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From Empire to Oblivion: Situating the Transformation of the Habsburg Empire in a Eurasian Context from the Eighteenth Century to the First World War

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In this essay, I situate the Habsburg Monarchy in the Eurasian imperial context by bringing together a variety of recent secondary literature dealing with the Habsburgs and examples of empires in world history. In doing so, I show how the Habsburgs paralleled and diverged from other polities that have been more consistently identified as empires. I also offer a schema for thinking about polities in terms of both how uniformly they are organized internally (i.e., how unitary they are) and the extent to which they can enforce the will of the center (how much like a state they are). This schema draws inspiration from a number of works, chiefly Karen Barkey's *Empire of Difference* and Valerie Kivelson's and Ronald Suny's *Russia's Empires*.

By applying this schema, I argue that the Habsburg Monarchy certainly embodied some characteristics of empire, even as its agents sought to transform it into something more similar to but still distinct from emerging nation states elsewhere. I argue that the Habsburg Empire underwent dramatic state consolidation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that many of the transformations and challenges it experienced in this period were broadly similar to those which other empires underwent or faced. I begin by defining "empire" and showing how the Habsburgs fit into that definition in the eighteenth century. I then discuss attempts to reform the Habsburg Empire into a more unitary, less structurally imperial polity, though I also keep in mind the ways in which it retained imperial characteristics. Specifically, I examine the role of nationalism in supporting and challenging imperial rule. Finally, I examine the destabilizing challenges the Habsburg Empire faced, in particular elite consensus and international legitimacy (or lack thereof).

Keywords: Habsburg Monarchy, empire, nation state, imperialism, nationalism

Doomed, anachronistic, a relic of a bygone age. Traditionally, this was how the Habsburg Empire was described by historians.[1] Indeed, earlier works have tended to take for granted the triumph of the nation state over empire as the dominant political form. However, since the end of the Cold War, these views

1 A. J. P. Taylor in 1948 called it an empire "out of time and out of place." Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809–1918*, 9.

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have come under growing scrutiny. While no historian is seriously advocating a return of either the Habsburg Empire in particular or empires in general, a new appreciation for the significance of both has developed. Empires have dominated so much of human history. How can we understand this history without offering accounts of imperial political forms?[2] The Habsburg Empire, more specifically, has come in for a significant reevaluation, and the current consensus seems to be that it was not quite as doomed or "backward" as was once thought.

In this essay, I synthesize work on the modern Habsburg Empire[3] with more comparative works on empire in general. I argue that the Habsburg Empire underwent dramatic state consolidation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that many of the transformations and challenges it experienced in this period were broadly similar to those which other empires underwent or faced. I begin by defining "empire" and showing how the Habsburgs fit into that definition in the eighteenth century. I then discuss attempts to reform the Habsburg Empire into a more unitary, less structurally imperial polity, though I also keep in mind the ways in which it retained imperial characteristics. Specifically, I examine the role of nationalism in supporting and challenging imperial rule. Finally, I examine the destabilizing challenges the Habsburg Empire faced, in particular elite consensus and international legitimacy (or lack thereof).

Defining Empire and the Habsburgs in the Eighteenth Century

Framing the Habsburg Monarchy as an empire is not just a question of terminology or convention. It is also an analytical issue. Framing the Monarchy as such helps situate it in world history and make useful comparisons between the Monarchy and other polities. There are good reasons to see it as an empire.

The most important characteristic of empire is that it is *diverse*. This diversity is often understood in ethnic or religious terms, but perhaps political diversity is more important. Empires are composed of several constituent units, typically territorial, each of which has a unique relationship to the imperial center. These units may interact with each other, but the most important relationship is the one between the center and these units. I avoid using the term periphery here because these constituents could actually be quite central to the imperial whole, whether

2 Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 1–3.

3 Due to limitations of space, I limit myself in this essay to the Austrian or Central European Habsburgs and do not consider the Iberian branch of the dynasty.

geographically, politically, or economically.[4] Each of these relationships is also open to renegotiation, which does not affect the other center-constituent relationships.

A useful metaphor to understand this arrangement comes from Karen Barkey's *Empire of Difference*. In her study of the Ottoman Empire, Barkey characterizes empire as a "hub-and-spoke network" without a rim.[5] This characterization highlights the individual relationships between the center (the hub) and the subordinate entities or constituent units (the spokes). To extend the metaphor, each spoke could be of a different character, i.e., different material, different width, even varying lengths. In an imperial structure, there is no need for each constituent entity to be identical to the others, nor is there any need for all such entities to have identical relationships with the center. This model applied rather neatly to the Habsburg case, where imperial crownlands in the nineteenth century were generally prohibited from coordinating with one another and where the imperial legal and administrative systems privileged center-constituent relationships over inter-constituent ones. This prohibition was made explicit in the 1861 regional provisions on the crownlands.[6] However, this prohibition was steadily weakened over the course of the following decades, as I describe below.

