

## A TALE OF THREE EMPIRES

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Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs  
in a Comparative Context

*Sanjay Subrahmanyam*

The recent spate of writings about empire—following on the emergence of the unipolar American system at the end of the Cold War, and further stimulated by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after September 2001—has left those of us who have long worked on empires somewhat bemused. Or perhaps this new literature has produced a perverse form of “imperial trauma.” It is not easy for specialists to correct the myriad errors and dissect the outlandish theses of relative novices, then watch them laugh nonetheless all the way to the bank. I believe that we have by now spilled too much futile ink, whether on the ostensibly left-wing speculations of Messrs. Hardt and Negri or on the definitively right-wing suggestions of Niall Ferguson.<sup>1</sup> We have surely heard enough of such propositions as that the British empire was a “force for good” given that Hitler and his allies could never have been defeated in the 1940s without the Indian troops recruited by the British.<sup>2</sup> Ferguson’s argument could be redeployed in justification of Stalin and the gulag, for without that excellent invention of the Soviets’, how could Hitler have been defeated either?

1. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

2. This argument was one of the more ingenious deployed by Ferguson in a debate whose motion was “The British Empire was a Force for Good” at the Royal Geographical Society, London, on June 1, 2004. The motion, supported by him, was incidentally passed by a popular vote of the audience.

My purpose in this admittedly diffuse and ambitious essay differs from those of these recent forays. I wish to discuss three early modern empires—which between them covered an impressive swathe of more or less contiguous territory (with a small gap from east to west equivalent to the width of the Safavid domains), extending from the northern fringes of Burma in the east to the Atlantic and Morocco in the west of Eurasia—and which in a wider sense had global coverage and reach around the year 1600. None of these three empires, generally speaking, has been written into the happy history of modernity, and all of them are definitely seen as losers in the eighteenth-century redistribution of cards that characterizes the rise of the “second British empire.”<sup>3</sup> Yet these three are very significant in terms of the diversity of the political, institutional, and cultural arrangements and processes that they embody. For though Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs were rivals who possessed some characteristics in common, they were also, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, quite different from one another, and continue to differ in the longer-term trajectories of the political institutions that they produced. They moreover occasioned different sorts or degrees of imperial trauma, wielded or lacked different sorts or degrees of power—and it is important to bear these finer distinctions in mind.

## I

It is convenient to begin in 1580–81, when the three empires saw themselves as locked into a tight grid of interimperial rivalry. The already complex contest between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs became still more intricate, and the Mughals too entered the scene in a substantial way. This was the year when Philip II, as a consequence of a convoluted train of events, gained joint control over the Spanish and Portuguese empires after the death of the Portuguese king, Dom Sebastião, in 1578 and the demise, less than two years later, of the aged Dom Henrique. Philip notoriously could mobilize not only legal arguments based on his kinship ties with the Portuguese House of Avis but the force of his battle-hardened armies and his New World silver to smooth over the transition.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, the Habsburgs—which is to say, Philip II, his son, and his grandson—came for a relatively brief period of sixty years to rule over an empire that included not only a part of the Low Countries and Naples but also Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Brazil, Angola, the lower Zambezi valley, and a part of lowland

3. Arguably one of the more balanced views of this process is found in C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989).

4. Geoffrey Parker, “David or Goliath? Philip II and His World in the 1580s,” in *Spain, Europe, and the Atlantic World: Essays in Honour of John H. Elliott*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 245–66.

Sri Lanka.<sup>5</sup> This Habsburg world-empire was supposed in theory to be ruled in two autonomous sections, but in East Asia, as well as the Río de la Plata, the boundaries between the “Portuguese” and “Spanish” sections of the empire proved quite permeable. Moreover, the events of the time brought the Ottomans into a situation where—instead of facing one set of rivals to the southeast (in the Indian Ocean) and another set in the Mediterranean—they notionally were encircled by the extensive resources deployed by the Habsburg monarchy of the Philips. Thus, the theaters of Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry in the 1580s included North Africa, the central and eastern Mediterranean islands and Ethiopia, as well as much of the Swahili coast, the Persian Gulf, and northern Sumatra.

Besides, within the Muslim world, the more or less unchallenged supremacy that the Ottomans had enjoyed since the reign in the 1510s of Yavuz Sultan Selim was now under challenge. During the half-century reign of Sultan Süleyman, “the Lawgiver,” the Ottomans were seen as the lords of the holy cities of the Hijaz (in addition to Jerusalem) and as the only great Muslim power with a true maritime reach; they also boasted periodically that they alone possessed territories in all of the “seven climes” of traditional Islamic geography.<sup>6</sup> But this situation was to change. The Mughals, descendants of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, emerged in the area of Herat and Kabul in the early sixteenth century as a petty dynasty, initially under Safavid tutelage; but from the 1560s onward, they mounted a series of successful campaigns to consolidate their domains in northern India. By 1580, the Mughal ruler Akbar (r. 1556–1605) was seen as a genuine rival to the Ottoman sultan in terms of power and prestige, and it is significant that by about 1600 the Mughals rather than the Ottomans became a model for some of the fledgling sultanates emerging in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral.<sup>7</sup> In the early 1580s, Akbar entered into direct diplomatic contact with the Habsburgs, and by the time the first Habsburg-appointed viceroy, Dom Filipe Mascarenhas, reached Goa in 1581, a Mughal ambassador was already there to greet him. Not for nothing has 1580–81 been seen in traditional historiography as sealing the fate of the world-imperial ambitions of the Ottomans, in the face of a set of realignments and potential alliances that boded only ill for them in the long term.<sup>8</sup>

It is useful here to distinguish a naive “political” and short-term interpretation of the transition of 1580–81 from the far more sophisticated view of Fernand Braudel. In his classic study of the Mediterranean in the age of Philip II, Braudel did write, with characteristic flourish, that the transition of 1580–81 (and more

5. Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde: Histoire d'une mondialisation* (Paris: Martinière, 2004).

6. Seyyidi 'Ali Re'is, *Le Miroir des pays: Une anabase ottomane à travers l'Inde et l'Asie centrale*, trans. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont (Paris: Actes Sud, 1999), 86–87; for a modern Turkish edition of the text, see Seyyidi 'Ali Re'is, *Mir'âtü'l-Memâlik: İnceleme, Metin, İndeks*, ed. Mehmet Kiremit (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 1999), 115–16.

7. Denys Lombard, *Le Sultanat d'Atjéh au temps d'Iskandar Muda, 1607–1636* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1967), 79.

8. Cf. the discussion in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: Mughals and Franks* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42–70.

generally the years 1578–83) was from the viewpoint of the Mediterranean the “turning point of the century.”<sup>9</sup> While the logic of international politics plays a role in Braudel’s explanation of the shift from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic around 1580, that logic is underpinned by a sense of the enormous inertial momentum of longer-term shifts of economic balance in Europe that led to the rise in importance of the Low Countries and England. Thus, in Braudel’s view, a slow-moving substratum of forces became manifested at the level of events in a dramatic political climax, which was at once a “crisis” and a “turning point.” Braudel also briefly discusses the purported Ottoman resumption (as a consequence of the 1580–81 transition) of the “war for control of the Indian Ocean.” In his view, energy earlier focused on the Mediterranean had to be transferred (by what Braudel calls the “physics of international relations”) to two external zones: the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.<sup>10</sup> Still, it is clear that, despite his own very considerable investment in the study of the sixteenth century, the rival empires of 1580–81 are for Braudel of lesser consequence in the long term than the great “modern” commercial empires of the seventeenth century—the British, Dutch, and French overseas enterprises. The Habsburgs and Ottomans after 1600, even if not relegated to the “dustbin of history” in this construction, are not seen as necessarily relevant for the longer history even of political arrangements on a global scale. In the hands of historians such as Niels Steensgaard—historians of a more explicitly Weberian bent than Braudel—a tidy classification can be applied to the world of around 1600.<sup>11</sup> On one side of the divide are the nascent, forward-looking “productive enterprises” of the northern Europeans, which will eventually produce the modern world; and on the other side are the increasingly archaic “redistributive enterprises” of the Habsburgs, Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals (into which pot one could also presumably throw the China of the Ming and Qing), whose fate it is to be drawn into modernity only through the relentless “Europeanization of mankind.”

