



What Military Revolution? On the Revision of a Eurocentric Concept

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The military revolution is an outdated and antiquated concept that originated in a Eurocentric time in which developments outside of the European sphere of influence were hardly considered to matter for the historical process. The presented article will argue to revise, yet even to abolish this antiquated and more than outdated theoretical concept. In addition, some critical points are presented that make it obvious that such Eurocentric master narratives should no longer have a place within critical historical research and its ambition to explain the formation and functioning of a globalized world.

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Theoretical concepts must be understood in their respective historical contexts. Considering this, the theory of a military revolution that marked the rise of the West is definitely outdated, if not obsolete. The origins of the concept go back to the 1950s, when Michael Roberts, in “one of the most influential Inaugural lectures ever given”¹, mentioned that the military revolution in early modern Europe “between 1560 and 1660 was in essence the result of just one more attempt to solve the perennial problem of tactics—the problem of how to combine missile weapons with close action; how to unite hitting power, mobility, and defensive strength”². Roberts’ initial theoretical reflections

¹ G. Parker, *The ‘Military Revolution,’ 1955-2005: From Belfast to Barcelona and the Hague*, in “The Journal of Military History”, 69, 2005, 1, pp. 205-9: 205. The lecture was delivered at Queen’s University, Belfast.

² M. Roberts, *The Military Revolution, 1560-1660*, in C.J. Rogers (ed.), *The Military*

caused generations of historians to take a closer look at and debate multiple military revolutions³. Probably the most prominent works among them are the ones by Geoffrey Parker⁴, Jeremy Black⁵, Clifford Rogers⁶, and Tonio Andrade. These authors highlighted the role and impact of the military revolution. Parker, who partially reverted Roberts' original considerations⁷, for example, states that

the revolution in military manpower between 1530 and 1710 was extremely important. It certainly had all the significant consequences which Roberts attributed to it: it made war impinge more upon society; it increased the authority of the state (partly at the expense of the citizen); it accentuated social mobility; and it undoubtedly retarded the economic development of most participants (although it stimulated that of many neutrals). In addition, it certainly helped to precipitate the numerous confrontations between governments and the governed which are commonly referred to as the 'general crisis' of the seventeenth century. The 'prodigious increase in the scale of warfare' alone merits the title of 'military revolution' which Roberts bestowed upon it twenty years ago⁸.

According to his later reflections,

The military revolution of early modern Europe possessed a number of separate facets. First, the improvements in artillery in the fifteenth century, both qualitative and quantitative, eventually transformed fortress design. Second, the increasing reliance on firepower in battle [...] led not only to the eclipse of cavalry by infantry in most armies, but to new tactical arrangements that maximized the opportunities of giving fire. Moreover, these new ways in warfare were accompanied by a dramatic increase in army size⁹.

Revolution Debate: Readings on the Transformation of Early Modern Europe, Westview Press, Boulder (CO) 1995, p. 13.

³ See exemplary W. Murray, M. Knox, *Thinking About Revolutions in Warfare*, in M. Knox, W. Murray (eds.), *The Dynamics of Military Revolutions, 1300-2050*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2001, pp. 1-14.

⁴ G. Parker, *The Military Revolution, 1560-1660: A Myth?*, in "Journal of Modern History", 48, 1976, 2, pp. 195-214; G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996².

⁵ J. Black, *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society 1550-1800*, Red Globe Press, London 1991.

⁶ C.J. Rogers, *The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years' War*, in "The Journal of Military History", 57, 1993, 2, pp. 241-78.

⁷ Rogers, *The Military Revolutions*, cit., p. 242.

⁸ Parker, *The Military Revolution, 1560-1660*, cit., pp. 213-4.

