Controversies and Strategic Ignorance in Norway's Green Energy Transition," *Arctic*

- Review on Law and Politics* 14 (2023): 140–168; Daria Gritsenko, “Energy Development in the Arctic: Resource Colonialism Revisited,” in *Handbook of International Political Economy of Energy and Natural Resources*, edited by Andreas Goldthau, Michael F. Keating, and Caroline Kuzemko, 172–184 (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018).
26. Maria Paula Diogo and Dirk van Laak, *Europeans Globalizing: Mapping, Exploiting, Exchanging* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
 27. Osterhammel and Jansen, *Kolonialismus*, 29–30.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).