And yet the Habsburgs—still less the Ottomans and Mughals—were by no means carcasses in 1600. The Mughal state was only just emerging into prominence at this time, and it makes little sense to see it as already emitting the odor of decadence. The thrust of most recent historiography on the Ottomans has, for its part, cast enormous doubt on the old paradigms of Ottoman “decline,” which were based on the sour observations of Venetian observers, as well as on internal cyclical theories deriving in part from Ibn Khaldun.<sup>12</sup> As Cemal Kafa-

9. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (London: Collins, 1972), 2:1176–77.

10. Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 2:1166, 1174–76.

11. Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the*

*Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

12. Cornell Fleischer, “Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and ‘Ibn Khaldunism’ in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18.3–4 (July–October 1983): 198–220.

dar has written, “many processes and events dating from the last three and a half centuries of the Ottoman empire were indiscriminately lumped together under the rubric of decline. Transformations in all spheres of life—political, military, institutional, social, economic, and cultural—were neatly explained in the framework of decline. Degeneration of the empire implied that there was no regeneration, vitality or dynamism, but only occasional respite through despotic discipline (until the imported vitality of Europeanization arrived).”<sup>13</sup> The case of the Habsburgs is more curious still, since the paradigm that speaks of a “golden age” followed by an “age of decline” remains in place, with scarcely a sign of challenge. Whether one dates such decline to the 1580s, with the “imperial overstretch” of Philip II, or to the great revolts of the 1640s that dealt a body blow to the ambitions of the Count-Duke of Olivares, most narrative histories continue to argue as if the standard rise, consolidation, and decline cycle fits the Habsburg case perfectly well.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the rivalry on a world scale between the Iberians and their northern European rivals did not quite end in a total triumph for the latter. To be sure, the Dutch (and to a lesser extent the English) did make major inroads into Portuguese holdings in the Indian Ocean between the 1590s and the 1660s. But in Africa and America, the situation was far more ambiguous. With the exception of parts of the Caribbean, the Spanish empire in America remained largely intact at the end of a century of war, raiding, and piracy by the Dutch, French, and English. The most significant successes outside the Caribbean for the newcomers were on the Atlantic seaboard of northern America, where Spanish investments of money and manpower were quite limited. Brazil notoriously remained intact as a Portuguese colony, despite Dutch attempts to settle Pernambuco through Johan Maurits of Nassau and the West-Indische Compagnie. Indeed, Brazil continued through the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be a powerful and vibrant motor in the Portuguese colonial system, and linked not simply to the metropolis but also to West Africa, in a South Atlantic trading system that has unfortunately not received even a fraction of the attention of its North Atlantic counterpart.<sup>15</sup> At this level, the Habsburgs (or even the restored House of Braganza) were hardly the pushovers that the usual whig narratives of imperial competition would have us believe.

Even if we see the seventeenth century as the period when the Dutch and English emerge into great prominence as carriers of transcontinental trade, with

13. Cemal Kafadar, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4.1–2 (1997–98): 33–34.

14. On imperial overstretch, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

15. However, see Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *O Trato dos Viventes: Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul, séculos XVI e XVII* (São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 2000); and the earlier classic by Frédéric Mauro, *Portugal, o Brasil e o Atlântico, 1570–1670*, trans. Manuela Barreto and Artur Teodoro de Matos, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1989).

Amsterdam and London as important clearing houses for this traffic, it is only by thinking anachronistically that one can imagine that the Ottomans, Mughals, and even the Habsburgs can simply be ignored or set aside as trivial. Yet the pressing momentum of whig historiography, the desire to read the nineteenth century back into the seventeenth, and the great teleologies of Marxist and Weberian social-scientific reasoning, all lead in this direction. Even recent historiography on the British empire shows few signs of having moved on these key questions; thus we can learn, as late as the 1990s, from P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins that “the Ottoman empire and Persia can be placed, with China, in a distinct category of regions that presented peculiar obstacles to European expansion in the underdeveloped world. The failure of societies in these three empires to produce modernising elites which were both powerful and cooperative limited their development as independent polities along western lines.” What then could be the fate of such places? Hardly a happy one: for “the presence of large, antique, yet still death-defying political structures meant that indigenous authorities could not be taken over without promoting internal disorder, incurring massive expense and risking international conflict.”<sup>16</sup> Stagnation and suffocation could be the only outcomes, until Westernization could bring about the necessary, radical and wrenching, changes.

## II

Let us pause, if only briefly, to ask what was in fact “antique” (the subtext meaning is “archaic”) about the Mughals, Ottomans, or Habsburgs, and when these polities became so in the perception of historiography. The Mughals ruled over northern India from the 1520s to the late 1850s, but two caveats need to be introduced with respect to this chronology. First, between the late 1530s and the mid-1550s, there was a hiatus in their rule, when the Mughal emperor Humayun was forced to withdraw from northern India on account of the resurgence in power there of Afghan warlords. Second, from the late eighteenth century, and more particularly from the 1770s and 1780s, the Mughal emperor was reduced to a figurehead, so that it is difficult to talk of a Mughal *empire* per se existing in the first half of the nineteenth century. With regard to the Ottomans, the chronology stretches over a far longer period, indeed nearly six centuries. Still, during the first century or so of its existence—that is to say, well into the fifteenth century—it is more plausible to speak of an Ottoman regional polity than a veritable empire. Indeed, as late as 1512, the Ottoman domains were still quite compact, extending west to east roughly from Sarajevo to Sivas, and from the Danube

16. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London: Longman, 1993), 397.

south to the Mediterranean. It is in the sixteenth century that Buda, Oran, Cairo, Mosul, Basra, Mecca, and Suakin all fall into their hands. As for the Habsburgs, they too ruled a quintessentially early modern empire. Charles V (or Charles I of Spain) came to power in Iberia in the 1510s, and the death of the last Habsburg ruler of Spain, Charles II, coincided neatly with the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Of these three structures, two, the Ottoman and the Habsburg, had world-embracing ambitions in the sixteenth century, of a literal sort that set them apart from the older type of universal empire and from most other states of the time—as Sir Walter Raleigh noted in his vast and unfinished *History of the World*. Raleigh’s preface to this work is a curious one, for he tells us that even though he had begun with the notion of a history of the world, he had “lastly purposed (some few sallies excepted) to confine my discourse within this our renowned island of Great Britain,” since it was far better in his initial view to “set together . . . the unjointed and scattered frame of our English affairs, than those of the universal.”<sup>17</sup> Eventually, even this reflection on Britain had to be limited to a few asides, for Raleigh was unable to go chronologically beyond the Romans, whom he left at the end of his work still “flourishing in the middle of the field; having rooted up, or cut down, all that kept it from the eyes and admiration of the world.” However, while closing the work, Raleigh does hint strongly to us how he might have organized that other “universal” history that he had abandoned. Such a history would be oriented, for his times, in terms of the opposition between the Turk and the Spaniard, for “there hath been no state fearful in the east but that of the Turk.” To this observation he adds the counterpart: “nor in the west any prince that hath spread his wings far over his nest but the Spaniard.” Raleigh thus concludes: “These two nations, I say, are at this day the most eminent and to be regarded; the one seeking to root out the Christian religion altogether,—the other the truth and sincere profession thereof; the one to join all Europe to Asia,—the other the rest of all Europe to Spain.”<sup>18</sup>

The Mughals were a somewhat different order of polity than these two great rivals. The Mughals’ ambitions extended periodically into Central Asia, where they may have entertained ideas of recovering the “ancestral homelands” (or *watan*) of their great ancestor Timur; but beyond that and a few residual border disputes with the Safavids, their notions of a frontier of expansion largely seem to have been southwards and eastwards.<sup>19</sup> To the south, a natural limit presented

17. Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World in Five Books*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1820), vol. 2, pt. 1. Also see John Racin, *Sir Walter Raleigh as Historian: An Analysis of “The History of the World”* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974).