This focus on diversity, whether political or cultural, resonates with many other comparative studies on empire. Jane Burbank's and Frederick Cooper's synthetic work *Empires in World History* offers a good example. Burbank and Cooper define empires as "large political units, expansionist or with a memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people." In the same paragraph, they note, "[t]he concept of empire presumes that different peoples within the polity will be governed differently."[7] A central feature of empire is the embrace and deliberate maintenance of difference, both horizontally (among the ruled) and vertically (between ruler and ruled). In keeping with this definition, the authors apply their comparative method to tease out various "imperial repertoires" in order to understand how diverse empires have managed and ruled over their populations. This word "repertoire" speaks to the non-systematic approach empires adopted. Imperial rule is often improvised and flexible. Imperial rulers have their habits, which shape what and how they could imagine ruling. They are constrained by circumstance and informed by past experience. This approach looks "for actions

4 Osterkamp, "Cooperative Empires," 130–31.

5 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 9.

6 Osterkamp, "Cooperative Empires," 134.

7 Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 8.

and conditions that pushed elements into and out of empires' strategies," rather than insisting on "false dichotomies of continuity or change, contingency or determinism."[8] Flexibility and adaptability are key features of imperial rule, and they underpin the management of political and cultural diversity, which was and is a consequence of imperial expansion.

These same themes crop up in Valerie Kivelson's and Ronald Suny's coauthored volume, *Russia's Empires*. Kivelson and Suny identify four characteristics of empire and then focus on two key ones. These four characteristics are (i) a supreme sovereign, answerable to no one, (ii) a wide range of disparate lands and peoples, (iii) a strict hierarchy between metropole and provinces, and, most fundamentally, (iv) emphasis on differentiation rather than integration or assimilation.[9] In their conclusion, the authors focus on two poles: authoritarian, even autocratic politics on the one end and diversity on the other.[10] As an empire becomes more authoritarian, it suppresses diversity. Conversely, as the imperial center embraces diversity, empires become less authoritarian and more conciliatory with their constituent units.

Moving beyond Europe, William Rowe's *China's Last Empire* gives an account of the Qing dynasty, which ruled much of East Asia from about 1636 until 1912. In his introduction, Rowe succinctly summarizes the various historiographical shifts in thinking about late imperial China. One of the major "turns" he identifies is the "Inner Asian" turn, a development of cultural history. This approach emphasized representations of reality over facts, de-essentializing categories and resituating them as "culturally negotiated and historically contingent."[11] Such an approach will be familiar to scholars of the Habsburg Empire, who have witnessed the deconstruction of nationalism and nationality in the historiography of late imperial Austria in the past few decades.[12] A central argument advanced by this turn in the historiography of the Qing is that the dynasty constructed a "Manchu" ethnic identity for itself after its conquest of China proper. Unlike previous dynasties, the Qing conceived of a universal empire with remit to rule over as many people as possible, i.e., a multinational polity. In this framework, China proper was simply one component alongside others, such as Tibet, Outer

8 Ibid., 3.

9 Kivelson and Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 4.

10 Ibid., 397.

11 Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, 5

12 E.g. Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*; Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*; Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*; King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*.

Mongolia, and Xinjiang. Rather than imposing a single, homogenous culture upon these various pieces, the Qing deliberately cultivated separate ethnic identities for their various constituencies. This separation extended into the self-presentation of the Qing themselves, who adopted a multitude of roles to legitimize their rule over a multitude of peoples. The Confucian "Son of Heaven" was only one among many such roles.[13] Diversity thus played a critical role in shaping Qing rule and the specific form of empire which emerged in East Asia in the seventeenth century.

These understandings of empire apply to the Habsburg context. The Habsburgs were known for expansion more through strategic marriages, inheritance, and diplomacy than direct military conquest. They acquired the Kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary in 1526 by election, and these titles were legally converted into hereditary titles in the seventeenth century. While military conquest did play a role in these acquisitions, that conquest was legitimized through a legal claim based on a preexisting title or realm.[14] Consequently, the Habsburgs, like other feudal monarchs, had to contend with the historical privileges and traditions peculiar to individual political units or, more specifically, with the local nobility's legal claims based on historical precedents predating Habsburg rule. These could not easily be swept aside without undermining the imperial claim to the title itself, since these claims often entailed an obligation to uphold the rights and privileges of the local nobility. This constituted one half of the reciprocal relationship between monarch and subject, the other half being the military and financial support provided (as an obligation) by the monarch's subjects. These issues of noble privilege and the historic rights of crownlands persisted in some form or another into the nineteenth century, even informing later nationalist discourses, particularly in the Bohemian and Hungarian crownlands. Each province brought with it its own specific history and legal traditions, forcing the imperial center in Vienna to reckon with this legal diversity long before the rise of modern popular nationalisms. In this way, the structure of the Habsburg realms was quite similar to imperial formations elsewhere.

An illuminating example of these issues comes from Galicia, the Austrian portion of the Polish partition added to the empire at the end of the eighteenth century. Despite Habsburg ambitions to impose a model of uniform, centralized rule, Vienna was forced to accept local power structures in order to rule. As

13 Ibid., 6.

14 Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, 50, 61, 73.