⁹ Parker, *The Military Revolution*, cit., p. 24. With regard to the "fortress design", a special

Rogers afterwards applied these theoretical considerations to the Hundred Years' War and argued on behalf of multiple military revolutions, i.e. one of the infantry, one of the artillery, and one in relation to fortifications that followed later¹⁰. Eventually, the concept of the military revolution became an essential part of teaching and understanding the historical developments in early modern Europe and the way they had prepared the "rise of the West". Black could therefore emphasize in 1991 that "the idea that military revolution occurred in the early modern period [...] is an established part of the curriculum for early modern studies in Britain" and that "the putative military revolution has been used to explain [a] period of stability [after 1660] which is described as the age of absolutism and defined in terms of the authority and power of centralising personal monarchies"¹¹. Regardless of these statements, single aspects of Parker's arguments were contested, since some of his claims, especially with regard to fortifications and army sizes, could not be confirmed for all European contexts¹². Tonio Andrade's important study of China during the "gunpowder age" has shown that it was not only the existence of military technologies but other aspects, like actual war-related experiences, that helped European powers to gain influence in East Asia¹³. It must also be highlighted here that Eurocentrism was an essential shortcoming of the theoretical concept of a military revolution, which was often considered in a way that German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel described as "reflective history"¹⁴, although in this case it was not reflective but rather selective due to its ambition to serve a narrative that could also be exploited politically: the West was more advanced and therefore could expand around the globe. The theoretical concept consequently served Western chauvinism and supported narratives that intended to explain colonial expansion along the lines of a natural development, often negating or ignoring actual contacts and exchanges between Western and non-Western military

focus was put on the *alla moderna* fortifications.

¹⁰ Rogers, *The Military Revolutions*, cit., p. 244.

¹¹ Black, *A Military Revolution?*, cit., p. 1.

¹² D.A. Parrott, *Strategy and Tactics in the Thirty Years' War*, in C.J. Rogers (ed.), *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, Westview Press, Boulder (CO) 1995, pp. 227-52.

¹³ T. Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation and the Rise of the West in World History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2016.

¹⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Batoche Books, Kitchener (ON) 2001, pp. 18-21.

forces¹⁵. A superior technical spatiality¹⁶, according to this narrative, allowed the West to dominate the world. The concept should have been criticized for its Eurocentric bias and critiqued much earlier.

Nevertheless, the concept was and still is applied and debated in different regional and, eventually, non-European contexts¹⁷. The theoretical discussion about the military revolution is also still ongoing, as newer publications about it suggest¹⁸. In contrast to this approach to the study and understanding of history, Gilmar Visoni-Alonzo and I argued against the continuation of this outdated concept, which supposedly described something that never happened: “There never was a Military Revolution”¹⁹. In an earlier article, we contested the terminology used to describe a rather evolutionary and global process related to the advancement of military technologies, strategies, and tactics²⁰. For us, it seemed to be clear that the concept as it had been previously applied would not stand a broader stress test when someone asked just a few critical questions:

Was the Military Revolution global? Yes, it was and still is a global process that cannot be limited to Europe. If we do that, we will remain in the position of a Eurocentric historiography that would no longer be sufficient for the global context of history itself. Were there numerous revolutions? This question cannot be answered in a universal sense. We can say that there were numerous Military Revolutions, which however would still be part of a larger

¹⁵ D.M. Peers (ed.), *Warfare and Empires: Contact and Conflict Between European and Non-European Military and Maritime Forces and Cultures*, Ashgate, Aldershot 1997.

¹⁶ On this concept, see F. Jacob, *Technological Spatialities: The Impact of Geography and Technology During the Imjin War (1592-1598)*, in S.K. Danielson, F. Jacob (eds.), *War and Geography: The Spatiality of Organized Mass Violence*, Schöningh, Paderborn 2017, pp. 25-38.