18. Raleigh, *History of the World*, 6:368–69.

19. On Mughal ambitions with regard to Central Asia, see Richard C. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1998), 136–46.

itself in the maritime frontier of the Indian Ocean; and though the Mughals had almost attained this limit by 1700, there is no sign, for example, that they ever considered launching an expedition into Sri Lanka, let alone into Southeast Asia. To the east, Bengal represented a very important terrain of expansion between the 1570s and 1660s; and beyond that areas such as Kuch Bihar, Tippera, and Assam fell within the Mughals' reach. But they seem to have set limits to their expansion even here, and no real projects were planned to extend the Mughal domains into the region of Arakan in northern Burma. To this extent, we may see the Mughal state as an unfinished project, in a territorial sense, but also as one that had a proper sense of its limits. We shall seek to explore elsewhere where such ideas might have come from.<sup>20</sup>

When does talk of the "decline" of these three empires begin? Here again, chronology is complex and becomes even more so if one looks to the case of China in the early modern period.<sup>21</sup> To begin with, internally generated political theories within each of these empires carried with them much anxiety about decline, and it was these internal theories that were opportunistically seized upon, and at times deliberately misinterpreted, by outside observers. Theories of Habsburg and Ottoman decline appeared in the late sixteenth century, and Mughal theories in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Kafadar has warned that it will not do to confuse authors who "warn of the possibility of disorder" with those who see disorder as already endemic and characteristic of a "world-in-decline." Bearing this warning in mind, we may distinguish theories that are broadly cyclical and predominantly dynastic in orientation within a given zone from theories that are inclined to see domination and hegemony as a phenomenon that passes from one region of the world to another. The bulk of theories within the Habsburg and Ottoman contexts seems to fall into the first category and is accompanied by "advice" or "reform" literature (*nasihat* or *arbitrío*) proposing ways of checking, attenuating, or even reversing processes of decline.

The central ideas of these literatures involve "corruption," the lack of a proper equilibrium among the elements that hold a polity together, the rise of new social groups associated with money rather than achievement, and a suspicion of new standards that lay aside ascriptive criteria. Yet these are not blanket cultural criticisms. No Spanish *arbitrista* of importance ever recommended abandoning the Catholic religion or suggested that the languorous Mediterranean climate condemned Iberians to a lazy decadence. The only Mughal writers who

20. For a brief reflection on this question, see M. Athar Ali, "The Perception of India in Akbar and Abu'l Fazl," in *Akbar and His India*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 215–24.

21. See William S. Atwell, "Ming Observers of Ming Decline: Some Chinese Views on the 'Seventeenth-Century Crisis' in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3rd ser., 2 (1988): 316–48; see also the earlier classic account by Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).



made such arguments about their own polity were those who did so after the British conquest of India, when they had deeply internalized a form of “cultural cringe.” Rather, typical Mughal writers of the eighteenth century might argue that a decline had occurred in the “masculinity” of the Mughals, or that commercially oriented social groups had come to hold far too much power in the polity.<sup>22</sup> These were arguments that very nearly had the status that astrology may have in such societies; rather than being a fully deterministic science, the theory implies that events are impelled by a certain momentum but can also be altered in their course. Yet these arguments were eventually to be manipulated by others—notably, Western European proponents of the view that the Ottoman empire was the “Sick Man of Europe” or Protestant propagandists of the “Black Legend”—into fully locked-in arguments: the fate of decaying empires was inexorably determined, even as the rise to power of the Netherlands and Britain was written in stone.

In other words, by the mid-seventeenth century the decline of the Ottomans and the Habsburgs was the object of a curious consensus of observers on the inside and outside, but a consensus based on a fundamental incompatibility of the schemes of presentation. A century later, this generalization could apply to the Mughals as well. When Nadir Shah of Iran humiliated them in his campaign of 1739–40, Mughal observers ruefully began to look for reasons why they had “declined”; and despite superficial similarities, their own explanations had little to do with the views of East India Company officials, who were anxious to show by the 1750s that there were easy pickings to be had in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, after having proceeded a fair way down the road to conquest, some of these same East India Company servants would discover virtues in Mughal modes of organization that had until then escaped their notice. Time and again, between 1760 and 1830, the British in India would declare that they aimed to preserve the best of Mughal institutions, while ridding themselves of the dross (which naturally included most of the Islamic character of the state). The British view was generally that something quite substantial did exist to be salvaged from the Mughal state—a notion vastly different from that set out by Mustafa Kemal and the Kemalists at the end of the Ottoman state.

Which brings us, logically, to a consideration of the key elements in the political and institutional functioning of the three “declining” empires. In this respect, their histories diverge, but in complex ways. Mughals and Ottomans appear quite similar in respect of some institutions but dissimilar in respect of

22. Cf. Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–48* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 169–75.

23. Compare Khwaja ‘Abdul Karim ibn Khwaja ‘Aqibat Mahmud Kashmiri, *Bayān-i Wāqī: A Biography of Nādir*

*Shāh Afshār and the Travels of the Author*, ed. K. B. Nasim (Lahore, Pakistan: Research Society of Pakistan, 1970), with William Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs, Particularly Respecting the Present State of Bengal and Its Dependencies* (London: Almon, 1772).

others. In surprising ways, the histories of the Habsburgs and Ottomans converge, and that of the Mughals eventually emerges as quite distinct. There must have been reasons why the Ottoman and Habsburg empires eventually fragmented to produce a large number of smaller—and often deeply divided—nation-states, while the bulk of the Mughal empire holds together even today in the form of a single nation-state, the Republic of India. My focus here will be on three issues: the management of regional diversity; the matter of religious and denominational difference; and the problem of economic change. These three cannot be separated, for a canard has long floated (and has recently been revived by neo-Kemalist economic historians) that the Ottoman empire declined economically because of its rigid adherence to the outmoded legal institutions of Sunni Islam.<sup>24</sup> Again, issues of regional diversity and religious difference often come intertwined in the historiography: it would be difficult indeed to separate the two entirely in the context, say, of the revolt of the Netherlands from Habsburg rule. However, it may be useful to look to the institutions in question—first, in the period of imperial consolidation—and then consider their evolution as time wore on.

The paradox of Habsburg rule lies in the curious contrast between their treatment of Atlantic colonies and European territories. In the latter, a far greater degree of institutional diversity was permitted during the sixteenth century, a diversity implied in the process by which different elements were treated as “kingdoms” attached to one another. Such diversity existed even in the interior of the Habsburgs’ Iberian holdings, so that the terms of their acquisition of Portugal confirm rather than question the rule. Local and regional institutions and privileges were jealously guarded, and when they were questioned—as happened periodically—reactions ranged from grumbling and the threat of litigation to outright rebellion, as in the case of the *comuneros*’ revolt (early in the reign of Charles V) and from time to time thereafter. In other words, the metropolitan heart of Habsburg rule was characterized by a diversity of fiscal privileges (*mercedes* and *fueros*), special arrangements going back to the Reconquest, community claims, and other institutional exceptions to practically any “absolutist rule” that we can find. These arrangements were to frustrate the ambitions of the great *validos* in their drive to consolidate the power of their masters, Lerma acting for Philip III and Olivares for Philip IV.<sup>25</sup> As Olivares wrote secretly to Philip IV as early as 1625: “The most important thing in Your Majesty’s monarchy is for you to become the king of Spain: by this I mean, Sire, that Your Majesty

24. For a relatively sophisticated version of this argument, see Timur Kuran, “The Islamic Commercial Crisis: Institutional Roots of Economic Underdevelopment in the Middle East,” *Journal of Economic History* 63.2 (June 2003): 414–46. Cf. Nelly Hanna, *Making Big Money in 1600: The Life and Times of Isma‘il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian Merchant* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

25. John H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); also Richard A. Stradling, *Philip IV and the Government of Spain, 1621–65* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 172–206.

should not be content with being king of Portugal, of Aragon, of Valencia, and count of Barcelona, but should secretly plan and work to reduce these kingdoms of which Spain is composed to the style and laws of Castile, with no difference whatsoever.”<sup>26</sup> But such a plan was eventually to prove beyond the grasp of the Habsburgs.