Iryna Vushko demonstrates in *The Politics of Cultural Retreat*, the Habsburgs and their officials in Vienna initially imagined Galicia as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate. They imagined that they had a "civilizing mission" to improve Galicia, extirpating its "backwardness" and the "pernicious influence" of the landed nobility on the peasantry.[15] The imperial bureaucrats who were sent to Galicia from all parts of the Monarchy were quite surprised by what, or rather who, they found there. They quickly sympathized with the Polish-speaking nobility thanks to a shared elite culture (i.e., they spoke French, read contemporary literature, etc.). Over time, many bureaucrats adopted Polish language and culture, married into the local nobility, and raised Polish children. This constituted a rejection of the imperial center's designs for Galicia. The imperial authorities were forced to accommodate the local nobility and incorporate existing elites into the imperial administration.[16] This inclusion paralleled the way in which the local nobilities in other crownlands had historically controlled their local administrations prior to 1740.[17] This inclusion is also particularly striking, considering that Galicia was carved out of Poland and only acquired a distinct legal, cultural, and political identity as a region or crownland after having become part of the Habsburg Empire.[18] The inclusion of the local nobility also throws into relief the kind of diversity which characterized the Monarchy at the beginning of the modern era. Rather than a single, unitary state, the Monarchy before the nineteenth century was composed of semi-autonomous component pieces or, to return to Barkey's metaphor, spokes, each of varying make and length, populated by specific, local structures of power.

Making a Unitary Polity

In the eighteenth century, various actors began seeking to reform the Habsburg Empire into a more tightly knit, unitary state. I distinguish between being unitary and being a state (i.e., stateness) in order to avoid methodologically coupling the two. I use the word polity as an umbrella term to refer to any kind of constellation of political power that independently exercises authority. Thus, I conceptualize two separate axes for describing polities. One axis runs from a unitary polity toward a more decentralized, loosely constituted one. Unitary

15 Vushko, *The Politics of Cultural Retreat*, 6, 47.

16 Ibid., 3, 8.

17 Ibid., 6.

18 Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia*.

polities are characterized by uniform relationships between the center and the polity's constituent units, i.e., all the spokes radiating out from the hub are the same. By this definition, imperial polities are only minimally unitary, if at all. Polities may also be centralized if the central government has a high degree of control over the constituent pieces, but this need not be the case. The second axis describes the degree of "stateness," i.e., state capacity, or the extent to which a government can exert its will on the communities, individuals, and territories it claims to govern. High degrees of stateness are characterized by an extensive state apparatus (e.g. bureaucracy, law enforcement), the function of which is to carry out the will of the government. In this section of the essay, I focus on how the Habsburgs and other empires transformed themselves into more unitary polities and the challenges they encountered in this process.

As Pieter Judson has demonstrated in his synthesis of recent Habsburg historiography,[19] the Habsburgs of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in particular Joseph II, embarked on an ambitious program of reform. First, the imperial center sought to bolster and make more complete both its knowledge of and ability to act in the various crownlands. In doing so, the Habsburg center sought "to consolidate its control over several very different territories." In practice, this meant bypassing "traditional local relationships of power" and "breaking the traditional political dominance exercised by regional powerbrokers, the local nobility." This leads neatly into another of Judson's themes: the Habsburg reconceptualization of the proper relationship between the government and both its aristocratic and common subjects. The Habsburgs and their advisers in the late eighteenth century developed and sought to implement a new notion of imperial citizenship, one which "saw the people of the empire in essentially comparable and interchangeable terms, rather than in traditional hierarchies of privilege."[20] The imperial center sought to break down the existing corporate relationships whereby individual subjects related to the center only via their local, crownland hierarchies. While Judson specifically emphasizes the development of a centralized state, it is also possible to read these changes as moves toward a unitary polity where the specificities of local legal and political history are minimized and the constituent units have a uniform relationship to the center. This does not necessarily mean that the center comes to dominate, only that each unit has the same rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis

19 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History.*

20 Ibid, 17–18.

the center. At the same time, the reforms that Judson describes met with only limited success.

Despite setbacks, over the course of the nineteenth century, reformers and politicians in the Empire gradually molded it into a somewhat more cohesive polity. As John Deak has shown, after Joseph II, the imperial bureaucracy became one of the main forces pushing for change. Deak's work focuses on Vienna and its imperial reformers from 1740 until 1914.[21] Unfortunately, this means that Habsburg Hungary receives less attention, but his discussion remains quite illuminating. He argues not only that Maria Theresa and Joseph II initiated a radical program of organizing new state structures and personnel to govern the realm (in short, a bureaucracy), but also that the people who staffed this bureaucracy imbibed a specific ethos of service to and reform of the Habsburg polity. This ethos, or perhaps a professional culture, helped to animate and motivate the bureaucracy to be an agent of reform and state consolidation, even when Joseph II's successors (particularly Francis II, who ruled first as Archduke and then as Emperor of Austria from 1792 to 1835) did not share the Josephine zeal for reform.