¹⁷ To quote just a few examples, see K.J.V. Jespersen, *Social Change and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe: Some Danish Evidence*, in “The Historical Journal”, 26, 1983, 1, pp. 1-13; T. Wollschläger, *Die ‘Military Revolution’ und der deutsche Territorialstaat unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Brandenburg-Preußens und Sachsens*, PhD thesis, University of Gießen 2002; H. Carvalhal, A. Murteira, R.L. de Jesus (eds.), *The First World Empire: Portugal, War and Military Revolution*, Routledge, London-New York 2021; G. Âgoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005.

¹⁸ M.C. Fissel(ed.), *The Military Revolution and Revolutions in Military Affairs*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2022.

¹⁹ F. Jacob, G. Visoni-Alonzo, *The Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe: A Revision*, Palgrave Macmillan, London-New York 2016, p. 1.

²⁰ F. Jacob, G. Visoni-Alonzo, *The Theory of a Military Revolution: Global, Numerous, Endless?*, in “Revista Universitaria De Historia Militar”, 3, 2015, 6, pp. 189-204.

process of research and development, adaption and evaluation. However, if we use the term in an overly inflationary way, we would have to argue that there is no Military Revolution at all. [...] And finally, is the revolutionary process in military history endless at all? Yes, the process is endless while the numerous instances of (r)evolutions are not. As long as there are people trying to kill other people, there is space and time for another (r)evolution. One could even go further and state that the initial (r)evolutionary impetus never stopped²¹.

In *The Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe: A Revision*, which was published the following year, we intensified what some people would refer to as a criticism due to “frustration”²² about the concept of a military revolution in early modern Europe. We made a clear statement that the concept as such is simply artificial, stereotypical, and an expression of an outdated age in Western supremacy that was defended not only by force but also by intellect. In our opinion, it was clear “that the concept of a Military Revolution is not helpful, nor are there any provable instances of such revolutions. Rather, it is an artificial construct that is supposed to help explain the dominance of the West in the age of colonialism; it therefore expresses Eurocentric assumptions as opposed to being based in historical proof”²³. Now, more than five years since we made this statement, I still believe in its validity and will try to emphasize here why it is obsolete to continue the debate as one about “revolutionary changes”.

The import of the term ‘revolution’ as such, which is usually used to describe modern political system changes²⁴, although it is also used for tremendous economic or social changes, cannot really be used to write a reasonable military history, especially since this would lead to the existence of numerous military revolutions in the past within many different regional contexts. It has been shown that successful military structures are seldom reformed without an external threat that would cause such reforms to be considered²⁵. Victories are therefore no stimulus

²¹ Ibid., p. 204. Parentheses added by the author.

²² Andrade, *The Military Revolution in Global History: East Asian Perspectives*, in *The First World Empire* cit., pp. 223-38, p. 235.

²³ Jacob, Visoni-Alonzo, *The Military Revolution*, cit., p. 1.

²⁴ F. Jacob, *#Revolution: Wer, warum, wann und wie viele?*, Büchner, Marburg 2022.

²⁵ R.M. Eaton, ‘Kiss My Foot’, *Said the King: Firearms, Diplomacy, and the Battle for Raichur, 1520*, in *Expanding Frontiers in South Asian and World History: Essays in Honour of John F. Richards*, special issue, “Modern Asian Studies”, 43, 2009, 1, pp. 289-313. For a broader

for military changes, while defeats make them necessary, simply to provide a chance for a reversed outcome in the future. Furthermore, military revolutions, or the cases that have been claimed to represent the ‘concept at work’, are less revolutionary, although they might lead to more centralized structures, larger standing armies, massive fortresses, etc. The reason for their existence and the expansion of military forces does not serve a revolutionary purpose but only provides a stronger potential to dominate in a specific region or to successfully face one’s enemies.

