

Mimesis and rivalry: European empires and global regimes*

Jeremy Adelman

History Department, Princeton University, 129 Dickinson Hall, Princeton, NJ 08544-1017, USA
E-mail: adelman@princeton.edu

Abstract

This article places empires as interlocking parts of a broader global regime, a term invoked as an alternative to a world system. By focusing on connective processes and political contingencies, it presents a strategy that avoids rendering empires as radial hubs of a European-centred arrangement. Two features lie at the core of the approach: the way in which empires competed with each other, and the way in which they imitated, borrowed, and learned from each other. Instead of looking at the cyclical rise or fall of great powers, the accent here is on the tensions and intervisibilities between the parts that make up a whole. The regime was, therefore, inherently unstable and integrative at the same time. The article looks in particular at European empires embedded in the broader, unstable, yet increasingly integrated global context that shaped them. The period at stake covers the fifteenth century to the nineteenth and concludes by pointing at some longer-term legacies. It suggests an alternative political economy to the familiar models of 'European world system'.

Keywords circulation, competition, encounters, enlightenment, European empires, world systems

Introduction

This article draws from and juxtaposes two lines of historical inquiry. First, in recent years, global historians have recast our understanding of empires, drawing attention to their multi-centric and heterogeneous features. The result is an effort to 'decentre' and to localize understandings of European empires. The second pushes us to consider a 'connected' history of the world's parts, specifically the contact points across empires. This article is an attempt to decentre and connect imperial histories at the same time. It asks how we might place European empires on a wider planetary plane of transformations without reducing the source of change to exclusively European origins.

There is a long tradition that invokes empire as the means for European capitals to project their basic features outwards from individual capitals or metropolises. Relying on a radiating model from capitals to hinterlands, cores to peripheries, it is most associated with

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‘world systems’ pioneered by Immanuel Wallerstein. Lately, it has been revived, ironically, by a neo-modernization scheme in which the history of globalization emerges as a fundamentally European derivative that fanned out – or ‘diffused’ – to modernity’s latecomers. In this frame, the connected features of global history were the result of European vascular structures linking cores as the heart to peripheries and colonies as limbs and digits.¹

Despite its resilience and popularity in some quarters, the radiating model has fallen on hard times. The critiques are several: it neglects reciprocal flows of influence from non-Europe to Europe and it presumes only one planetary order – Europe’s.² More recently, the materialist and structuralist features have given way to more elastic political dynamics. Recent studies of empires underline forms of rule and strategies to manage social heterogeneity, revealing shifting and mixed methods of governing territories.³ Another strategy stresses legal arrangements that reconcile imported and incumbent norms and practices of justice in mosaics of variegated legal spaces under a mantle called empire. One recent anthology emphasizes the role of empires in the making of ‘multilayered’ arrangements that underscore the ‘legitimacy of decentralized power’.⁴

Highlighting the multiple sources of governance and justice within empires has done much to shake out radial features. But we face a problem. In closing the gap in our understanding of how empires reproduced themselves across time and space through complex institutions and adaptive models, another gap has widened. Empires are seldom conceptualized as pieces of a larger puzzle shaped by other pieces, other empires. This is what the Wallersteinian accent on *systems* originally advocated: to treat imperial relations as elements of an arranged, if mobile, set of relationships, which is what repositioned European empires into a world system.

To integrate empires as complex multi-centric legal systems into broader arrangements, we might turn to approaches that entangle or cross polities. We can draw some insight from international political economists who refer to the making of regimes. Realists and constructivists alike call attention to the role of overlapping norms, converging dynamics, and interlocking forces that inducted states into something that added up to more than a sum of their parts. In 1982 the journal *International Organization* explored approaches to international regimes. Global historians have followed similar paths, albeit without the same generalized compass. Recent work on borderlands, courtly encounters, and trans-culturation in the making of creole worlds has drawn attention to movements across borders, their mutual influences, and interlocking conflicts. The rise of Muscovy, for instance, can be

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- 1 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The modern world-system II: mercantilism and the consolidation of the European world-economy*, New York: Academic Press, 1980; Niall Ferguson, *Empire: the rise and demise of the British world order and the lessons for global power*, New York: Basic Books, 2004.
 - 2 Steve J. Stern, ‘Feudalism, capitalism, and the modern world system in the perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean’, *American historical review*, 93, 4, October 1988, pp. 829–72.
 - 3 Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history: power and the politics of difference*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.
 - 4 Lauren Benton, *Law and colonial cultures: legal regimes in world history, 1400–1900*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross, ‘Empires and legal pluralism: jurisdiction, sovereignty, and political imagination in the early modern world’, in Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross, eds., *Legal pluralism and empires: 1500–1800*, New York: NYU Press, 2013, p. 7.

understood within a broader palate of neighbouring and rival polities, from Byzantium to Mongol states.⁵ This turn in approach examines interaction effects across empires while acknowledging the improvisation and adaptation within decentralized jurisdictions. Furthermore, it shines a light onto influences flowing from non-Europe to Europe and also to other non-European regions, a process connecting autonomous spots on the planet without implying that ordering the world had to make it conform to one with a European centre and radiating spokes. The approach offered here builds on these turns, considering the boundary-crossing activity all along the chains that linked imperial parts together. However, it also seeks to aggregate these contingently integrated structures to think about a global regime comprised of entangled, competitive parts: while fighting for spoils, empires also borrowed, stereotyped, and gained self-understanding between and across each other. In short, they influenced one other mutually because they feuded; because empires were rivals, their leaders looked at each other with envy and emulation. Tracing the interaction effects across regimes provides a strategy for thinking about global regimes as an alternative to world systems.

This article focuses on two entangled processes. One was the familiar pattern of rivalry between political economies for control over markets, territories, and knowledge. The other was the flow and deployment of representational artefacts of global parts and peoples. The production, circulation, and reception of these artefacts can be called mimetic exchange, and it coursed through empires like blood through vessels. The usage comes from Karl Marx. But there has been a burgeoning of ‘mimetic studies’, following the lead of Erich Auerbach’s classic study of Western literature as a function of emulative reading, and René Girard’s studies of violence, religion, mimetic desire, and scapegoating. Of late, it has become a guiding concept in the flourishing area of ‘global literary studies’.⁶

What Marx and others have noted about the emerging bourgeois European order can be adapted to a broader scale and more extended timeline: the circulation of images created a stock of understandings about the world as it came into being. Stephen Greenblatt has noted how representations were thus more than effects but were the ‘producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them into being’. Considered on a global scale, from the fifteenth century these forces were imperial, as Serge Gruzinski, Barbara Fuchs, and Jonathan Hart have insisted. What is important for the purposes of this article is to note that mimetic activity of empires (which has until now been a focus of art and literary historians) cannot be abstracted from the tensions wrought by rivalry (these being customary subjects of political and economic historians). By the same token, representations gave meaning and significance, justification and legitimation, to practices of predation, collusion, warfare, and the rules and norms that were invented to ‘govern’ the international system. Mimetic circulation and imperial competition thus formed the coil of an emerging global

5 Stephen Krasner, ed., *International Regimes*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982; Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-cultural influences on the steppe frontier, 1304–1589*, New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected histories’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 3, July, 1997; Serge Gruzinski, *L’Aigle et le dragon: Démonstration Européenne et mondialisation au XVIe siècle*, Paris: Fayard, 2012.