In addition, Deak's account indicates that the agents of imperial consolidation were not constant. While reform began on the throne with Maria Theresa and Joseph II, in the nineteenth century, the initiative seems to have shifted toward the bureaucracy. Jana Osterkamp's work on the concept of "cooperative empires" points to an additional shift in the early twentieth century.[22] Osterkamp argues that while cooperation between the imperial crownlands in the Cisleithanian (or non-Hungarian) portion of the empire was formally forbidden,[23] in practice, it became increasingly necessary in order to deal with the ballooning debt crises on both the provincial and imperial levels of government. Osterkamp links this growing cooperation to the de facto federalization or *Verländerung* of the empire, beginning with the delegation of administrative powers to the crownlands in the 1860s via the 1867 fundamental law of the state and the 1861 regional statutes. Essentially, the crownlands' power to pursue modernization projects (principally building and improving infrastructure, schools, and hospitals) increased without a commensurate increase in their power to collect revenues. This led after 1880 to a massive increase in the debt of the crownland governments.[24] Osterkamp

21 Deak, *Forging a Multinational State.*

22 Osterkamp, "Cooperative Empires."

23 Ibid., 134–35.

24 Ibid., 139–40.

argues that, in response to this crisis, a "paradigm shift" occurred in 1905, when, "for the first time in the history of the Habsburg monarchy," representatives from the Cisleithanian crownland legislatures met for joint consultations.[25]

These and similar meetings continued over the following years, with the upshot that the crownlands successfully negotiated as a bloc with the imperial government to receive a portion of imperial revenues in order better to support their own finances. Further reforms to increase cooperation among the regional and imperial governments to manage debt and income were only interrupted by World War I. Osterkamp calls these developments the emergence of a "cooperative empire," since they represent an unprecedented degree of horizontal, interregional cooperation.[26] I would also argue that these developments can be read as a move away from imperial forms of government, since the relationships between the provinces and the center, as well as between the centers, became more homogenous, i.e., all these relationships were regulated together rather than separately. Additionally, the impetus for reform and consolidation came not from the imperial center, but from the regions themselves. This point highlights the way in which empires, like the Habsburg Empire, can reform into less imperial and more state-like formations and that the push for reform can come from a variety of political actors. As Osterkamp herself argues, "one must acknowledge that the process of change from empire to a nonimperial state is fluid."[27] Of course, it is also important to keep in mind that while all of this was happening, Hungary remained an entirely separate part of the empire, indicating that imperial consolidation can take place in a politically heterogenous environment.

The Habsburgs were not alone in these endeavors. As Victor Lieberman argues in his 1,500-page work *Strange Parallels*, polities in both Europe and Southeast Asia experienced dramatic state consolidation in the mid to late eighteenth century. He does not focus exclusively on empires, although they figure prominently in his analysis. He situates this parallel in a millennium-long cycle of political consolidation between 800 and 1830, synchronized in four cycles. A general trend toward greater political and eventually cultural consolidation was occasionally punctuated by periods of collapse and crisis, but these interregna grew gradually shorter over time. As Lieberman argues, by the

25 Ibid., 140.

26 Ibid., 142–43.

27 Ibid., 145.

nineteenth century, these trends had produced "an unprecedentedly powerful and extensive formation."[28]

Lieberman makes several claims in reference to what he terms the "protected rimlands" of Eurasia, namely northwestern and northeastern Europe (he focuses on France and Russia), Japan, and mainland Southeast Asia, all of which were located on the periphery of the traditional core of settled, agrarian, Eurasian polities in South Asia, China, and the Mediterranean littoral. These "rimlands," from the sixth century through to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, "domesticated world religions, developed unprecedentedly grand architectural complexes and/or public works," and underwent "secondary state formation," to borrow Barbara Price's term. Lieberman terms the principalities founded in this era "charter states" in the sense that "their religious, dynastic, and/or territorial traditions" became normative and legitimizing for local successor states. These "charter states" disintegrated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with territorial consolidation resuming sometime between 1450 and 1590. This consolidation grew in scope and efficiency into the nineteenth century. The increased solidity of emergent states reflected the combination of three trends: first, the expansion of monetary resources, which in turn was a result of growing populations and trade; second, the greater inclusiveness of cultural identities; and third, the improvement of administrative and military technologies, which was motivated by interstate competition.[29]

Lieberman's work also clearly shows how the Habsburg experience of state building fits into Eurasian, not just European, trends. He himself notes this at several points in his argument, emphasizing territorial expansion, the establishment of a professional army, and broadly the unification of administrative structures.[30] These transformations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are covered in broad strokes in this essay. An earlier interesting moment to situate in Lieberman's cycle is the establishment of the Habsburgs in Austria. The Habsburgs gained the duchy of Austria for the first time in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. In doing so, they supplanted the Babenberg dynasty, whose last male heir had died in 1246.[31] The Babenbergs traced their rulership back to 976,[32] during the "charter states" period identified

28 Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, 457.

29 Ibid., 77–78.

30 Lieberman, *Strange Parallels,* vol. 2, 207, 280–81.

31 Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, 26–27.

32 Ibid., 13.

by Lieberman. The Habsburgs claimed legal continuity with the Babenbergs, using forged documents purportedly from that era to attempt to cement their position in the Holy Roman Empire in 1359.[33] Their use of burial sites as early as 1280 also demonstrated a claim to the Babenberg tradition, along with the grander pretension to Carolingian heritage.[34] This use reinforces the idea of the Babenbergs as the Habsburgs' normative and legitimizing charter state, although an argument could also be made for the Carolingians and even the Romans.[35] The Habsburgs later experienced a period of political fragmentation at the end of the fourteenth century, beginning with the Treaty of Neuberg in 1379.[36] The Habsburgs also acquired the Bohemian and Hungarian crowns in 1437, only to lose both of them again within 20 years.[37] These events coincide with a period of political fragmentation in Lieberman's schema.[38] These crowns were reacquired more permanently in 1526, in the period which Lieberman identifies as state consolidation among the Eurasian rimlands.