The latter’s defeat might often also be rather related to the existence of advantages in a given situation but cannot per se be interpreted as a sign of cultural superiority, no matter how outstanding the victories historically seem to have been²⁶. The success of Western armies in the early modern period was, without any doubt, made possible by new naval technologies²⁷, and the individual case studies presented by researchers who have participated in the debate about the military revolution are certainly valid with regard to their regional contexts and subjects of interest. However, these factors alone did not cause the decline and fall of non-Western empires and civilizations, and, as William R. Thompson highlights,

target vulnerability and local allies are at least as important as military superiority, if not more so. If it can also be demonstrated that in some cases the military superiority exhibited by the Europeans was not due to early modern revolutions in military technology, the military superiority interpretation will have been

view on medieval Indian warfare, see I.A. Khan, *Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India*, Oxford University Press, New York [etc.] 2004.

²⁶ Alfred W. Crosby, for example, remarked in 1967 about the success of the conquistadors that “A few hundred Spaniards defeated populations containing thousands of dedicated warriors, armed with a wide assembly of weapons from the stone and early metal ages. Societies which had created huge empires through generations of fierce fighting collapsed at the touch of the Castilian”. A.W. Crosby, *Conquistador y Pestilencia: The First New World Pandemic and the Fall of the Great Indian Empires*, in “The Hispanic American Historical Review”, 47, 1967, 3, pp. 321-37, p. 321.

²⁷ T. Andrade, *An Accelerating Divergence? The Revisionist Model of World History and the Question of Eurasian Military Parity: Data from East Asia*, in “The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie”, 36, 2011, 2, pp. 185-208, p. 197. See also the classic studies related to European naval power and expansion: C.M. Cipolla, *Guns and Sails in the Early Phase of European Expansion, 1400-1700*, Collins, London 1965; J.H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire*, Hutchinson, London 1966; C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800*, Hutchinson, London 1966; G.V. Scammell, *The World Encompassed: The First European Maritime Empires, c. 800-1650*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1981.

shown to require even further discounting. Finally, an emphasis on one side's coercive edge in acquiring territorial control tends to overlook the macroevolution of a global political economy increasingly dominated by some west Europeans. Ultimately, this macroevolution is a more important key to the finite ascendancy of the European region within the world economy than is military superiority²⁸.

There were many elements that stimulated the decline and fall of the West's adversaries in the non-Western world and the respective courses of history in these regions. And very often, more than technological or military superiority was needed for the Western invaders to obtain success. In fact, European expansion was very often made possible by the Machiavellian exploitation of internal struggles and the use of all means necessary to destroy the enemy²⁹. When Hernán Cortés invaded the Aztec Empire, he used the help of local translators to exploit internal struggles and unrest for his own purposes and forged alliances with the Tlaxcaltecs who helped him to end the rule of Moctezuma II in 1520³⁰. In fact, it was not only the Europeans who used the native tribes as allies; the political and sometimes territorial interests of the native rulers would also result in alliances in which the European forces were considered auxiliary military resources that would grant the natives a higher chance of victory. In his report about the "New World" (1591)³¹, Jaques Le Moyne de Morgues shows how a king called Outina used French soldiers to supplement his own army to defeat one of his local enemies [Figure 1].

²⁸ W.R. Thompson, *The Military Superiority Thesis and the Ascendancy of Western Eurasia in the World System*, in "Journal of World History", 10, 1999, 1, pp. 143-78, p. 144.

²⁹ On this issue, see also B.C.S. Watson, *The Western Ethical Tradition and the Morality of the Warrior*, in "Armed Forces and Society", 26, 1999, 1, pp. 55-72. With regard to the methods that European expansion was based on beyond military confrontation, see, among others, T.S. Edwards, P. Kelton, *Germes, Genocides, and America's Indigenous Peoples*, in "Journal of American History", 107, 2020, 1, pp. 52-76.

³⁰ A. Lanyon, *Malinche: Die andere Geschichte der Eroberung Mexikos*, Ammann, Zurich 2001; C. Wurm, *Doña Marina, la Malinche: Eine historische Figur und ihre literarische Rezeption*, Vervuert, Frankfurt am Main 1996; K.A. Myers, *In the Shadow of Cortés: Conversations along the Route of Conquest*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson (AZ) 2015, pp. 105-7.