6 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German ideology*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998, p. 47; Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western literature*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. On Girard, see Robert Doran, ed., *Mimesis and theory: essays on literature and criticism, 1953–2005*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.

political economy.⁷ Competition and copying can thereby be treated not as the result of imperial expansion but what spurred it. Along the way, these forces induced some fundamental changes in imperial objectives, concepts, and strategies, from the understanding of governance of far away people to the values placed on territories and knowledge.

Discoveries

Rivalry and borrowing were certainly present before 1492. But the discovery of lands and peoples after that date was more than an opportunity for plunder and settlement; it was also a discovery and creation of the existence of ‘mankind’, of which Afro-Eurasians increasingly saw themselves a part. From the standpoint of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Oceania, the discovery of others and the globalization of the political imagination had the same outcome; but the toll was incalculably different.⁸

The encounter with the Americas, and the collapse of the distances that separated Europeans from Africa and Asia, entwined the histories of Europe with the rest forever, and put in motion images and narratives of convergence and difference; in effect, mimesis created a world of semblances and likenesses, recognitions and misrecognitions at the very same time. ‘Our world’, marvelled Montaigne, ‘has just discovered another one.’ In reading Francisco López de Gómara’s *Hispania victrix: la historia general de las Indias y conquista de México* (1552), Montaigne learned that Americans wore clothes made of woven cotton, erected golden cities, and worshipped spirits. In short, they exemplified God’s vision of humanity’s intrinsic diversity within unity, even if they were a ‘young’ version of ourselves. Youth and innocence, in fact, became a trope for discovered peoples. When Columbus held out his sword as he delivered his *Requerimiento* (the ‘requirement’ to declare fealty to God and his envoys), he was stirred by the fact that the islanders he met would reach out for it and cut their hands ‘out of ignorance’ of metal weapons and ‘guileless’ disposition.

Of course, the discovery of innocence could also represent a squandered opportunity. What a shame, lamented Montaigne, that the conquest was not effected by an Alexander, a ‘noble conqueror’ who knew how to make of his triumphs an opportunity for renewal of classical virtues. Instead, the Americas fell under the heels of venal ‘Conquistadores’. ‘What a renewal that would have been, what a restoration of the fabric of this world, if the first examples of our behavior which were set before that new world had summoned those peoples to be amazed by our virtue and to imitate it, and created a brotherly fellowship and understanding.’ Instead, he sneered, Spaniards had shattered the hopes of redemption ‘on behalf of the pearls-and-pepper business!’⁹

For good and for ill, Europeans increasingly saw themselves as being at one with the rest, connected across the same now unambiguously circular globe. They also contrived ways in

7 Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous possessions: the wonder of the new world*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 6; Serge Gruzinski, *What time is it there? America and Islam at the dawn of modern times*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010; Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and empire: the new world, Islam, and the construction of European identities*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Jonathan Hart, *Representing the new world: the English and French uses of the example of Spain*, London: Palgrave, 2001.

8 David Abulafia, *The discovery of mankind: Atlantic encounters in the age of Columbus*, New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2008.

9 M. A. Screech, ed., *Montaigne: the complete essays*, New York: Penguin, 1987, book 3:6, pp. 1029–31.

which to think of themselves as unique carriers of some endowed mandate to fold the parts of the world into a common material or spiritual union of highly uneven parts. It was the creation of an integrated, if stratified, idea of humankind in the late fifteenth century that yielded premises for how Europeans would understand themselves and would fuel mimetic rivalry. News of the New World spread fast. By the end of 1493, translations of Columbus' letters were available in Latin, German, and Italian; the Italian edition had a cover depicting three tiny ships in front of an island where naked men and women paraded and danced innocently along the shore. This is what Pope Alexander Borgia was looking at when he issued his bull 'Inter Caetera' in 1493, which carved the planet into two spheres. There will be more to say about this shortly – but for now let it be noted that it aimed to establish papal dominion in the world (*in orbe*) as well as in Rome (*in urbe*), because the world was now one.¹⁰

From the moment that Europeans stepped onto the shores of the Americas, the news, images, and meanings of the discoveries were framed in terms of a contest over the soul of mankind – and increasingly it was the destiny of European rulers to resolve that contest. 'In this island of Hispaniola I have taken possession of a large town', wrote Columbus to his monarchs, 'which is most conveniently situated for the goldfields and for communications with the mainland both here, and the territories of the Great Khan, with which there will be very profitable trade.'¹¹ Of course, Columbus never found his Great Khan; but he did deliver on his promise to Ferdinand and Isabella to yield riches that would help the Catholic monarchs to mount a campaign to rid Europe and the Holy Land of infidels and their imperial lords. Ferdinand of Aragon nursed ambitions to dominate the Mediterranean; his counsellor, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, urged a final, redemptive crusade, visualizing himself in Jerusalem giving the Eucharist to his king, as well as to his relations, Manuel of Portugal and Henry VIII of England. The string of Iberian triumphs – Mers el-Kebir (1505), Oran (1509), Bougie, and Tripoli (both 1510) – were all taken as signs that the cardinal had been chosen by divine decree to crush Islam. With the aid of American precious metals, the Roman empire could now be reborn as a global one.¹²

Such a grandiose scheme sparked rivals to nurture immodest ideas of their own. Nor were Europeans the only ones who saw their fortunes linked to others. Ferdinand was about to sail to Tunis to stage his final assault on the Holy Land when war erupted with France, which pulled his energies north-eastward. The Christian conquests along the north African coast proved beyond their means to hold. Indeed, the Maghreb would be where the crusading cycle would finally grind to a standstill, and then be rolled back. Elsewhere in Europe, Ottoman forces drove deep into Hapsburg heartlands. By the 1520s, Suleiman the Magnificent emerged as Charles V's principal rival for control in central Europe and the Mediterranean. There ensued setbacks and disasters from the Balkans to Morocco. Clashes

10 Abulafia, *Discovery of mankind*, pp. 184–6.

11 'Letter of Columbus to various persons describing the results of his first voyage and written on the return journey', in J. M. Cohen, ed., *Christopher Columbus: the four voyages*, New York: Penguin, 1969, p. 120.