Lieberman ends his analysis roughly in 1830–1850, but it is interesting to note the broad shift after those dates toward political disintegration, i.e., the next "cycle" in Liberman's schema. The period after 1830 was marked by an increase in smaller polities and a weakening of imperial power, even as the imperial center in Vienna sought to hold off these forces. The 1848 revolutions in the Habsburg lands generally took on a liberal nationalist character, challenging the imperial center's political and cultural authority (even though these revolutions failed). As Alice Freifeld has shown in *Nationalism and the Crowd in Liberal Hungary*, the failure of 1848 in Hungary was mythologized in ways which mobilized and united Hungarian-speakers behind the crownland's elites, contributing to the growth in Hungarian nationalism over the following decades.[39]

While these forces did not overthrow Habsburg rule, the empire was eventually destroyed by interstate competition in the form of World War I, along with the Russian and Ottoman Empires and the German Empire to some degree. Notably, six years earlier in 1912, the Qing Empire in China had collapsed. In its place, a republic was declared under pressure from colonial powers (another form of interstate competition) and anti-colonial nationalism

33 Ibid., 30.

34 Stercken, "Shaping a Dominion," 335–36, 343–44.

35 Rady, *The Habsburgs*, 35–36.

36 Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526–1918*, 7.

37 Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, 34.

38 Lieberman, *Strange Parallels,* vol. 1, 78.

39 Freifeld, *Nationalism and the Crowd in Liberal Hungary*.

(challenging the cultural authority of the imperial center and its traditions). Thus, one can situate the transformations within the Habsburg Empire in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century within Lieberman's Eurasian framework as part of a long pattern of consolidation and disintegration. The progressive growth and intensification of state power and territorial consolidation and the challenges to imperial authority in the nineteenth century fit within the broader Eurasian trends for which Lieberman argues.

Nationalism and Empire: A False Dichotomy?

Despite these moves toward consolidation, the Habsburg Empire retained significant imperial characteristics in its final decades. Several scholars have pointed to the ways in which the empire participated in European colonialism, including its so-called "cultural mission" in Bosnia and Habsburg civil society's engagement with colonial ideas.[40] In this section, and focusing on domestic developments, I argue that empires and nationalist politics are able to coexist and even synergize. I then suggest that this is a feature of imperial diversity, or empires' tendency to govern pluralistically. In this way, the Habsburg Empire's ability to accommodate and even make use of nationalist politics is an important way in which it retained imperial characteristics even toward the end of the empire's existence and after a century of political and administrative consolidation. While the empire did ultimately dissolve into nationally-defined successor states, prior to 1914, nationalists were able to work within the framework of the empire to pursue their own goals.[41]

Scholarship in recent years has already turned to addressing the relationship between nationalism and imperialism. Osterkamp, cited above, argues that we would do well to break down the dichotomy between empires and nation-states in order to conceptualize specific, historical states as existing along a sliding scale rather than in discreet categories.[42] A more comprehensive treatment comes from Stefan Berger's and Alexei Miller's edited volume *Nationalizing Empires*. This volume focuses on the emergence of nations at imperial cores rather

40 On Habsburg participation in European colonialism, see Sauer, "Habsburg Colonial" and Ruthner, *Habsburgs "Dark Continent."* Another interesting work on this topic is Bach, *Tropics of Vienna*. On Bosnia as a Habsburg colony, see Ruthner et al., *WechselWirkungen* and Ruthner and Scheer, *Bosnien-Herzegowina und Österreich-Ungarn, 1878–1918*.

41 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 270, 274–75.

42 Osterkamp, "Cooperative Empires," 145.

than throughout empires' constituent pieces. These "imperial nationalisms" were symbiotic to the empires they occupied, seeking to reform the empire so that it could be more effective without seeking to incorporate all the lands and subjects of the empire into the nation located at the empire's core.[43] However, the Habsburgs did not fit neatly into this schema, as shown by one contribution to *Nationalizing Empires*, since there was no clear imperial core that emerged out of the confluence of economic, cultural, and political forces.[44] In contrast to this work, I am interested not so much in the role of nationalism in the imperial core, i.e., at the center, as I am in the relationship between imperialism and nationalism throughout empires' component parts.

One complex example of this synergy between nationalism and imperialism in the Habsburg case comes from Bosnia. In *Taming Balkan Nationalism*, Robin Okey argues that the Habsburgs occupied the Ottoman province of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 in an attempt to neutralize the threat posed by Yugoslav, Croatian, and Serbian nationalist movements, specifically by promoting a separate Bosnian identity that would align with imperial interests, based on existing religious communities and the history and tradition of the province. The province contained a diverse population most of which spoke a South Slavic language and practiced Catholicism, Christian Orthodoxy, or Sunni Islam. Austro-Hungarian officials (the empire having officially become Austria-Hungary in 1867 and Bosnia being occupied in 1878 as a "condominium" shared by the two halves) and Croatian and Serbian nationalists all saw in Bosnia the human material for their various political and cultural projects. The occupying Austro-Hungarian forces, primarily under the governorship of Benjamin von Kállay, sought to block Serbian and Croatian nationalist influences. They pursued this goal by building schools and infrastructure to promote a Bosnian civic identity with the Muslim population as a conservative backbone but without making religious affiliation a defining element. In doing so, von Kállay sought to foster and instrumentalize Bosnian nationalism against other South Slav nationalisms and harness it to the interests of the imperial center.[45] Even if von Kállay's project met with only limited success, it nevertheless demonstrates that imperial proponents like him could conceive of nationalism as a useful political tool.