In the overseas territories, on the other hand (and here we must leave aside the problematic status of the Habsburg North African possessions), the process of conquest was based on the notional implantation and reproduction of imported institutions.<sup>27</sup> We see this kind of reproduction first with the *encomienda*, brought into the Caribbean, then into Mexico, and then into Peru, on the basis of a model that itself came from the Estremadura. The decline of this institution brought others (such as the *hacienda*) in its place for the control of land and labor, but everywhere the same linguistic and terminological grid appeared: the *repartimiento* to organize space, the *reducción* to bring populations together, the model city with its *traza* plan and its council, the imposing fortified monasteries with their lands, the Franciscans and Jesuits with their great linguistic and brainwashing projects, the universities to train creole elites, and so on. As the Spanish empire wends its majestic and often deeply destructive way from Hispaniola and Cuba, to Mexico and Central America, to Peru and Bolivia, and eventually to the Philippines, we are struck by the degree of orderliness in the midst of chaos caused by disease and displacement, the acts of repetition and institutional reproduction, and the desire for sameness that appears to deny the diversity of these territories. For how much did Cuba, the valley of Mexico, and the area of Manila have in common before the Spanish irruption?

To be sure, the problems of administration in the sixteenth century almost immediately produced fissure, as the viceroyalty of New Spain was separated from that of Peru, while the Philippines—though notionally dependent on Mexico—enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy. However, against this result we must look to institutions that produced a constant circulation across these territories, whether of administrators, merchants, religious, or intellectuals. Unlike the two other empires that we shall consider, the Habsburg empire was from its inception explicitly colonial—based uncompromisingly on the dual principles of settlement and economic exploitation. Some rough figures indicate how matters appeared on the first of these fronts, suggesting a steady increase in the European population but also in the population of mestizos and mulattos (who would eventually, in some cases, be absorbed into the creole elites objecting to colonial rule).<sup>28</sup>

26. Cited in John Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 105.

27. On the somewhat anomalous position of the North African possessions, see Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Les Juifs du roi d'Espagne* (Paris: Hachette, 1999).

28. Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, “Las Indias durante los siglos XVI y XVII,” in *Historia social y económica de España y América*, ed. Jaime Vicens Vives, vol. 3 (Barcelona: Libros Vicens, 1982), 336, 451.

**Table 1** Population Statistics for Spanish America

	1570	1650
By racial classification		
Whites	118,000	655,000
Negros, mestizos, and mulattos	230,000	1,299,000
Indios	8,927,150	8,405,000
By region		
Mexico	3,555,000	3,800,000
Peru	1,585,000	1,600,000
Colombia	825,000	750,000
Bolivia	737,000	850,000
Chile	620,000	550,000
Central America	575,000	650,000
Antilles	85,650	614,000
Others	1,292,500	1,545,000
<i>Total</i>	9,275,150	10,359,000

There is surprisingly little in the nature of this Habsburg empire, as it appears in 1650, that would suggest the eventual fission of the whole into a series of political entities ranging in size from Argentina and Mexico to Salvador and Honduras. To the extent that there is regional diversity, it appears largely determined by three phenomena: the extent of the survival of the descendants of the pre-Columbian populations (and in some cases, as with the area that comes to be known as Argentina, the related question of the pre-1500 population density); second, the diversity of ecologies and economies, with a predominance of mining in some regions, of agriculture in others, and of unsettled groups in still others; and third, the nature of the slave trade, the import of African slave populations, and the differential impact of these factors on areas that range from Mexico and the Caribbean to Ecuador, Colombia, and Bolivia. That said, the late sixteenth century did see the first signs of particularistic patriotism in different parts of Spanish America: residents of Mexico often viewed that colony (and city) as a center of true majesty unlike any other in America, while the denizens of Lima came for their part to respond with claims for their own city and for the colony and viceroyalty it governed.<sup>29</sup>

Further reinforcing this picture of relatively limited regional diversity overseas (in contrast to the surprising tolerance of diversity in the Habsburg Euro-

29. For a discussion of these themes through a series of evocative biographical sketches, see David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

pean possessions) is the religious question. Here, the contrast between Europe and the extra-European colonies is far less sharp. The empire of the Habsburgs, it is very nearly a cliché to assert, was born to religious intolerance of a sort that few other early modern empires endured (the only valid comparisons appear to be with Safavid Iran and Tokugawa Japan). The voyage of Columbus coincided with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and a century later the policy of religious homogenization was sealed with the expulsion of the *moriscos*, decreed in 1609 and more or less implemented by 1614. This population of forced converts from Islam to Christianity was suspected by many of being a “fifth column” for the Ottomans within the heart of Spain. Their expulsion (mostly to North Africa but also to the eastern Mediterranean) may have involved as many as 275,000 to 300,000 people—perhaps 3 to 4 percent of a total population of eight and a half million.<sup>30</sup> The effects of this expulsion were quite uneven regionally in Spain, with the regions most affected being in the southeast, especially Valencia and Aragon. Whether these events had a massive economic effect may be doubted, but at any rate it is clear that the expulsions symbolized the Habsburg monarchy’s drive toward a form of religious homogenization whose targets were not only “heretics” (that is, Protestantism) but also the other religions of the book. Intolerance broadly obtained in the American possessions as well, for even if there were periods when the population of *marranos* (or converted Jews) was tolerated in Mexico, Peru, and the Río de la Plata, at other moments they were subjected to fierce persecution. Some recent historians have gone overboard in their enthusiasm to defend the record of the Inquisition at the time of the Habsburgs: the nature of this institution should be set against the record of the Ottoman and Mughal empires.

From the early sixteenth century, the Ottoman domains were recognized as a place of refuge for religious groups persecuted in Europe—for Jews, later for the *moriscos*, but also for a vast number of groups including the Anabaptists and other Protestant sects. The Ottoman understanding of most of these groups was that they were “protected minorities” (*dhimmis*), which was equally the case for Armenian and other Eastern Orthodox Christian populations. According to at least one authority, the success of Ottoman expansion in the sixteenth century meant a sort of golden age for these minority communities: thus “the victory of the Ottoman Empire symbolized, in the sphere of economics, a victory of Greeks, Turks, renegade Christians, Armenians, Ragusans, and Jews over the two-century-old commercial hegemony of Venice and Genoa.”<sup>31</sup> The picture is

30. See Antonio Domínguez Ortiz and Bernard Vincent, *Historia de los moriscos: Vida y tragedia de una minoría* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1978).

31. Traian Stoianovich, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant,” *Journal of Economic History* 20.2 (1960): 234–313, as cited in Halil İnalcık, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, 1300–1600 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214.

somewhat different for rural Christians living under Ottoman rule in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, but there is little doubt that the commercial and professional classes among both Jews and Christians saw the Ottomans as their protectors in the Mediterranean. The Ottomans seem to have internalized this image of themselves too: the Ottoman sultan, for example, wrote a reproachful letter to his ally King Charles IX of France after the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre of 1572, chastising him for his unjustifiable treatment of religious minorities. On the other hand, the Ottomans did collect a discriminatory poll tax (*cizye* or *jizya*) from their non-Muslim subjects, which accounted for as much as 8 percent of the empire's total revenues; and in the Balkans, the Ottoman state levied an additional collective tax on Christian villages (a poll tax on fugitives and the dead).

But perhaps most important was the practice of the *devshirme*, the "levy of boys from the Christian rural population for services at the palace or the divisions of the standing army at the Porte," as Halil Inalcik defines it. This levy was an adaptation by the Ottomans of the so-called *mamluk* institution that had long existed in Muslim states, save that the Ottomans stretched the definition beyond what was in fact legally permissible. For usually, these elite slaves (*mamluks* or *kul*) were war captives, not drawn upon, as the Ottomans in part drew them, from one's own subject populations. The result in the Ottoman case was, on the one hand, the opportunity for some former Christians, after alienation from their natal families, "social death," and rebirth, to acculturate into Ottoman elite practices and, at times, rise up very high in the administrative and military hierarchies; yet, on the other hand, the practice was based on force, and we must imagine that it was accompanied by considerable resentment on the part of populations that were obliged to surrender their male children in this manner. At any rate, it is instructive that, while the Ottomans were eventually imitated in this matter by the Safavids (especially toward the late sixteenth century), the Mughals for the most part steered clear of this institution as a basis of their state-building.<sup>32</sup>

The Ottoman slave bureaucracy became an object of admiration on the part of some European observers, such as Machiavelli, who saw it as a meritocracy such as contemporary European states were incapable of producing.<sup>33</sup> The *mamluk* institution seems to have functioned in the most efficient fashion in the sixteenth century, but—as Metin Kunt has shown—its form and content changed somewhat in the seventeenth.<sup>34</sup> These changes were accompanied by changes in

32. On elite slavery in Mughal India, see Indrani Chatterjee, "A Slave's Quest for Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Hindustan," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 37.1 (2000): 53–86.

33. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Luigi Ricci (1515; New York: New American Library, 1959), 43–45.

34. I. Metin Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550–1650* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

the relationship between the central and provincial administrations, a theme to which we should now turn briefly. As we have already seen, the Ottoman state began from a core in Anatolia and Rumelia and then expanded in fits and starts, extending further east but also acquiring substantial territories in Bulgaria and Macedonia by 1389. Expansion continued very gradually over the next century and more over the Serbian kingdom and Albania, and further east still, to include such towns as Konya, Kayseri, and Amasya. This heartland, which had been consolidated by 1512, was to become the core for a massive subsequent expansion that continued into the mid–sixteenth century. In the early 1530s, economic historians estimate a population for the Ottoman domains (excluding the Arab provinces) of around 17 million, and perhaps about 25 million by the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>35</sup> If broadly true, these statistics place the population at roughly the same level as the Habsburg empire’s in 1650 (after the loss of Portugal and its dependent territories), which we may estimate at somewhat over 20 million.

However, the articulation of the Ottoman empire in terms of regions differs substantially from that of the Habsburgs. The classic centralizing fiscal institutions of the Ottomans—especially the *timar*, the prebendal assignment on the basis of which the Ottomans drew military manpower (outside the standing army)—were to be found largely in the heartland and the main military routes leading westward. The Ottoman policy, unlike that of the Habsburgs, was one of compromise: the maintenance of various forms of “customary privilege” in external or newly incorporated territories, rather than the insistent reproduction of idealized central institutions. In areas such as North Africa, the Ottomans announced early that their intention was not to disturb local institutions, and they instead sought out local elites with whom they could collaborate. In André Raymond’s summary: “Where the Ottomans had found ancient traditions of the state, and strongly constituted socio-political groups, they frequently made an effort to compromise with these traditions and these groups, rather than trying to impose their administrative system in its totality.”<sup>36</sup> The same was largely the case in other regions, whether Iraq, the Hijaz, or Habesh (though arguably less so in the Balkans). In most of the territories they conquered after 1512, the Ottomans sought to benefit from the opportunities presented by economies more cash-rich than the somewhat impoverished and sparsely populated core of Anatolia. Further, even in the sixteenth century, when the circulation of bureaucrats and officials between the imperial center and the provinces was far more regular than

35. The classic study on this issue remains Ömer Lütfi Barkan, “Essai sur les Données statistiques des registres de recensement dans l’empire Ottoman au XVe et XVIe siècles,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1.1 (1958): 9–36. I have calculated these numbers from Barkan’s tables, using his coefficient of five members per

household; they have, however, frequently been misread by more recent historians to suggest a population of 12 million in about 1520.

36. André Raymond, “Les Provinces arabes (XVIe–XVIIIe siècle),” in *Histoire de l’Empire Ottoman*, ed. Robert Mantran (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 356.

**Table 2** Ottoman Population Estimates (Households and Population), c. 1530

Region	Muslims	Christians	Jews	Households	Population
Anatolia	1,067,355	78,783	559	1,146,697	5,733,485
Rumelia	291,593	888,002	12,204	1,191,799	5,958,995
Balkans/Aegean	244,958	862,707	4,134	1,111,799	5,559,395
<i>Total</i>	1,603,906	1,829,492	16,897	3,450,295	17,251,875

it became later, the Ottoman dependence on local elites remained high. Theirs was never quite a “settler empire,” and there was simply no question of sending out tens of thousands of colonists from a core to a periphery, with the possible exception of the *timariots* (who may have numbered 20,000 in the late fifteenth century) sent out into the Balkans and Eastern Europe, or the migrants who went out from Anatolia and Rumelia to colonize untenanted lands in areas such as northeastern Bulgaria, Thrace, the Macedonian plains, and Thessaly. Where the Ottoman elite could usually be found was in positions of privilege, whether in Tunis, Cairo, Budapest, or Baghdad, but the contrast with the America of the Habsburgs could scarcely be more stark.

In sum, therefore, even in those territories that the Ottomans directly ruled (as distinct from tribute-paying lands, such as Wallachia or Moldavia), the degree of centralized control varied enormously, whether over political and fiscal institutions or over religious practices. Even with respect to money and monetary circulation, the Ottomans permitted an enormous diversity of regimes to exist in different parts of the empire, though the *akçe* existed as a notional unit of account for fiscal purposes.<sup>37</sup> Where religion was concerned, to be sure, tolerance was not general, and in particular the Ottomans, with their attachment to Sunnism, had a distaste for the Shi’ism they found in eastern Anatolia or in the borderlands with Safavid Iran. The Ottomans naturally associated the Shi’ism in their territories with the religious heterodoxy (*ghuluww*) that had given birth to the Safavid regime of Shah Isma‘il in the early sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Again, with regard to Christians, it is certain that conflicts arose periodically and that instances of forced conversion (as well as of “martyrdom” in such contexts) can be found. However, as Haim Gerber has effectively argued, overall the *dhimmis* in the Ottoman empire found that regime to be a congenial one for many purposes and even preferred it when they had other options open to them.<sup>39</sup>

37. Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 88–111.

38. Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs, 2002).

39. Haim Gerber, “Muslims and *Zimmis* in Ottoman Economy and Society: Encounters, Culture, and Knowledge,” in *Studies in Ottoman Social and Economic Life*, ed. Raoul Motika, Christoph Herzog, and Michael Ursinus (Heidelberg, Germany: Heidelbergger Orientverlag, 1999), 99–124. Also see Ronald C. Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean world, 1571–1640* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).



This view of the Ottoman dispensation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries conflicts with the received wisdom of many post-Ottoman nationalist historiographies, notably those that portray Ottoman rule as the “saddest and darkest period” in Balkan history.<sup>40</sup> In this construction, as Maria Todorova observes, it is held that “on the eve of the Ottoman conquest, the medieval societies of the Balkans had reached a high degree of sophistication that made them commensurate with, if not ahead of, developments in Western Europe.” Ottoman rule, then, was “a calamity of unparalleled consequences because it disrupted the natural development of southeast European societies as a substantial and creative part of the overall process of European humanism and the Renaissance.”<sup>41</sup> The Balkan elites were either annihilated physically or driven out, leaving only the Orthodox church and the village commune to preserve and defend something of a glorious pre-Ottoman past. Todorova suggests that, after the Ottoman conquest, “only a small part of the Balkan Christian aristocracies were integrated in the lower echelons of power” and that, in the vassal territories, such Christian elites were tolerated to a higher degree, though not properly integrated into the Ottoman world, where elite culture was “produced and consumed exclusively by educated Ottoman, Arabic and Persian-speaking Muslims.” On the other hand, she also points to how “the Ottoman period provided a framework for a veritable flourishing of post-Byzantine Balkan culture,” a long distance indeed from the representation of this period as some form of “Dark Age”—a representation promoted by nationalist historiographies in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This evaluation of the Ottomans—as “bearers of an essentially alien civilization characterized by a fanatic and militant religion,” as invaders who “brought about the pastoralization and agrarianization” of the regions over which they ruled—would find echoes in populist, Hindu nationalist depictions of Mughal rule in South Asia. However, these depictions are unsupported by most authoritative scholarly writing on the Mughals, which tends to portray them as ruling over a complex and plural empire with a fair degree of ideological flexibility. Like the Ottomans, the Mughals were a Sunni Muslim dynasty, though they did have extended flirtations with Shi‘ism both in the sixteenth and the later eighteenth centuries. Again, like the Ottomans, their ruling elite was a composite one, made up of Indian Hindus and Muslims, as well as Iranians and Central Asians. The substantial presence of non-Muslims at the highest ranks of the ruling elite does, however, set the Mughals apart from the Ottomans and even more so from the Habsburgs—in whose empire one cannot imagine a non-Christian coming to occupy a place like that afforded the Rajputs under the Mughal empire. Again,

40. Konstantin Jireček, *Geschichte der Bulgaren* (Prague: Tempsky, 1876), as cited in Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 183.

41. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 182–83.

unlike the Ottoman case, the place of elite slavery in the Mughal hierarchy was limited, though slavery as such was not unknown at court.

The Mughal bureaucracy was organized around a numerical principle of rank, derived from that of the Mongols and adapted and refined in the course of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The core institution was the dual *mansab* rank, with those who attained a sufficiently high rank being termed *amirs* (or *grandees*; pl. *umara*). This rank entitled the holder to remuneration, either in cash or in the form of a prebendal assignment known as the *jagir*.<sup>42</sup> These assignments were intended to circulate, and the *mansabdar* elite were periodically dispatched on assignments to various provinces of the empire. Thus, to take one example from around 1600, a high *mansabdar* of Central Asian origin, Sa'id Khan Chaghatay, on his return from Bengal and Bihar, was reassigned to the Punjab. Such transfers also occurred at lower levels in the bureaucracy, even if some tenacious elements attempted to remain for long periods in a region where they had built up a support base or clientele. At the very lowest levels of the hierarchy, one also eventually found officials who were deemed too petty to merit transfer.

This system coexisted, as many seventeenth-century observers noted, with another: a system of rooted local magnates called *zamindars*, many of whom belonged to families that already had deep roots before the Mughals' arrival.<sup>43</sup> Mughal rule was in effect a compromise with such magnates, and periodic conflicts broke out that had to be resolved through main force or skillful negotiation. *Zamindars* were also important local patrons and saw themselves as located in their vernacular regional cultures, whereas the Mughals by the late sixteenth century had clearly adopted Persian as their idiom of rule.<sup>44</sup> Eventually, acculturation into the Persian idiom also became a means for various non-Muslim groups to accede to the Mughal hierarchy without converting to Islam, a phenomenon whose parallel would have been inconceivable under the Habsburgs (where non-Christians were concerned) and somewhat difficult under the Ottomans, even if one can periodically find Jews exercising a powerful influence at the Ottoman court around 1600.

The ideological basis of this "Mughal compromise" was articulated in the late sixteenth century by the statesman and intellectual Shaikh Abu'l Fazl, who also presented an argument for "peace toward all" (*sulh-i kull*), based on notions of social equilibrium that itself derived from an older tradition of Persian and

42. Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Mughal Assignment System during Akbar's Early Years, 1556–1575," in *Medieval India: Researches in the History of India, 1200–1750*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 62–128.

43. On the role of this group, see S. Nurul Hasan, "Zamindars under the Mughals," in *The Mughal State, 1526–1750*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 284–300.

44. Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 32.2 (1998): 317–48.

Central Asian political treatises (*akblaq*).<sup>45</sup> At the heart of the matter was the vastness and diversity of the empire that the Mughals aimed to rule over, once they had completed the conquest of Gujarat and Bengal by the 1570s. The Mughals ruled by 1600 over a population that cannot have been far from 70 million and, by the end of the seventeenth century—with population growth and the southward expansion—may have been closer to 120 million.<sup>46</sup> Comparing these population figures to those of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, we can gain a sense of the difference in proportions, although it is the far higher population density of South Asia (rather than the size of territories) that accounts for the difference. That an empire the size of the Mughals' could be ruled over simply by force was inconceivable; the majority of the population was made up of non-Muslims, and the institutions that existed in the different regions were also very varied. Only for a brief period in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries had a state—the sultanate of Delhi—had anything like the extensive reach that the Mughals possessed. When Muslim clerics at the time of that state had proposed a forthright attack on Brahmanical culture, the sultans balked at what they saw as an infeasible plan. Instead, the Mughals proposed a compromise, in which the ruler would take on attributes and practices that appealed to his non-Muslim subjects, while Mughal rule would then proceed on the basis of a progressive Persianization of elite culture and the incorporation of extensive territories through recognizably Mughal fiscal and administrative institutions. This approach was articulated with a fair degree of clarity by the rebel prince Muhammad Akbar, to his father, the emperor 'Alamgir, in the 1680s: he reminded his father that “former emperors like Akbar had contracted an alliance with this race [of Rajputs] and conquered the realm of Hindustan with their help.”<sup>47</sup>

However persuasive ideas of balance or equilibrium (*i'tidal*) might have been, ultimately Mughal rule was based on trial and error, and at times was tested by reactions from a subject population made up of an armed peasantry that the Mughals did not have the means to pacify. By the early eighteenth century, powerful regional magnates emerged, some from within the Mughal hierarchy and others from within the ranks of the *zamindars*; together, they set about dismantling some of the more centralized aspects of Mughal rule, while still preserving its form and institutions. Even at its height, the Mughal empire had not functioned, though, as a colonial regime; and even if resources had flowed to the court (which

45. Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 61–67.

46. I follow the reasoning in Ashok V. Desai, “Population and Standards of Living in Akbar’s Time—A Second Look,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 15.1 (1978): 70–76, while accepting his lower-bound estimates of 65 to 70 million. A far higher population of between 107 and 115 million for the Mughal empire in about 1600 is

defended by Irfan Habib, “Population,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1:166–67.

47. This correspondence may be found in Jadunath Sarkar, “Muhammad Akbar: The Nemesis of Aurangzib,” in *Studies in Aurangzib’s Reign* (London: Sangam, 1989), 66–72, citation on 69.

was usually located in the empire's northern Indian heartland), it is difficult to portray the whole as a core ruling over a series of exploited peripheries. However, in the eighteenth century, revenue-flows from regions such as Bengal, Gujarat, or the Deccan first dried to a trickle, then eventually ceased altogether. It was this weakened Mughal center that the English East India Company was able first to manipulate, then eventually displace.

It is clear that, in most respects, the Mughals resembled the Ottomans far more than they did the Habsburgs. Both the Mughal and Ottoman empires were largely based on contiguous territorial expansion, whereas the Iberian model (later imitated by the Dutch, British, and French) was "seaborne." Further, neither the Mughals nor the Ottomans can be thought to have ruled over "colonial empires" (nationalist Balkan historiography notwithstanding). Neither Mughals nor Ottomans systematically promoted settler colonies or based their empires on an extractive and exploitative relationship of the type that existed between Castile and the lands over which the Habsburgs ruled. Both Ottomans and Mughals promoted a composite elite, the latter through a form of *acculturation douce*, and the former through the far more rigid mode of the *devshirme*. Again, both engaged in extensive compromises with local and regional elites and permitted a degree of variation that existed for the Habsburgs within the Iberian peninsula but not outside it. Arguably, in this respect the Mughal compromise went deeper than the Ottoman, but it was also less robust to the extent that it led to the rise of centrifugal forces within a century and a half of the establishment of Mughal rule.

### III

What impact did these imperial regimes have on the character of economic change in the regions that they ruled? The Habsburg case is the classic one, for the usual argument is that the nature of their colonialism benefited neither the colonies nor eventually the metropolis. To be sure, the problem was considerably exacerbated by two other factors: the shrinking native populations of the Americas and the enormous cost that interimperial wars placed on the Habsburgs in the course of the seventeenth century. Yet, paradoxically, the Habsburg colonies seem in some respect to have fared better than the metropolis, particularly in the latter half of the seventeenth century. In the case of Mexico, in the seventeenth century, a turning away from mining to agriculture, and to manufacturing for the domestic market, seems to have taken place, as the colony became somewhat less oriented to its transatlantic links. Together with subsistence farms and sugar estates, great cattle ranches emerged using the institution of the *hacienda* and developed new local and regional patterns of economy that were less tied up with the fate of the port towns. This new regime—described in terms of "local self-sufficient economies with their own urban centre [that] could survive inde-

pendently of the transatlantic trade, dealing with other localities in particular commodities, and trading in particular with Mexico City, a market, an entrepôt, a source of capital, a metropolis”—was also linked to a rise in the proportion of government revenues that were retained in Mexico for administration and public works rather than remitted to Spain.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, this regime cannot be generalized to other parts of Spanish America or to the Philippines. In the case of Peru, despite expansion in the production of wine and sugar, the dependence on mining remained substantial. However, one also remarks in the seventeenth century the growth of inter-American trade between Mexico and Venezuela, or Mexico and Peru, which has been correlated with a “shift of the Spanish American economy and its mounting independence of Spain, the decrease of remittances to the metropolis and the growth of investment in the colonies themselves.”<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the economy of Castile has been described as “trapped in a vicious cycle of depression” that was particularly marked in the latter half of the seventeenth century.<sup>50</sup> Harvest failures in 1665–68 led to major inflation in food prices, and a series of economic and natural disasters followed persistently in the decade from 1677 to 1687.<sup>51</sup> The population of the region seems to have stagnated over most of the seventeenth century, and there were also periodic monetary crises, so that even official observers wrote of how, by 1685, “the state of the whole kingdom of Castile is utterly wretched, especially Andalucía, where the aristocracy are without funds, the middle elements poverty-stricken, artisans reduced to vagrancy or beggary, and many dying of hunger.”<sup>52</sup>