12 'Digest of Columbus's log-book on his first voyage made by Bartolomé de las Casas', in *ibid.*, p. 37; Norman Housley, *The later crusades: from Lyons to Alcazar, 1274–1580*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 291–321; Norman Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman threat, 1453–1505*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 62–71.

spilled into the Indian Ocean after the Portuguese sailed into Arab seas and started a veritable arms race. Chinese coastguard vessels smashed a small Portuguese fleet; the Ming only allowed a base in Macao a generation later, on the presumption that Europeans acknowledged their tributary subordination. Meanwhile, roaming Ottoman fleets forced the Portuguese to bulk up the fortress of Diu in Gujarat; when Ottoman and Gujarati forces besieged it in 1538, they were finally driven off at huge Portuguese expense.¹³

By the 1520s, the contest had reached fever pitch. It also spanned the planet. There were now some added parts to the global convergence of empires, as New World encounters gave way to conquests. When Hernán Cortés wrote to Charles V, he likened the conquest of Mexico to the re-conquest of Spain, so that Montezuma should be treated as a Muslim emirate would have been. The courts of Charles V and his heir, Philip II, were steeped in fantasies that the New World gave Castile the opportunity to restore a universal balance and to wage a redemptive war against heresy of all stripes: Islam, American idolaters, and soon Protestants. It should not be forgotten that as Charles read Cortés' accounts of the fall of Tenochtitlán he was bracing to purge Lutheranism from the empire and to square off in an epic clash with Suleiman to stop Ottoman armies at the gates of Vienna – struggles which Mexican and Peruvian precious metals financed.

Like Columbus' testimonials, Cortés' letters framed possibilities and fired rivalries around the globe. But now they were *written* with that purpose; here was a conquistador fully aware of the potential impact of the recent innovation, the printing press. The first of Cortés' epistles was published by Jacobo Cromberger in November 1522; it was put into immediate circulation across Europe, followed by other letters, which were likewise translated into Latin, Italian, and French and commented upon. One version was embellished with illustrations of Aztec splendour. The fifth letter (1525), addressed to Charles as a 'Caesarean majesty', requested permission to sail westward beyond Mexico, to chart the route to Malacca and the Spice Islands, and to make of them 'Your Majesty's rightful property' while sidelining Portugal. After that, Cortés could target China.¹⁴

While signs of war and encounter made rivalries and alliances, they also fuelled rival narratives. The lust for gold, for instance, could cut several ways. It could cover the costs of a redemptive war against Islam and campaigns against Christian heretics in Europe. But gold lust could also yield stories of the corruption of Christian hopes of salvation with tales of live burnings, Indians fed to the dogs, and scenes of public rape and defilement – the ruin of paradise by conquistadors who dehumanized Americans in their greed. No sooner did Cortés' tales enter Europe's printing market than Peter Martyr d'Angeira published *Enchiridion de nuper sub D. Carolo repertis insulis* in Basel in 1521. Even before the final assault on the Aztec capital, here was a book that invoked the idea of a triumph over a great, prestigious empire. At the same time, it described the suffering of innocents, planting doubts about the fitness of Spaniards to shoulder the burdens of a pious war. The most important portrait was that of Bartolomé de Las Casas, whose 1552 *Brevísima relación de las Indias* chronicled the devastation of native populations. He observed the atrocities of pearl fishers who enslaved Taínos with alcohol and worked them to death; hence

13 Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman age of exploration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

14 Anthony Pagden, trans. and ed., *Hernán Cortés: letters from Mexico*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 445.

Montaigne's scorn for Spanish conquistadores' hunger for pearls. Las Casas ushered in a tradition of reportage and eye-witness accounts about Europeans' wrongdoings in faraway places. Spaniards had not behaved like Christian heroes bringing enlightenment; this was not Rome, or even Granada, but just destruction. Thereafter, Las Casas' account would loom large in the representations of Spanish motives and methods: this artefact of mimetic capital circulated a sense of commonness between Europeans and 'others', which was essential to legitimate claims of possession, while serving as grist for new divides and rival narratives to justify them.¹⁵

The news of discoveries in the Americas therefore folded into broader conflicts in the old world and helped bring them to a head. They also created images of hitherto unimaginable grandeur and possibility for contestants, images that locked their fates together as a broader purpose and ambition.

Circling the world

Atlantic world discoveries and early imperial forays soon reverberated well beyond Europe. Not only were Europeans becoming aware of global connections and possibilities. The circulation of images and narratives of New World discoveries also aroused intrigued and interested readings around Afro-Asia. It yielded a small business in Ottoman Americana, concerned not just with conquest but with commerce and the search for value beyond Europe. The conquest of the Americas overlapped with triumphs of Islamic empires: the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 and the campaigns of Zahir ud-din Muhammad Babur across north India and the formation of the Mughal empire from 1519 to 1530 have been entwined. What is often forgotten, however, is that the sultan's triumphs in North Africa were a direct response to the universal claims of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. These reinforced his Balkan plans and he fastened his sights directly on the Indian Ocean to counter the threat of the Portuguese. Indeed, not since the Abbasid empire of the tenth century had Islam so burnished the concept of a universal caliphate to rival Christian universalisms. This stirred curiosity about Mexican conquests and a desire for news of new worlds. Piri Reis's *mapamundi* of 1513, for instance, was a mariner's chart of the world drafted for Ottoman rulers based upon the (now-lost) map made by Columbus of his Caribbean discoveries; perhaps the most famous Ottoman expression of this curiosity and yearning to understand the New World's charms and potentials, it was by no means unique. Meanwhile, Italian translations of chronicles of discovery and conquest reached Suleiman's circle, fuelling concern that Muslims were playing no role in the epic – and reinforcing his determination to stop Charles V's ambitions in their tracks.

Just as Europeans cut and pasted narratives of encounter and conquest, as Gruzinski has noted, so Ottoman chroniclers concocted mixtures of Cortés, Peter Martyr d'Angheira, and López de Gómara. The oldest book about the New World published east of Italy was *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi*, a pastiche of López de Gómara and others whose purpose was to learn from American conquests to prepare for a holy war. It was more concerned with natural history than cataloguing Spanish atrocities or conversions of native peoples.

15 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A short account of the destruction of the Indies*, ed. and trans. Nigel Griffin, New York: Penguin, 1992; Hart, *Representing the New World*, pp. 36, 101–17.