Of course, Habsburg interactions with nationalist projects were not always so deliberate. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, specific decisions and

43 Berger and Miller, "Introduction," 4–5.

44 Komlosy, "Imperial Cohesion, Nation-Building, and Regional Integration in the Habsburg Monarchy."

45 Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*, 60–65.

laws at the imperial level inadvertently boosted nationalist demands, enabling nationalists to use imperial institutions to support their nation-making projects. For example, the provision in the 1867 constitution stipulated equality between the languages of the Habsburg Empire, granting citizens on an individual basis the right to conduct their affairs in a recognized language of their choosing. In spite of the intentions of the provision's framers (who sought to ensure that German would remain the principle language of "serious" affairs while conceding "less important" matters to other languages), this quickly enabled nationalists across the empire to make demands on behalf of their claimed language, even if they still could not invoke "the nation" in a legal sense. Language became a proxy for nationality, backed up by imperial guarantees of equality. This in turn led to the 1905 Moravian Compromise, in which the imperial state sought "to defuse the national conflict in Moravia" between Czech and German nationalists by obliging citizens of the crownland to register formally as belonging to one nationality or the other. This would enable a segregation of political and administrative institutions along national lines. While no similar agreement came together for Bohemia, others were implemented in Bukovina in 1910 and Galicia in 1914.[46] In this way, the empire created a legal framework which enabled and emboldened nationalist politics.

The other major imperial institution which contributed to the nationalization of politics was the census. Benedict Anderson, writing about the Southeast Asian context, argued that the census is an important tool in the imagining of national communities.[47] In the Habsburg context, the census became a tool for nationalists to make claims about and on behalf of their imagined nations. The 1880 census was the first to ask respondents to indicate a "language of daily use" or "Umgangssprache." Government officials deemed this information necessary in order to govern and communicate with their citizens. However, an international convention established in 1872 stipulated that each respondent could only list one language, erasing bilingualism in the official records at a stroke. Furthermore, while imperial officials refused to make an explicit connection between language and nationality or ask about nationality on the census, nationalists had no problem linking the two.[48] This linkage, combined with the understanding of the census as a supposedly objective representation of reality, allowed nationalists to use the census to make claims about the relative strengths of their nations and in turn to demand state support for education

46 Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 12–14.

47 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 168.

48 King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*, 58–60.

in minority languages.[49] Nationalists were thus able to use imperial institutions, such as the census, to pursue their political-cultural projects.

In other cases, nation-building projects were able to establish and develop themselves within existing imperial structures without necessarily seeking to overthrow them. This is one argument that Beno Gammerl makes in his comparison of late nineteenth-century Canada and Hungary in his work on citizenship. His comparison shows how both sub-imperial entities pursued homogenizing nationalist policies. Canada implemented exclusionary mechanisms to limit and control immigration from other parts of the British Empire (primarily to maintain a "white Canada," excluding Asian immigrants and limiting the rights of indigenous First Nations peoples). In contrast, Hungary sought to encourage non-Magyars to adopt Magyar culture and join the ethnically defined Hungarian nation, especially after 1879.[50] However, Gammerl argues against reading these nationalist tendencies as evidence of a desire on the part of these groups ultimately to secede from their respective empires.[51] Rather, they are evidence of the ways in which nation-state projects could develop even within imperial frameworks. Hungary was able to pursue Magyarization thanks to the Compromise of 1867, which afforded Hungary significant autonomy in its domestic affairs. At the same time, Canada coordinated with the British imperial government to discriminate against fellow British subjects from India without damaging the prestige of British subjecthood. This was achieved by only allowing immigration by Indian subjects who had arrived directly from India (and not via another country such as the United States) and instructing shipping companies to avoid selling tickets to Indian subjects, thereby cutting off the only means of traveling directly from India to Canada. This combination of policies seems to have satisfied London's preference for "indirect discrimination."[52] In both cases, Hungary and Canada were able to pursue nationalist policies of social engineering without seceding from their respective empires.

Work from other parts of Eurasia seems to support these conclusions. Prasenjit Duara has examined Japanese imperialism in the puppet state of Manchukuo, which was established in northeast China or Manchuria from 1932 until 1945. Recent scholarship has shown how Manchukuo was a place of paradoxes, where it was "difficult to disentangle imperialism from nationalism,

49 Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 24–25.