³¹ J. Le Moyne de Morgues, *Der ander Theyl, der Newlich erfundenen Landschafft Americae*, Frankfurt am Main 1591, George Arents Collection, New York Public Library, No. 40, Table 13.

Figure 1. J. Le Moyne de Morgues, *Der ander Theyl* (1591), Table 13, showing the battle between Outina and his enemy (https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/le_moyne/13)



While it was naval advances that brought the conquistador to the shores of the Aztec Empire, it was no genuine Western superiority that was responsible for his military success³². The Spanish invader, in addition to local support from anti-Aztec forces, also capitalized on internal struggles and unrest when he “relied heavily on large numbers of disaffected Aztec subjects who were his indispensable allies in the victory”³³.

Similarly, albeit later and in a different geographical context, the British East India Company also exploited the locals’ military capacity to wage war and expand its influence on the Indian subcontinent³⁴. The company’s officials succeeded by using as military potential different auxiliary

³² H. Thomas, *Die Eroberung Mexikos: Cortés und Montezuma*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2000.

³³ G. Raudzens, *Military Revolution or Maritime Evolution? Military Superiorities or Transportation Advantages as Main Causes of European Colonial Conquests to 1788*, in “The Journal of Military History”, 63, 1999, 3, pp. 631-41, p. 637.

³⁴ S. Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India 1770-1830*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995.

forces they could provide while they attacked the local rulers one by one in several wars³⁵. Initially, the British East India Company was just another competitor in the struggles for expansion on the subcontinent and faced similar problems to other territorial rulers. Eventually, however, the financial assets it could rely on provided some necessary advantages, especially since military reforms in the competing territorial states came too late and had not fully changed the power relations in the region before the company served its final blows against its adversaries one by one, e.g. in the Anglo-Mysore Wars³⁶. These wars had already witnessed a transition with regard to the military organization of Indian armies, but “it was the European military organization that won over traditional Indian armies. So long as the bureaucratized, rationally organized British military faced the heroic military of the Indian princes, combatant ratios could remain highly unbalanced without adverse effect upon foreigners”³⁷. The history of European expansion in India actually provides additional insights. While the British East India Company was relatively successful in using existing divisions in the enemy camp to expand step by step, the early attempts by the Portuguese to do so were limited, and they gained instead from their naval superiority³⁸. The Portuguese viceroy for India, Afonso de Albuquerque, therefore began to support the kingdom of Vijayanagara against its

³⁵ R.G.S. Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India: The Struggle for Control of the South Asian Military Economy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003; J. Pemble, *Resources and Techniques in the Second Maratha War*, in “The Historical Journal”, 19, 1976, 2, pp. 375-404.

³⁶ G.D. Ness, W. Stahl, *Western Imperialist Armies in Asia*, in “Comparative Studies in Society and History”, 19, 1977, 1, pp. 2-29, p. 18. On the Anglo-Mysore Wars and their perception, see R.G.S. Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India: The Struggle for Control of the South Asian Military Economy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003; R. Ahuja, M. Christof-Füchsle (eds.), *A Great War in South India: German Accounts of the Anglo-Mysore Wars, 1766-1799*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2020. Ranjit Singh began to implement military reforms on the organization of his troops, but these efforts seem to have been undertaken too late. See I. Heath, *The Sikh Army 1799-1849*, Osprey, Oxford 2005; J.-M. Lafont, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Lord of the Five Rivers*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002.

³⁷ Ness, Stahl, *Western Imperialist Armies*, cit., p. 14.