Moreover, circulating news encouraged Ottoman heavy investment in fleets to rule the Indian Ocean.¹⁶

Rivalry and emulation in the Atlantic world reshaped tensions in the Indian Ocean and beyond. News of gathering forces motivated Mughal expansion – which reached its acme with the march on commercial outposts such as Gujarat in 1572. The Portuguese entered a South Asian theatre in which powerful, territorial Islamic regimes were already locking horns. Chroniclers such as Zayn al-Din al Malibari catalogued Portuguese atrocities in the same tradition as Spanish critics. Like dominoes, Hormuz was attacked in 1507 and fell in 1515, along with Goa in 1510 and Malacca in 1511. Zayn al-Din al Malibari's 1574 *Gift of the jihad warriors in matters regarding the Portuguese* was a call to arms to 'fight against the slaves of the cross', explaining the principles of jihad to mould an anti-European response and defence of what Enseng Ho has called 'creole Muslim networks'.¹⁷

Meanwhile, as Cortés fastened on Mexico, the Portuguese sent embassies to Beijing in 1517. Tomé Pires had been dispatched as the first European diplomat to the Forbidden City. His saga ended badly. Still, Pires was a revealing choice as one of Europe's premier collectors of information on Asia at the time. Though his dispatches never earned him the notoriety of his contemporary envoy to Mexico, they flowed into the set of impressions that would be copied, translated, printed and commercialized. His *Suma oriental* became the most important source on the trade of maritime Asia at the dawn of European entry into East Asian waters.¹⁸

Within half a century, Spanish officials in Manila (which they had seized in 1571) were hatching plans – animated by images of Cortésian triumphs – to conquer and convert China, known as *la empresa de China*. If Cuba had been the staging grounds to Mexico, the Philippines, with the support of men, money, and materiel from Mexico, could be an even grander stage for a Spanish triumph over China. To realize that image, Francisco de Sande, the Governor of the Philippines, called for an army of 5,000 soldiers to bring down the Ming dynasty. The plotters argued that conquering China would remove the biggest obstacle to the spread of God's word across infidel Asia. It could open the backdoor to inner Asia. From Beijing, Christians could then move west to Baghdad, and thence to Jerusalem.¹⁹

This dream of global encirclement ended like so many others: wrecked by the local and global rivalries it spawned. By the time that Sande returned to Manila from Mexico (where he had gone to muster resources for the cause), the city had been burned and pillaged

16 Gregory C. McIntosh, *The Piri Reis map of 1513*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000; Thomas D. Goodrich, *The Ottoman Turks and the new world: a study of Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi and sixteenth century Americana*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990; Nabil Matar, ed., *In the lands of the Christians: Arabic travel writing in the seventeenth century*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

17 Enseng Ho, 'Empire through diasporic eyes: a view from the other boat', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46, 2, 2004, p. 223; K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and civilisation in the Indian Ocean: an economic history from the rise of Islam to 1750*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 73, 79, 117.

18 John E. Wills Jr, 'Maritime Europe and the Ming', in John E. Wills Jr, ed., *China and maritime Europe, 1500–1800: trade, settlement, diplomacy, and missions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 26–8.

19 John M. Headley, 'Spain's Asian presence, 1565–1590: structures and aspirations', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 75, 4, November 1995, pp. 623–46; Hugh Clark, 'Frontier discourse and China's maritime frontier: China's frontiers and encounters with the sea through early imperial history', *Journal of World History*, 20, 1, March 2009, pp. 1–33.

by Chinese and Japanese pirates, who had also been consuming news of distant developments and had dispatched advance parties to Manila to grab some of the riches flowing from the New World. The population was in revolt. While some have argued that the opening of Manila was a crucial stage in the forming of a world system by connecting Mexican supply of bullion with Chinese demand, it also locked regional players in Asia into a global political scramble by creating networks of circulating images and legends. Contacts and conquests laid down the multiple radials and circulars from different corners of imperial webworks to transmit impressions of events and narratives from one place to another.²⁰

Newcomers

The argument about discoveries and intensified jostling around the world does not presume that powerful, extrusive European states were requirements for expansion; rather, expansion was the effect of these early global exchanges between relatively weak polities. Yet, expansion would in turn compel polities to marshal resources and create capacities to manage increasingly entangled relations. How did this work? News and images of conquests and contacts intensified the intervisibility of rivals: that is, people on either side of imperial divides regarded each other with greater facility and eagerness, fuelled by proliferating printing presses, networks of spies, and merchants of curiosities and commodities. By spreading the circulating imagery globally, their brokers augmented their value and induced newcomers, thus increasing the complexity of entanglements.

Some saw the possibilities – and perils – immediately, recognizing the need to curb the rivalry. One of them was Pope Alexander VI. No stranger to European feuds, once he had received news of Columbus' landfall the pope saw that the making of humankind also threatened to unleash an even more intense scramble for power at home. His solution was a Latin Christendom comprised of states that worked together for a higher purpose. That was one point of the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, which partitioned the world between the two Catholic kings of Spain and Portugal. There had been earlier papal bulls dealing with partitions of discoveries, and some even concerned disputed claims to Atlantic islands. But when Columbus made his first return and landed in Lisbon in March 1493 he gave Europeans their first glimpse of native Americans. In Las Casas' rendering of the Admiral's Diary, he noted 'The thing was so new and admirable that everybody from the region came to see the Indians, nude people, never anything like this had been imagined in all the world.' He then proceeded to Barcelona to see Ferdinand and Isabella, leaving behind a Portuguese king scrambling to get a share of the new action. It was the immediate sensation of the news and the fear of an outbreak of hostilities that compelled the pope to acknowledge a division of west and east in 1494. For all intents and purposes, the Treaty of Tordesillas was a doomed document for global governance. Nevertheless, it set the stage for a scramble for geographic knowledge and rules governing inter-imperial relations and rivalries.²¹

20 Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, 'Born with a "silver spoon": the origin of world trade in 1571', *Journal of World History*, 6, 2, Fall 1995, pp. 201–21.

21 Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Vida de Cristóbal Colon*, Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1992, p. 67; Jerry Brotton, *Trading territories: mapping the early modern world*, London: Reaktion Books, 1997, pp. 122–59.

The flow of news and images brought on newcomers and emulators, each bristling with fantasies of personal gain and political conquest. The English wasted no time in enlisting the Venetian Giovanni Caboto, who was working on the building of a bridge over the Guadalquivir river in Andalusia as the stories of Columbus' discoveries made the rounds. 'Cabot' claimed he knew a better route to Cipangu (Japan), by sailing north – and Henry VII dispatched him with letters patent to conquer, establish trade monopolies, and claim dominion in discovered lands. This was 1496; the pope's bull and the Iberian dividing the world were, not surprisingly, ignored. The English king was not going to be constrained by legal nicety. The French also sent expeditions armed with similar fantasies. Jacques Cartier, his head flush with tales of Cortésian feats, learned from the Iroquoian Chief Donnacona on the shores of the St Lawrence that further west lived white men dressed in woollen clothes who draped themselves in gold and silver. In the spring of 1536 Cartier kidnapped the chief, hoping that his captive would provide direct testimony at the king's headquarters, the Louvre, of the riches that lay beyond in the fictive kingdom of Saguenay, a rival to Mexico. Both English and French sovereigns consoled themselves with claims that their conquests would be more virtuous than Spanish predecessors, lacing their chronicles with early exceptionalist narratives.²²