50 Gammerl, *Subject, Citizen, Other*, 47.

51 Ibid., 52.

52 Ibid., 30–31.

modernity from tradition, frontier from heartland, and ideals of transcendence from ideologies of boundedness." Duara sees these paradoxes not only in Manchukuo specifically, but also in the wider problems of early twentieth-century modernity. He argues that "no matter how imperialistic the intentions of its builders, Manchukuo was not developed as a colony but as a nation-state," one which sought international legitimacy by claiming to represent the authentic culture of Manchuria and its inhabitants.[53]

As Duara explains, the Pan-Asianism in the Japanese civilizing mission produced a number of tensions between inclusivity and exclusivity. On the one hand, Manchukuo was an ally and sovereign partner in a regional (East Asian) anti-Western coalition. On the other, it was subordinated to Japanese interests and constrained by a neo-colonial power structure.[54] Duara locates this tension between equity and hierarchy, or national sovereignty and imperial power, in the need of both nationalism and imperialism to adjust themselves to the ideological circumstances of the interwar period. On one side, imperialists were forced to accommodate demands for self-representation among their subjects. On the other, nationalism had to adapt to the "territorial imperative" that drove contemporary polities into competition and expansionism in order to achieve its goals.[55] In this context, Manchukuo nationhood helped legitimate Japanese indirect rule and imperial domination. In this way, Japanese imperialism sought to accommodate itself to calls for greater self-government around the world by instrumentalizing notions of Manchukuo nationhood. Thus, the Habsburg Empire was not unusual in its ability and willingness to work with ideas of nationhood to legitimize itself.

Destabilizing Challenges in Global Context

The Habsburg Empire encountered several challenges that threatened its long-term survival, both at home and abroad. Two significant challenges were the struggle for consensus at the imperial center and the empire's faltering international recognition and legitimacy abroad. In other words, do imperial elites at the center itself agree on what needs to be done? And do other polities, especially powerful neighbors, recognize the legitimacy of the polity in question (in this case, the Habsburg Empire)? While the answers were usually yes to both questions in the

53 Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 1.

54 Ibid., 246.

55 Ibid., 1–2.

Habsburg context, there were key points when Habsburg officials struggled to reach a consensus or convince other polities of the empire's legitimacy. They were not alone among other imperial polities in facing these challenges.

Two examples come from, first, the British Empire, as described by Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher in *Africa and the Victorians*, and, second, the Portuguese Empire, as discussed by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700*. Both works focus on European maritime empires and illustrate the importance of consensus among imperial policy makers in distinct time periods. Robinson and Gallagher use the term "the official mind of imperialism" to characterize imperial decision making and explain British imperial expansion in Africa. They focus on decision making in Britain rather than factors in Africa.[56] This "official mind" of imperialism centered on the machinery of imperial policymaking in London, more specifically in Whitehall. Official policy represented an accumulated mass of experience and tradition which had been passed down "unbroken from Pitt and Canning to Palmerston and Clarendon" through the "great country houses of the land." They continue: "Most ministers had been born in the Eighteen twenties and thirties, read classics or mathematics at Oxford or Cambridge and serve their political apprenticeships in junior posts under Palmerston or Disraeli in the late Fifties and Sixties."[57] Ministers shared a certain outlook, and even as governments came and went, the general consensus on imperial policy remained the same. A united elite culture at the imperial center facilitated the implementation of imperial policy.

Subrahmanyam's multi-layered account of the Portuguese Empire in Asia from 1500 to 1700 provides an informative counterexample. One of Subrahmanyam's main arguments is that the Portuguese imperial center lacked a clear consensus on its maritime expansion into the Indian Ocean. Metropolitan Portugal was "riven by tensions, between different social classes, within the elite itself, and between different regions." These tensions inhibited the formulation of a consistent policy on maritime expansion, which in turn led to several shifts in policy during the sixteenth century. These shifts included a growing elite snobbery against commerce, a reorientation from the Indian Ocean to Brazil, and an unwillingness by the Iberian Habsburgs to fund colonial expansion in Asia. These factors, along with changes in Asia itself and growing European competition, meant that Portuguese possessions in the Indian Ocean region

56 Robinson et al., *Africa and the Victorians*, xi.

57 Ibid., 22.

shrank considerably.[58] A lack of elite consensus and sustained focus on long-term goals contributed to Portugal's imperial decline in Asia.

In the Habsburg case, the lack of consensus among the elites manifested not only as conflicts between the imperial center and its constituent pieces but also at the center itself, exemplified in the transition from Joseph II to Francis II. As Deak argues, the experience of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars caused the Habsburgs, who feared unrest and sought political stability, "to turn sharply away from their state-building project."[59] This change of direction created an ideological conflict between the court and the recently created bureaucracy.[60] Francis II and his court deliberately neglected and stifled the bureaucracy wherever they could, even as they paradoxically relied on it to buttress their power, while the new caste of educated elites in the bureaucracy sought to carry on the Josephinist project.[61] While the bureaucracy carried on reforms throughout the nineteenth century, it did not regain the kind of support it had had under Joseph II.

Indeed, the fissures in the Habsburg Empire only became more substantial as time passed, particularly between the upper echelons of the imperial military and other parts of both the government and wider Habsburg society. Ultimately, the military's discontent with the direction of Habsburg society and imperial politics proved fatal for the empire. Jonathan Gumz and John Deak make this argument convincingly in their account of how the Habsburg military high command (AOK or *Armeeoberkommando*) tore apart the civilian administration in the first two years of World War I. Crucially, the assault on the rule of law by the military was rooted in a deep-seated disdain among the military elite for the growth of constitutional government after 1867 in the empire. A particular target was the state administration, which the military leadership regarded as complicit in what it also regarded as dangerously disloyal nationality politics. In short, where the civilian bureaucracy saw a need for compromise with nationalist politics, the military high command saw a need for repression. This difference in perception contributed to "an increasingly hostile set of oppositions between the army, the state administration, and broad swaths of the political classes." In turn, in 1914 the military used the war and the exceptional state that military necessity provided in order radically to alter the political and legal life of the

58 Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia*, 290–92.