³⁸ Raudzens, *Military Revolution or Maritime Evolution?*, cit., p. 635. The Portuguese used this superiority to replace their Arab trade competitors in the region, but they did not immediately establish a “Western dominance” in this part of the world. D. Couto, *Muscat and the Portuguese: Economic and Political Dynamics in the Early 16th Century (1507-1529)*, in “Arabian Humanities”, 15, 2022, <https://rebrand.ly/dv0fz7g>; J.C. Solórzano Fonseca, *El comercio en el Océano Índico: Desde la Antigüedad hasta el arribo y control de esta ruta mercantil por los portugueses*, in “Revista Estudios”, 40, 2020, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/7449472.pdf>.

northern Muslim enemies and thereby secured the rights to import and sell war horses from the Middle East in the harbors of Goa and Bhatkal³⁹. The Portuguese naval superiority, however, was not entirely uncontested by other players that had an interest in the Red Sea or the Indian Ocean⁴⁰. The superiority of the Western intruders consequently did not exist early on and was often contested⁴¹, although their ruthless exploitation of resources ultimately put the colonial powers in a superior position.

This exploitation, which led to the establishment of what Immanuel Wallerstein referred to as a capitalist world system⁴², allowed and at the same time forced Western colonial and later imperialist powers to further expand to gain access to natural and human resources and accumulate more capital⁴³. In order to achieve this goal, naval technology might have been the key, but the rise of the West was neither related to a single or multiple military revolutions nor to the backwardness of the people attacking forces encountered. It was rather a superiority in relation to an ambition-driven unscrupulousness paired with Machiavellian considerations about the exploitation of alliances and all available resources⁴⁴. This means not only natural resources but also human capital within the newly explored and soon-to-be annexed regions of the world. Slavery was one aspect related to the latter form of ex-

³⁹ R.A. de Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Cartas de Affonso Albuquerque eguidas e documentos que as elucidam*, vol. I, Academia real das sciencias de Lisboa, Lisbon 1884, p. 28; Eaton, 'Kiss My Foot', *Said the King*, cit., p. 296. On these relations, see also M.A. Lima Cruz, *Notes on Portuguese Relations with Vijayanagara, 1500-1565*, in "Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies", 1995, 2, pp. 13-39.

⁴⁰ J. Hooper, *Pirates and Kings: Power on the Shores of Early Modern Madagascar and the Indian Ocean*, in "Journal of World History", 22, 2011, 2, pp. 215-42; A. Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, *Conquistadores, Mercenaries, and Missionaries: The Failed Portuguese Dominion of the Red Sea*, in "Northeast African Studies", 12, 2012, 1, pp. 1-28.

⁴¹ One such example is Koxinga, a Chinese pirate who fought Dutch colonialism in East Asia. T. Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory Over the West*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2013, pp. 124-36. On Koxinga's perception as a hero of Chinese nationalism, see R.C. Croizier, *Koxinga and Chinese Nationalism: History, Myth, and the Hero*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1977.

⁴² I. Wallerstein, *Welt-System-Analyse: Eine Einführung*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden 2019.

⁴³ On the accumulation of capital as a reason for imperialist expansion, see the classic text R. Luxemburg, *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals: Ein Beitrag zur ökonomischen Erklärung des Imperialismus* (1913), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V, Dietz, Berlin 1975, pp. 5-411.

⁴⁴ One example is the abuse of Native American rivalries during the Seven Years' War. M.C. Ward, *Understanding Native American Alliances*, in M.H. Danley, P.J. Speelman (eds.), *The Seven Years' War: Global Views*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2012, pp. 47-72. For a short introduction to the topic, see J.D. Murphy, *Introduction*, in Id. (ed.), *American Indian Wars: The Essential Reference Guide*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA 2022, pp. xiii-xxiv.

plotation⁴⁵ as well as to the recruitment of local military forces that would soon have been used as agents of colonialism against their own people in exchange, to name just a couple of examples, for the promise of rewards and their acknowledgement as local, often military, elites⁴⁶.