The circulation of stories and signs meant that what went on in the peripheries was neither out of sight nor out of mind. These accounts were central to the founding myths of the modern world. Las Casas' testimonial would become an instrument in a war of words and symbols that had lethal – and lasting – consequences for the theory and practice of just war and international law. It was not his intention, but the eye-witness account published in Seville in 1552 was part of the debate over the Aristotelian nature of the Indians – were they naturally slaves or naturally equal? – and it was quickly translated into other languages; within two decades Las Casas circulated widely in French and Latin and became a staple of the 'Black Legend' of Spanish wrongdoings. John Foxe's 1554 *Book of martyrs* spun the conquest as an example of Spanish tyranny and cruelty in order to justify the morality of England's cause against Spain. The Dutch revolt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries turned the 1598 Latin translation by Theodor de Bry into a veritable bestseller among insurgent literati.²³

This catalogue of misdeeds in the peripheries was among the staples of Francis Drake's literary diet and important in the making of a counterpoint 'White Legend' – a script and strategy for imperial rivals. Instead of conquests on land, they resorted to predation, mainly at sea. Predation between kingdoms pushed the methods of economic warfare into literally uncharted legal waters from Malacca to Veracruz; piracy tales thus became another mimetic staple. We have seen how the news of booty from Mexico drew Chinese and Japanese pirates to Manila. Earlier in the century, in 1522, Captain Jean Fleury seized two Spanish galleons off the Azores loaded with the plunder taken from Montezuma. This was the first recorded act of state piracy against American booty; like so much of the news it was a sensation that

22 Bruce Trigger, *Natives and newcomers: Canada's 'heroic age' reconsidered*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985, pp. 132–3.

23 Charles Gibson, 'Introduction', in Charles Gibson, ed., *The Black Legend: anti-Spanish attitudes in the old world and the new*, New York: Knopf, 1971, pp. 3–27; Lewis Hanke, *All mankind is one: a study of the disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda on the religious and intellectual capacity of the American Indians*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974.

inspired a swarm of imitators. Fleury's sponsor was Charles's nemesis, François I, for whom the works of gold and jade, masks and mosaics of gemstones, and exotic animals were the elixirs of the new age. But for Francis it was more than just about the money. The Treaty of Tordesillas had enraged him: 'I should very much like to see the clause in Adam's will that excludes me from a share of the world.' To make his point, he ordered eight more vessels to maraud. This flotilla captured no fewer than thirty Spanish and Portuguese vessels. Fleury's plundering ways came to an end when he was eventually captured and tried in Toledo, then hanged.²⁴

Taking treasure also triggered practices of seizing other staples. Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton have demonstrated how important the early and prolonged practice of piracy on the high seas was for the sourcing of African slaves to English and Dutch traders bereft of legal means to traffic directly in Africa. As early as 1527, William Hawkins had ventured to Guinea in search of gold. What he saw was human cargo being loaded onto vessels bound for Brazil; he brought the news back to England and started a frenzy. By the 1560s, his son, John, joined another predator, Francis Drake, to cruise off the African coast hunting for slave vessels. Thereafter, West Central Africa, the hub of Portuguese commerce, was the predominant source of captives for almost three centuries; with time, inter-imperial trading for slaves would eclipse cross-imperial piracy.²⁵

A precedent was set for oceans and sea lanes to become lasting sites for imperial contests; vessels would thereby become carriers of legal claims, like floating islands of pseudo-sovereignty in which pirates and privateers (private warships chartered on behalf of governments to attack foreign vessels) were the purveyors of law and violence for states who contracted them. Far from being the stereotypical rogue outlaws, they were imperial emissaries, functioning at the fringes purposefully to entangle empires through what one world historian has called 'macroparasitism'.²⁶ This is important to underscore, for treaties such as Tordesillas (completed by the Treaty of Saragossa in 1529, which concerned the other side of the world) were only one face of an emerging international legal system – so too were the agents deployed to violate them, thereby comingling violence and negotiation, peripheries and cores, in the making of global empires. The Spanish triumph over the Ottomans' Mediterranean fleet at the battle of Lepanto led to a spasm of optimism – culminating in a project to create a mighty armada to destroy heresy in Europe and serve as a wedge for a final crusade. Its ruinous fate is well known. But naval clashes should not obscure the wider seaborne world and the multiplying strategies of rivalry that blurred the idealized lines demarcating formal from informal activities, lawful from unlawful purposes.²⁷

In fact, they were coiled together precisely because the horizons of expansion and accumulation circled the globe. Piracy and predation were of course not new. Chinese pirates

24 Nina Gerassi-Navarro, *Pirate novels: fictions of nation-building in Spanish America*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 21.

25 Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic creoles, and the foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 14–16.

26 J. L. Anderson, 'Piracy and world history: an economic perspective on maritime predation', *Journal of World History*, 6, 2, 1995, pp. 175–99.

27 Janice E. Thompson, *Mercenaries, pirates, and sovereigns: state-building and extra territorial violence in early modern Europe*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.

had plied the South China seas; Hindu and Omani corsairs worked the west coast of India and beyond.²⁸ Kongolesse nobles used mercenaries to funnel captives to an active slave market well before the Portuguese arrived. What *was* new was the degree of imperial sponsorship and the global scale of predation and privateering. When the Portuguese sailed into Chinese waters, they were swept up in ongoing feuds between the Ming state and Chinese pirates. In 1536 Gujaratis pleaded to the Sultan Umdet al-Mulk to protect the commercial entrepôt, under threat from ‘Mongols [that is Mughals] by land and infidels [that is the Portuguese] by sea’. Portuguese admirals, under orders from their viceroys in Goa, launched repeated raids and atrocities. By then, Ottoman fleets were as over-extended as the Portuguese, and unable to stop the swarm of opportunists. The whole rim of the Indian Ocean was engulfed in struggles for hegemony and defence. Paradoxically, recognizing this shift, Portuguese and Ottoman rulers pivoted from open rivalry to collusion. It was too late; they had already lost what little control they had. In 1610, the sheikh of Qadil condoned Arab piracy along the Makram coast, though he advised his agents to steer clear of direct hits on Portuguese targets. Islands such as Jamaica and Madagascar became havens for macroparasitism.²⁹

Territory

Thus far, this article has drawn attention to the interaction effects across empires. We can spot the multiple points where the circulation of news, chronicles, and images drew rivals into a combustible system with interlocking strategies. As kingdoms became empires resting on hybrid legal cultures, sovereigns were forced to resolve their definitions of power not just over *whom* but over *what*. This propelled a search for knowledge about the world. Europeans were crossing borders of the New World and the Old hunting for antiquities, precious artefacts, and naturalia to valorize exchanges, contacts, and conquests. Portraits of nature and charts of the seas contributed to the concern to understand nature and its laws – to create an early form of imperial *mise en valeur* in far-flung places. They made strange things commensurable, laced together the global origins of a scientific revolution with a search for commercial value, and augmented the stakes in and commitment to expansion.³⁰

Consider the example of Samuel de Champlain, a classic emissary of his age. Champlain had cut his teeth serving Henry IV in the clash with the Catholic League over Brittany; he witnessed the coiling of competition and collusion close up. He served in the Spanish fleets from Cádiz to the Caribbean and voyaged to the capital of the viceroyalty of New Spain. Along the way, he also saw how the English had seized Puerto Rico and used it as a base for contraband and raiding. In every port he saw vessels loaded with cargoes, and docks mounted with sugar and ginger, lined with fruit stalls and pens of African slaves, the thriving tropical nodes of commercial capitalism. Mexico, however, exploded his

28 Sebastian Prange, ‘A trade of no dishonor: piracy, commerce, and community in the western Indian Ocean, twelfth to sixteenth century’, *American Historical Review*, 116, 5, 2011, pp. 1269–93.