Even if we take this view to be somewhat exaggerated, it is clear that the Habsburg experience of empire did produce a form of “imperial trauma” or, at least, severe unintended consequences for the metropolis. Ottoman historians see the empire they study as producing consequences of a quite different sort. Thus, writing of the Ottoman empire as a form of “welfare state,” the doyen of modern-day Ottoman studies, Halil İnalcik, avers that “mercantilism was in complete contrast to Ottoman notions of economic relations.” Rather, he portrays the Ottomans as interested at one and the same time in promoting “an economy of plenty” and intervening extensively to create “regulations for customs and guild manufacture, fixing maxima in prices, market inspection on the quality and measures of goods, monopolies on the manufacture and sale of certain necessities.”<sup>53</sup>

48. Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs*, 230–31.

49. Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs*, 244.

50. The contrast is pithily summed up in the phrase, “Spain Frail, America Sturdy,” by Peter Bakewell, in his *A History of Latin America: Empires and Sequels, 1450–1930* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

51. See the classic essay by Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, “La crisis de Castilla en 1677–1687,” *Revista Portuguesa de História* 10 (1962): 435–51.

52. Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs*, 288.

53. İnalcik, *Economic and Social History*, 1:49–52. It is striking how heavily İnalcik’s conception here remains influenced by earlier whig-oriented historians such as Jakob van Klaveren, “Fiskalismus, Merkantilismus, Korruption: Drei Aspekte der Finanz- und Wirtschaftspolitik des Ancien Régime,” *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 47 (1960): 333–53.

It may be argued, however, that Inalcik distorts important features of the comparative picture. First, he seems inclined toward caricature in his contrast between grasping Western “mercantilists,” on the one hand, and paternalistic “easterners,” on the other. He vastly overstates the *dirigiste* character of the Ottoman economy, partly because he attributes too great an importance to the Ottoman center and to those parts of the empire (notably urban nodes such as Istanbul, Bursa, or Izmir) where the state had a relatively strong presence. This distortion is allied in turn to a recent trend that overstates the role of military supplies and the provision of war materials in the articulation of the Ottoman economy.

Also exaggerated is the role played by Islam as a determining feature in the long-term trajectory of that economy. From this assessment to one in which Islam, and Muslim institutions pertaining to property and capital, determine the long-term “underdevelopment” of areas under Ottoman rule is but a short distance. One can well imagine historiography on the “oppression of Christians” using these assessments creatively to find that, in the absence of Ottoman (that is, Muslim) rule, many parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans would have flourished economically under the aegis of a “Christian economy.” However, the gap between precept and practice was considerable; and even if the Ottoman state prohibited the export of gold and silver (to take but one example), these metals flowed east to the Safavid and Mughal domains in huge quantities in the seventeenth century. In a similar vein, economic changes in Egypt, the Balkans, and even Anatolia cannot always be read as the consequence of top-down initiatives emanating from the state. The transformation of international markets, the growing prospects of commercial agriculture, and regional complementarities must equally be taken into account.

The dangers of the “top-down” view can be seen in the manner in which Central European and Balkan nationalist historiography has laid the “underdevelopment” of that region wholly at the door of the Ottoman state. Thus, in the writings of a major Hungarian historian of the interwar period, Gyula Szekfü, we learn that “the Ottomans destroyed the normal development of the Hungarian state and nation by their three hundred years of war” and also that Ottoman rule was “the most severe . . . probably the only major catastrophe of Hungarian history”—the “cause of all later misfortunes of Hungary.”<sup>54</sup> Central to this portrayal is the Ottoman fiscal system, in which the tax burden was not only inordinately high but also linked to a form of “command economy” in which “the peasants had to sell their products to the Sultan at a low official mandatory price, which amounted to an extra form of taxation.”<sup>55</sup> Some more recent research has moved away from this sort of appraisal while maintaining a largely “top-down”

54. As cited in Iván T. Berend, *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 22.

55. The term “command economy” is used in John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

perspective. In these more balanced writings, the general view is that “Ottoman occupation of the Balkans actually helped to replace the nomadic transhumance way of life with permanent settlements and agricultural activity” and that “the state encouraged the cultivation of unused land by granting private ownership, which led to rice cultivation in the river valleys.”<sup>56</sup> However, once again, even positive features such as these are associated with the classic *timar* system, while the emergence of the tax-farming (*malikane*) regime of the seventeenth century is seen as producing many negative side effects, including an enormous rise in the tax burden.<sup>57</sup>

The case of the Mughal empire contrasts with those of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires in clear ways. First, it is evident that until the last quarter of the eighteenth century (and in some regions, even beyond), South Asia possessed massive resources in terms of artisanal manufacture that imports were unable to affect. Second, much recent work has demonstrated that the seventeenth century, as well as the first half of the eighteenth, witnessed considerable agrarian expansion that accompanied steady population growth. It was only in the context of the late eighteenth century that the wars of colonization, together with some devastating famines (such as that in Bengal in the early 1770s), brought about a substantial change in this picture. All in all, the centuries of Mughal rule are centuries of relative prosperity for much of South Asia, if one excludes moments of crisis such as the great Gujarat famine of the early 1630s. It is no longer plausible to argue that standards of living in Mughal India steadily fell behind those in Europe between 1500 and 1800; and if one must seek a “great divergence” (as Kenneth Pomeranz has proposed for China and Europe), it must surely lie in the period after 1780 or 1800.<sup>58</sup> Thus, whereas historians of the Ottoman empire seem largely content to argue that, by 1800, the domains ruled over by the Sublime Porte had fallen—in relative terms, at least—behind their neighbors to the west, historians of South Asia would be very reluctant to admit such a claim. In which case, it would be difficult to lay the blame at the door of Mughal institutions.

The view that I am developing here is at some variance with the cosy consensus that existed in the late 1960s, when historians such as Halil Inalcik,

56. Berend, *History Derailed*, 24. Berend’s analysis here depends in fair measure on Fikret Adanir, “Tradition and Rural Change in Southeastern Europe during Ottoman Rule,” in *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages Until the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Daniel Chirot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 131–76.

57. For a somewhat different view than the classic Balkan nationalist one, see Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade, and the Struggle for Land,*

1600–1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). McGowan stresses the growing importance of *chiftlik* (small estate) formation and a context of demographic decline in the seventeenth century that is not explained in “top-down” terms. Adanir also draws upon McGowan’s work, to argue that the *chiftlik* should not be understood as “re-feudalization.”

58. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Subhi Labib, and Irfan Habib sought to demonstrate how the Ottomans and the Mughals had produced institutional structures vastly inferior to those of an imagined “West.”<sup>59</sup> Some of these writers focused on the ideology of these states, while others—such as Habib—took a more orthodox Marxist line, suggesting that the nature of class relations in the Mughal empire was such that a small elite siphoned off the surplus and used it for wasteful, conspicuous consumption, leaving the bulk of artisans and peasantry in abject and undifferentiated poverty. Yet even in the 1960s, other voices suggested that one might look at the long-term trajectory of the Mughal empire’s economy in quite different terms. Tapan Raychaudhuri, for instance, argued that by the later Mughal period, “in several regions along the coast [in India] we find a powerful and rich entrepreneurial class and focal points of specialized economic activity which were not quantitatively insignificant in relation to the not very extensive territories [in Europe] which are our relevant points of reference.” He then went on to state: “As some of these territories, Gujarat and Bengal in particular, long enjoyed the benefits of Mughal peace and the urban-commercial development that went with it, conditions there were no more unfavourable to eventual industrialization than in pre-Meiji Japan. It would not be absurd to argue that in 1800 the relevant conditions were not more favourable anywhere else outside certain parts of West Europe and the New World.”<sup>60</sup>

The concealed implications of such an argument are not far to seek. The first, and most obvious, of these is that the imperial form of state may have acted as a check on the economic transformation of some regions by tying them willy-nilly to others that were less dynamic. If we are to take this view seriously, it would imply that the growing autonomy of the regions from the Mughal center in the eighteenth century may have been an organic process, which their reintegration into the British empire in the nineteenth century actually checked. In other words, a post-Mughal scenario of smaller regional states may have favored some regions far more than others. The second implication of this view is that the “Mughal peace” provided the preconditions for such a transformation because, first, the Mughal state was not a colonial one that extracted massive surpluses from the regions and transferred them to a metropolitan core; and second, because a “powerful and rich entrepreneurial class” did come to exist in these regions, benefiting from their centuries-long participation in regional and oce-

59. Halil Inalcik, “Capital Formation in the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Economic History* 29.1 (March 1969): 97–140; Irfan Habib, “Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India,” *Journal of Economic History* 29.1 (March 1969): 32–78; Subhi Y. Labib, “Capitalism in Medieval Islam,” *Journal of Economic History* 29.1 (March 1969): 79–96.

60. Tapan Raychaudhuri, “A Re-interpretation of Nineteenth-Century Indian Economic History?” in *Indian Economy in the Nineteenth Century: A Symposium*, by Morris D. Morris, et al. (New Delhi: Indian Economic and Social History Association, 1969), 77–100, citation on 87.



anic trade.<sup>61</sup> Still, the point to make is that Raychaudhuri's argument is presented in a counterfactual mode, whereas the long-term outcome in South Asia was not postimperial fragmentation but continued political consolidation.

In contrast, the longer-term outcomes in both the Habsburg and the Ottoman cases were fragmented polities born in a set of late imperial and postimperial moments. The disintegration of the Ottoman domains was a slow and painful one, which seems to have endured from the mid-eighteenth century through all of the century that followed. Central to the arguments of those who touted Ottoman disintegration was the unnatural character of the empire and the obviously "primordial identities" of the states that emerged from its debris. These were deeply dubious arguments but with enormous purchase in this case, whereas such arguments had a far more limited place with respect to South Asia. The situation in Spanish America is a more curious one, since Bolívar's ambitions explicitly included a consolidation of the former colonies (visible in his project for *Gran Colombia*), rather than their disintegration into small units.<sup>62</sup> Here, the clear comparison is with the United States, where the disbanding of the continental army in the aftermath of the revolutionary war, and the subsequent creation of an imperial state that organized progressive colonization in a westward direction, was a model that Spanish America was unable to emulate in the nineteenth century. The spectacle of a Spanish America that fragments into bitterly conflicting "nations" is particularly strange from a South Asian perspective, given that so much in South Asia allows one to argue for "primordial" differences of language, custom, and culture.

Why, then, did South Asia, like China, produce a continental-sized polity in the twentieth century, which, though calling itself a nation-state, possesses many of the attributes of an imperial polity? The facile answer is that India was the heritage of the British empire, but that response can be easily refuted. For, in the regions of the world that they ruled in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the British left behind as much division and fragmentation as consolidation and integration (and even arguably far more of the former than the latter). Second, it is not clear that it was in Britain's own imperial interest, or indeed in that of the United States, to have a polity the size of India on the world stage by the 1940s. The only function that such a polity could play was as a counterweight to China in Asia: a dubious role, in the circumstances. The hypothesis I would like to propose here is that the Mughal empire was a relatively successful exercise in state-building, and that the Republic of India has inherited many of its institu-

61. For more recent studies of the two regions cited by Raychaudhuri, see Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

2004). For a contrasting study of an interior (rather than a maritime) region, see Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

62. On Bolívar, see Brading, *First America*, 603–20.

tional and other characteristics—as modified by the colonial experience, to be sure. The politics of elite integration that the Mughals practiced were far more successful than the drastic modes of acculturation used by the Habsburgs or even than the peculiar ones that the Ottomans deployed. In its dealings with the regions under its control, the Mughal empire used neither the colonial forms that the Habsburgs favored (thus avoiding the creole resentments that those forms produced), nor the mix of *dirigisme* and *laissez-faire* that led the Ottomans to engage with European traders in the manner that they did.

In contrast, the Ottoman empire appears to us to be more ambitious in its programs in some respects, far less so in others. The degree of elite circulation, by the seventeenth century, was quite limited, and the degree of autonomy of some distant provinces came to be considerable by the later part of that century. Yet the Ottoman practice of autonomy was substantively different from the Mughal practice of incorporating, while compromising with, local and regional elites. Rajput nobles and Kayastha and Khattri notables all spoke Persian at the Mughal court by the early seventeenth century, while the freeborn Christian elites of the Balkans appear to have shown a relative indifference to high Ottoman culture.<sup>63</sup> However, the Ottomans are significant for the degree of openness of their commercial elite, the treatment of their *dhimmi* populations, and their refusal to espouse a model of cultural homogenization such as the one that the Habsburgs imposed.

#### IV

Whatever the comparisons and contrasts, however, all three of these empires were “losers” of the race to modernity and have long been measured against the success of the British and, more recently, American examples. Whether these will appear the appropriate yardsticks in the decades to come is, of course, a matter open to debate. What matters most now, perhaps, is that the large, neoimperial polities of India and China appear to be objects of desire for at least those architects of the European Union who wish to transform the EU into a federated polity possessing some of the most useful features of empire, while lacking the more traumatic and self-traumatizing ones. In a weaker vein, the project of the *Mercosur* seems to look back to Bolívar’s notions of a federated Spanish America; and it is not the Trotskyists alone who have argued that the success of the United States of America in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has lain in combining elements

63. Interestingly, Cemal Kafadar differs from many other Ottoman historians in insisting that “many *timar*-holders were also of non-Turkish origins, as were members of the *ulema*, the ranks of which were not closed to those born to, say, Arabic-, Kurdish-, or Greek-speaking families”;

see Cemal Kafadar, “The Ottomans and Europe: 1400–1600,” in *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 619–20.

of the nation-state with that of the expansive imperial polity. There have been moments, notably at the end of World War I (with the final disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires) and at the end of World War II (with the decolonization of large swathes of Africa and Asia), that the teleological view of empires giving birth to nation-states has seemed irresistible. Formulas such as the “right to national self-determination” seemed obvious at those times, and the primordial identities of ethnic groups were accepted unquestioningly.

The fall of the Soviet Union then gave currency to another brand of rhetoric, that of globalization: the end of nation-states as an international regime was expected by eschatologists as a step toward the “end of history.” However, the idea that the market would replace politics has had a distressingly short life. Instead, the twenty-first century has brought back a nostalgia for empire, though in the form of an imagined world driven and dominated by a single empire—a hegemonic role that the British empire barely attributed to itself at the height of its power. If indeed a single regime comes to acquire a stable place for the future, it is difficult to imagine its doing so without bringing on itself the trauma of isolated but increasingly violent acts of opposition by groups of either disillusioned former satraps or of disempowered would-be imperialists. This result seems almost as inevitable as that the hegemony of Microsoft (with one of whose computer programs this essay was, incidentally, written) will produce an underground culture of hackers who have exaggerated notions of their own heroism. Relative hegemony and relative impotence are perhaps never very far apart. An interimperial grid of competing, large-scale political entities that hold each other in partial check seems a less painful—if not a more plausible—scenario for the future. Whether, in that respect, the histories of the Ottomans, Mughals, and Habsburgs in the earlier modern world will provide substantial food for thought is of course a mere matter for speculation. And the hard comparative work required to make even speculation possible has scarcely begun.