If one considers all these aspects related to the history of Western expansion in different regions of the world during different time periods, it becomes obvious that this history was neither a really stringent process nor one in which military superiority existed continuously and unchallenged. If one continues to use the concept of military revolution(s) to explain the diverse and complicated history of Western expansion, the story told would be one that is narrowed down according to the wishes to write a history of cultural superiority. The history of military expansion as a consequence of the discovery of new parts of the world, a fact that is indeed related to new technological possibilities with regard to sailing, is not an easy one and, in addition, not one that could only be told from a Western (i.e. Eurocentric) perspective. The role and impact of local and non-European forces that shaped this historical process as much as those forces that initiated the expansion must also be told. However, they must be told in a way that pays tribute to the complexity of this historical process and not in one that continues to claim that the West dominated the world for centuries because it had gone through a military revolution that made it superior and somehow better equipped to rule the world. When making an argument for abandoning the theoretical concept of the military revolution, I do so with the aim of telling the full story and not solely focusing on some key technologies and strategic developments that were part of a natural and more evolutionary process within military history, but rather while acknowledging the complexity of events that included the non-Western actors as historical subjects as much as it did those who represented the West during this expansionist phase.

The theoretical concept of a military revolution is outdated, antiquated, and not fit as a framework for a global history of European expansion. It is part of a 'debt relief narrative' that goes hand in hand with claims about

⁴⁵ I. Wallerstein, *American Slavery and the Capitalist World-Economy*, in "American Journal of Sociology", 81, 1976, 5, pp. 1199-213.

⁴⁶ Regarding the role and impact of colonial troops see, among others, K. Hack, T. Rettig (eds.), *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London 2005; T. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-file: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964*, Heinemann, Portsmouth (NH) 1999; H. Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2004.

the ‘benevolence’ and ‘civilizational impact’ of Western empires⁴⁷. To let the military revolution be a part of the historiographic past is necessary to better understand the world beyond Eurocentric master narratives that served as claims for the legitimacy of one’s own colonial rule in the past⁴⁸. It is therefore time to abandon the idea of the military revolution and instead compare cases or instances of military evolution in European and non-European spatialities to write a more global history of the respective developments that shaped the history of the colonial and imperial expansion leading to the creation of a globalized world and the (military) world system that determined it. Such an attempt would then also pay tribute to the historical complexity of the issue and replace outdated views and prejudices about Western superiority that barely offered a true understanding of historical realities but in fact rather helped to narrate a story that was useful to the West and its protagonists, who believed in their own superiority and intended to inscribe the latter into their respective national historiographies.

There is no shame in accepting this and revising historiographic traditions, although it might be more painful for some, especially those who seek relief from their current suffering in a glorious past. Continuing outdated narratives and theoretical approaches that do not fit a global understanding of the early modern period will eventually not lead to relief but rather to an increase in the possibilities for the exploitation of glorious narratives that often tend to cause harm in our time as well when nationalist populists refer to the greatness of the past as a way to prove modern demands for a country’s leading position within the world’s community of states. Colonialism and imperialism were without any doubt based on prejudicial concepts, which is just another reason to consider the renouncement of similar concepts regarding the attempts to explain our past.

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⁴⁷ An example of such an approach toward the history of the British Empire, which Kim Wagner correctly called a “whitewash for Britain’s atrocities”, is J. Black, *Imperial Legacies: The British Empire Around the World*, Encounter Books, New York-London 2019. For Wagner’s full review, see K. Wagner, *Imperial Legacies by Jeremy Black. Review – Whitewash for Britain’s Atrocities*, in “The Guardian”, August 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/10/imperial-legacies-jeremy-black-review-empire-multiculturalism>.

⁴⁸ S. Conrad, *Globalgeschichte: Eine Einführung*, C.H. Beck, München 2013, ch. 6 in particular. Also see L. Melve, E. Heldaas Seland, *Hva er globalhistorie*, Universitetsforlag, Oslo 2021, p. 9. Global history in particular intends to challenge these Eurocentric narratives and therefore offers the possibility to revise outdated concepts, including the ‘military revolution’ in early modern Europe.