29 Casale, *Ottoman age of exploration*, pp. 56–66; Housley, *Later crusades*, pp. 320–1.

30 Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen, ‘Commerce and the representation of nature in art and science’, in Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen, eds., *Merchants and marvels: commerce, science, and art in early modern Europe*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 1–28; Robert Aldrich, ‘Imperial *mise en valeur* and *mise en scène*: recent works on French colonialism’, *Historical Journal*, 45, 4, 2002, pp. 917–36.

imaginings of empire and inspired him to pen an eye-witness account for the king, to submit ‘a true report to his majesty of the particularities which could not be known to any Frenchman, for the reason that they have not free access there’. As he travelled inland, he marvelled at the abundance of trees, fruit, and cornfields. ‘But all the contentment that I had felt at the sight of things so agreeable, was but little in regard of that which I experienced when I beheld that beautiful city of Mechique.’ He visited silver mines and cacao and cochineal plantations, even finding room for a medieval flight of fancy about ‘dragons of strange figure’ with ‘the head of an eagle, wings like those of a bat, the body like a lizard, and has only two rather large feet; the tail somewhat scaly, and it is as large as a sheep; they are not dangerous, and do no harm to anybody, though to see them, you would say the contrary’.³¹

Impressions of other empires led Champlain back to the Louvre to become the geographer to the king, which meant imagining the spatial authority of the sovereign in the New World. The Louvre, meanwhile, was being retrofitted for astronomers, cartographers, and navigators, and to warehouse exotic collections. As *géographe du roi*, Champlain would map out the contours of a French territorial empire in the New World. He used Cartier’s maps to travel up the St Lawrence to stitch together an alliance with the rulers of the Algonquian peoples, labouring as an ambassador for one ‘great father’ to others. His New France was an echo of Madrid’s New Spain. In response to the alliance between French and Algonquian, the Iroquois went in search of their own ally, finding English people also in search of a diplomatic and military partner to buttress a New England. The result was a shift from a scramble over trade networks and sea lanes to a rush for terrain.³²

Encounters in faraway places made impressions and informed strategies within Eurasian courts as reports such as those of Champlain shaped the calculus of expansion back home. Encounters, negotiations, influences, and responses were transmitted across every link in the chain of empires, from the fringes to central palaces and back again. These mechanisms, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam has pointed out, produced commensurability between regimes and facilitated coexistence and conflict between empires in Delhi and Istanbul as well. Interlinking signs and rituals of kingly majesty did not, of course, have to turn out well for intruders. The Tupinamba greeted Portuguese raiders with arrows and darts, and proudly etched tattoos onto their chests to record the number of kills. Another example was the cool reception given to foreign envoys arriving in the Forbidden Palace. But even in China the calculus was shifting. The Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia in 1689 saw Beijing swap territory to make the Argun river a dividing line to keep Russian settlers out of Qing territory and cut off the lifeline of support to Mongol borderlanders. The tsar, in turn, freed from having to defend freebooters in the east, could focus on western ambitions. Mediated by Jesuits, this agreement intensified the partitioning of inner Asia, helped consolidate Russian tsardom and Manchu authority, and released Chinese armies to crush the relics of Mongol borderland states.³³

31 Samuel de Champlain, *Narrative of a voyage to the West Indies and Mexico in the years 1599–1602*, ed. Norton Shaw, London: Hakluyt Society, 1858, pp. 2, 22, 33.

32 David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain’s dream*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008.

33 David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their savages in the Age of Enlightenment*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005, ch. 5; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly encounters: translating courtliness and*

Dotted, fluid, and vexingly irregular, these lines marked space. Sometimes they were geometric (as in Tordesillas); more often they were ‘natural’ (rivers, coastlines, mountains), which is why navigators, geographers, and natural historians became vital elements of any self-respecting imperial court. On the ground, the operative lines sketched the enclaves and corridors that were more typical of how empires got territorialized. Hapsburgs and Ottomans had engaged pirates and bandits across the Balkan borderlands as proxies for their regional contest; local clans in turn borrowed and amalgamated from both sides, using classic borderlander tactics and artful ways of playing empires off each others’ ‘holy war’.³⁴

Similar pressures, fuelled in part by the rise of the plantation economy, bridged the Americas and Africa, and put increasing pressure on borderlanders. The growing density of the imperial presence in the Americas and some areas of Africa, such as the Bights and Angola, led to friction where empires bumped up against each other; borderlands became bleeding grounds as the carnage between Europeans, Indians, Africans, and peoples ‘in between’ intensified. Complex exchanges between Portuguese envoys and the Kongo kingdom opened the floodgates for the forced exodus of Central African slaves. The campaigns against the kingdom of Ndongo in the late sixteenth century, for instance, were a boon to the rival Kongolese houses, who sold captives in the thousands to Portuguese factors and used their proceeds to expand their war-making capacities and territorial claims. As Lisbon set its sights on asserting more territorial control over its Kongolese allies, warfare finally erupted with Pedro II of the house of Nsundi in 1622. Kongo rulers played off Dutch agents to thwart the Portuguese. Pedro II appealed directly to the Spanish king and the pope to intercede. Afraid of being driven out of the region completely, Portuguese merchants, Jesuits, and a swelling creole population finally had Lisbon’s governor toppled. But the conflict over territory and the supply of captives left all sides badly bruised. Facing rivals from the house of Kwilu, Pedro II made a direct appeal with gold, silver, and ivory to the Dutch admiral Piet Heyn to take Luanda in 1624. Pedro’s untimely death put an end to the scheme. However, it set the stage for a full-scale Dutch invasion in 1641, by which time the Kongo kingdom was deeply riven by factional houses, its weakened ruler relying on Dutch support to suppress his rivals. He paid his sponsors with captives, which the Dutch then shipped to their new dominions in Brazil – connecting prizes in Africa to new territories in the Americas.³⁵

Territorialization did not mean that the lines separating polities became more legible or fixed. If anything, the escalating violence over imperial lines made them more porous – and therefore liable to be represented as lawless grounds that required imperial intrusion and control. Empires and allies began to go after each other’s islands, enclaves, and rivers; the St Lawrence, for example, was a riparian gateway into the North American interior, typical

violence in early modern Eurasia, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, esp. pp. 28–9 and 208–9.