59 Deak, *Forging a Multinational State*, 32.

60 Ibid., 34–35.

61 Ibid., 62.

empire, suspending constitutional guarantees of rights and privileges.[62] As Gumz has argued elsewhere,[63] the military used this situation to attack any perceived nationalist sentiment or disloyalty to the empire, up to and including summary executions of suspected traitors.[64] It is thus hardly surprisingly that, when the Austrian *Reichsrat* or parliament was reconvened in May 1917 for the first time since February 1914, things did not go well. Many of the deputies had become hostile to both the military and the state administration, and there was little political will for compromise. While they were not openly calling for the end of the empire, deputies demanded that the civilian and military administrators who had arbitrarily imprisoned and executed Habsburg citizens be punished.[65] The legitimacy of the empire had been seriously damaged by the military's cooptation of the bureaucracy and its effort to impose its own vision of politics. This schism between the military and civilian elites proved fatal in 1918.

The other challenge for the Habsburg Empire and emergent Habsburg state was international legitimacy. The late nineteenth century bore witness to academic delegitimizations of the Habsburg polity on the grounds that a multinational state was unnatural and undesirable. In his article "The Sociological Idea of the State," Thomas Prendergast lays out the debates that took place among sociologists, political scientists, and legal scholars in the late 1880s, pitting Habsburg scholars primarily against their French and German counterparts. Prendergast argues that Habsburg scholars developed a useable, "sociological" concept of statehood which in turn provided a theoretical legal basis for a multinational state. These debates mattered because they informed the curricula which trained the empire's jurists and administrators. These people were, according to proponents of "sociological" statehood, "key to propagating and entrenching a correct understanding of the Austrian state." This conception of the state attracted the support of people like Tomáš Masaryk (future founder of Czechoslovakia) and Polish-Jewish sociologist Ludwig or Ludwik Glumpowicz. Glumpowicz in particular argued that western European and Habsburg states represented not mutually opposed modern and pre-modern political forms but, rather, analytically comparable phenomena.[66] This approach opposed emerging political-legal schemata in France and Germany, as well as Italy, which took

62 Deak and Gumz, "How to Break a State," 1109–13.

63 Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918*.

64 Deak and Gumz, "How to Break a State," 1126–27.

65 Ibid., 1131–32.

66 Prendergast, "The Sociological Idea of the State," 330–32.

the nation state to be the natural form of modern polities and cast multiethnic polities like Russia and the Ottoman Empire as backward and antimodern. The fact that the Habsburg Empire did not always fit neatly into these schemata only lent weight to the idea that it was somehow abnormal. Austrian scholars like Masaryk and Glumpowicz repeatedly argued that the conceptual categories of German constitutional law, for example, were "weapons in the war on Austrian legitimacy in particular, and multiethnic statehood in general."[67]

The Habsburg or Austrian state was not alone in this regard. As Antony Anghie has argued in *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and International Law*, international law in general and the concept of sovereignty in particular have deeply colonial histories. International law as a discipline grew out of the European civilizing mission, which justified colonial rule over indigenous peoples globally by defining these peoples as non-sovereign and by maintaining an increasingly refined and elaborate distinction between "civilized" and "uncivilized" or "universalizing" and "particular." These distinctions helped undergird the colonial relationship, baking colonial attitudes into the very heart of international law. This same international law also made it virtually impossible for former colonies to take their former overlords to court for damages inflicted by colonial rule.[68] While the Habsburg Empire was not itself colonized, the very form of its political organization was delegitimized by European legal theory. These arguments in turn facilitated the partition of the empire in 1918, even while Germany, its former ally, retained the majority of its pre-1914 European territory.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that the Habsburg Empire sought to reform and consolidate itself in the period from the 1740s until World War I. In spite of these reforms, the empire did not become a unitary state but continued, rather, to function much like an empire. Besides the obvious case of Hungary separating from most Austrian institutions in 1867, the Habsburg Empire also worked with and through a number of sub-imperial nationalist projects, none of which convincingly occupied a core role in the empire's identity. By accommodating these nationalist projects, the Habsburgs exemplified a key characteristic of empire: its ability to govern diverse populations and territories without seeking

67 Ibid., 340.

68 Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*, 2–4.

to homogenize those territories. Additionally, despite moves toward political consolidation, the empire faced several destabilizing challenges. Two key such challenges were an imperfectly united elite culture and a struggle to hold on to international legitimacy. Both factors fatally undermined the empire's legitimacy from the inside and outside during World War I. However, I have also argued that, from all of these perspectives, the Habsburg Empire was not unusual. Many of these experiences had parallels in other empires throughout Eurasia and beyond, whether land-based or maritime-based. The Habsburg Empire therefore should be read not as an anomaly in imperial history, but as an instructive example for comparative study.

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