34 Catherine Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: piracy, banditry, and holy war in the sixteenth-century Adriatic*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

35 Ivana Elbl, ‘Cross-cultural trade and diplomacy: Portuguese relations with West Africa, 1441–1521’, *Journal of World History*, 3, 2, 1992, pp. 165–204; Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, p. 146; Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *O trato dos viventes: formação do Brasil no Atlântico sul*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000, pp. 70–6.

of the ways in which rivers operated as corridors into unevenly charted territories. But territorialization can also be seen as the making of contested lines lighting up with growing numbers of forts and militarized trading posts. Entire provinces could become someone else's: the Dutch attacked Bahia in 1624 and converted the Captaincy of Pernambuco into New Holland in 1630 in search of an open slaving frontier for the Dutch West Indies Company and the newfound interest in trade with Africa. The idea was to create a rival to the Count Duke of Olivares' dream of lacing together Madrid, Lisbon, Manila, Goa, Luanda, Bahia, and Mexico.³⁶

Rivalries evolved from the high seas to contests over borderlands precisely because it was there that the markers around corridors, enclaves, islands, and deltas were more contentious. The result: the quest for territory evolved into what looked increasingly like a prolonged scramble for possessions. Empires, as a result, also bulked up their fiscal–military powers and relied – if they could – less and less on feckless macroparasites. If there was a moment in which Charles Tilly's famous line 'that states make war and war makes states' held true, this was it. With one important modification: it was empires that made war and war that spread empires. In turn, an emerging territorial consciousness heightened the global disequilibrium, made it more intractable, and increasingly externalized it to fringes of state systems where once customary patterns of tribute and vassalage prevailed.³⁷

Knowledge

Territorial drives yielded a simultaneous push to resolve basic uncertainties and anomalies. This was one of the reasons why there was so much fuss about boundaries and the proliferation of fortresses, presidios, and factories as imperial spaces around the world were filled. It also accounts for the paradox of an augmented search for knowledge about the world and greater efforts to control, restrict, and even make secret that very knowledge.³⁸

There had been a flow of learning and discovery across the East–West divide to accompany warfare, espionage, and diplomacy, not to mention trade. Steeped in classical models, Italian humanists constructed an image of the 'Turks' while borrowing from them. Along the way, their texts nurtured an incipient, unstable idea of 'Europe'.³⁹ There was also the borrowing between European and Chinese literati, with knowledge of engineering of silk production, textile weaving, and porcelain running west and cosmology and arithmetic travelling east. Benjamin Elman has described the accommodations and reciprocal flows of 'natural studies' and the mediating role of Jesuit *scientia*, especially after the arrival of Matteo Ricci in the Forbidden Palace.⁴⁰

36 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Holding the world in balance: the connected histories of the Iberian overseas empires', *American Historical Review*, 112, 5, 2007, pp. 1359–85.

37 Charles Tilly, 'War making and state making as organized crime', in Peter Evans, Dieter Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the state back in*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 169–91.

38 Alison Sandman, 'Controlling knowledge: navigation, cartography, and secrecy in the early modern Spanish Atlantic', in Smith and Findlen, *Merchants and marvels*, pp. 31–52.

39 Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance humanists and the Ottoman Turks*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

40 Benjamin A. Elman, 'Jesuit *scientia* and natural studies in late imperial China, 1600–1800', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 6, 3, 2002, pp. 209–32.

As global horizons opened up and monarchies fastened on territorial marking, the value of scientific discovery intensified. The exodus of botanists and surveyors exemplified the interest in producing valuable knowledge about and from continental interiors. From the moment that Spaniards landed in Santo Domingo, native plants such as balsam became the subject of much fascination for their medicinal properties. Scientific exploration thus began to displace classical sources as the source of authority, a process reinforced by the value ascribed to the discovery of tradable drugs and other commodities. Continental interiors might be unlocked and reproduced as imperial gardens, like the Jardin Royal, created in 1640 to study the botanical harvest from the Two Indies to lend French intelligence ‘a large and rich advantage over all the others’.⁴¹ The prospect of ridding the world of gout and fevers while turning a profit only redoubled the scramble of ‘plant mercantilists’ (to borrow the words of Marie-Noelle Bourguet and Christophe Bonneuil).

Mapping physical contours of the landscape, classifying its fauna, and collecting its flora had two functions: they marked (albeit unevenly) boundaries of imperial states and emboldened the imaginary of empire. By accumulating an inventory of images, natural scientists and surveyors catalogued species and organized natural histories of Europe’s outer worlds to make them part of their inner worlds – blurring the lines between them. Science could pick up where faith or classics left off, and make the world whole. That they now did so in the vernacular of visual culture only added to the value of circulating imagery.⁴²

Studies of imperial science are now abundant; they can be placed within the context of a broader shift in political economy – indeed, they can be treated as elements that gave rise to political economy and new models of statecraft. One example of this coiled history of botanical imperialism and scientific rivalry is José Celestino Mutis and his scientific expedition to South America. A Spanish-born physician-turned-botanist, Mutis grew fascinated with the medicinal properties of *Cinchona* (Jesus’s bark or Peruvian bark). In 1763 he petitioned the king to allow him to conduct a thorough study of the flora and fauna of Nueva Granada. In making his pitch, he argued that possessing new lands, and being able to thwart others, meant knowing them. Understanding *Cinchona*, for instance, held out the promise of allowing healthy bodies to settle Spain’s tropical frontiers so that settlement could enhance the health of the kingdom. The Mutis Royal Botanical Expedition catalogued the bounty that God had bequeathed to his Spanish sovereign as part of a more general Zeitgeist of envisioning empire through materials that circulated through and across empires, heightening jealousies and emulation. The imaginary geography of empire moved from a reliance on signs of encounter and redemption to a visual culture comprised of portraits of a natural and human world poised for the collector, the cataloguer, and the cartographer in the service of new models of governance.⁴³

41 Antonio Barrera, ‘Local herbs and global medicines: commerce, knowledge, and commodities in Spanish America’, in Smith and Findlen, *Merchants and marvels*, pp. 163–81; Neil Safier, *Measuring the New World: Enlightenment science and South America*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 233.

42 Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and empire: colonial bioprospecting in the Atlantic world*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 5, 11; Júnia Ferreira Furtado, ‘The Indies of knowledge, or the imaginary geography of the discoveries of gold in Brazil’, in Daniela Bleichmar, Paula De Vos, Kristin Huffine, and Kevin Sheehan, eds., *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese empires, 1500–1800*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 178–97; Harold J. Cook, *Matters of exchange: commerce, medicine, and science in the Dutch golden age*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.

43 Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible empire: botanical expedition and visual culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment*, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2012.

Science remade earlier practices for a new era, one in which images of land and portraits of nature's commercial possibilities injected new notions of value into the understanding of empire. The search for value, in fact, became common currency and inspired an imperial political economy, a science of *mise en valeur*, to bond peripheral territories to national needs, starting with those emptied of their incumbent peoples. So much of the Amerindian world had been destroyed – to such an extent that, by the eighteenth century, European political economists could unreflexively refer to America as 'virgin land', waiting for European insemination one presumes. The point is that what Europeans brought to the Americas altered the balance of forces on both sides of the Atlantic because it created legacies that Adam Smith himself identified in *The wealth of nations*: 'The colony of a civilized nation which takes possession, either of a waste country, or of one so thinly inhabited, that the natives easily give place to new settlers, advances more rapidly to wealth and greatness than any other human society.'⁴⁴

By the middle of the eighteenth century, rulers and ministers were wrangling over how to adapt their ways and embarking on increasingly ambitious plans to modify the public and private institutions that held their empires together – by borrowing, translating, adapting, and refashioning from each other. Montesquieu's notion that trade could tame the passions, the *doux commerce* thesis, got even more circulation when applied to expanding opportunities in newly opening interiors. The Marquis de Pombal, the architect of commercial reform in Lisbon, spoke for many of his contemporaries: 'All European nations have improved themselves through reciprocal imitation; each one carefully keeps watch over the actions taken by the others.' In his memoirs, he would cite *The spirit of the laws* to explain the civilizing effects of trade, and lament that the English outpaced the Portuguese in recognizing the value of arts and industry. What Portugal did to Africa (which had, citing Montesquieu, precious metals that lured Africans to rely on the bounty of nature and not man), England was doing to Portugal, leaving Lisbon in a 'a kind of cold lethargy'.⁴⁵

The new science afforded new coordinates for the political economy of empire. The Amazon was one place that concerned Pombal above all. Once cleaved by the gridlines of Tordesillas, a new pact between Madrid and Lisbon, the 1750 Treaty of Madrid, informed by chests of maps and surveys, launched the Amazon's long (and ongoing) career as a subject for utopian-commercial and imperial fantasizing. Borrowing the astronomical innovations of the French royal geographer Guillaume Lisle, the first Brazilian scientific boundary commission of 1729, headed by the 'mathematical clerics' Diogo Soares and Domingos Capassi, mapped out Brazil's holdings according to a new calculus and an emerging model of rights that focused on territorial possession and use. For François Quesnay – the king's physician in Versailles, an avid Confucianist and a student of China's agrarian policies – physiocracy (literally, from the Greek 'government of nature') was not just a calculus of wealth but an imperial tableau for the state and its bond to land and territory. Hence the accent on agriculture, food, and thus land, and the escalating process of what Istvan Hont

44 Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1977, book IV, ch. 7, part II, p. 444; John Murrin, 'The beneficiaries of catastrophe: the English colonies in America', in Eric Foner, ed., *The new American history*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997, pp. 3–30.

45 John Smith, *Memoirs of the Marquis of Pombal: with extracts from his writings and despatches in the state paper office*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843, vol. 1, p. 116.

has described aptly in his history of political economy across imperial boundaries as 'jealousy of trade'.⁴⁶

The escalation and globalization of eighteenth-century warfare in turn heightened competition, emulation, and learning. Contests and treaties over territory and claims illustrate the converging understandings of the role and importance of distant dominions to imperial security and wellbeing. Feuds erupted everywhere that Europeans had sought to divide their possessions and began the long process of hardening lines of inclusion and exclusion between and within empires. This took various forms. One was outright territorial swap by treaty, as was the case of New France after the Treaty of Paris (1763). A result was wholesale eviction or ruin of borderlanders and allies. Acadian settlers were forcibly relocated; General Montcalm's Indian allies, by now ravaged by smallpox, faced the onslaught of 'Anglo' settlers. The British takeover of Florida sent Indians fleeing westward. Similar dynamics affected the River Plate borderlands, where the Society of Jesus had built up protective missions (*reducciones*) for the Guaraní. Between the Treaty of Madrid and the Treaty of Paris, Spain took Colonia do Sacramento but ceded many of the Jesuit territories. Shortly thereafter, the Society of Jesus was expelled from the Americas (in 1759 in Portuguese America, 1762 in French America, and 1767 in Spanish America), in part because it was felt that priests withheld territory from the sovereign's new model empire. Guaraní missions passed to Brazilian territory to become prey for slave raiders.⁴⁷

Territorial exchange was one strategy. Another was a shift in dependent alliances. This was evident in the New World, but also in India. The Battle of Plassey (1757) may be remembered as Robert Clive's triumph over the French East India Company and the transfer of Bengal. But what was more decisive was what it signalled for the balance of infra-Indian forces. The French had only fifty rifle- and artillerymen; it was the thousands under the Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah who did the real fighting against the British. And it was the about-face of his lieutenant Mir Jafar that brought a close to independent 'native' rulership. For his efforts Mir Jafar was rewarded as the East India Company's subordinate ally.⁴⁸

One thing did not abate: the combination of envy and emulation and the role that books, documents, and images – the produce of print capitalism – played in ravelling them together. Globalized rivalry pressured rulers to reform empires informed by new doctrines of political economy and geography – social sciences born of empire.⁴⁹ It may seem surprising that it was Spain and Portugal that made reform a central and explicit part of governance; historians are so accustomed to thinking of them as fossilized and immune to outside influence. The truth is that,

46 'Calculo sobre a perda do dinheiro do Reyno offerecido a El Rey D. João 5 no anno de 1748 por Alexandre de Gusmão', in Biblioteca nacional de Lisboa, coleção pombalina, Códice 473, ff. 207–9; Sophus A. Reinert, *Translating empire: emulation and the origins of political economy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 41; Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of trade: international competition and the nation-state in historical perspective*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

47 Julia Sarreal, *The Guaraní and their missions: a socioeconomic history*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014; Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, 'From borderlands to borders: empires, nation-states, and the peoples in between in North American history', *American Historical Review*, 104, 3, 1999, pp. 814–41.

48 P. J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires: Britain, India, and America c. 1750–1783*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 119–58.

49 T. H. Breen, 'An empire of goods: the Anglicization of colonial America, 1690–1776', *Journal of British Studies*, 25, 1986, pp. 467–99; Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

while the institutional fabric of these regimes had been laid down in earlier centuries, it was their sense of having come from an earlier age that fuelled the anxiety to retool and renew. They were not 'latecomers' as much as they were in need of renewal – and thus rulers were more explicit about importing the lessons from their more vigorous, 'younger', rivals.

The French, too, followed the Seven Years' War with efforts to build populated, commercial engines out of their colonies; the sugar boom on St Domingue was the result of physiocratic-inspired reforms, easing the importation of slaves and access to land. After the humiliation at Plassey and Quebec (1759), Étienne François, Duc Choiseul, turned his gaze to the Amazon and its colonization. Emboldened by a handbook written by a Guianese planter, Brûlet de Préfontaine, *Maison rustique à l'usage des habitants de la partie de la France équinoxiale* (1763), Choiseul uncorked an audacious colonization expedition to Kourou. 'I sent botanists, naturalists, doctors, cultivators, colonists to the prospective settlement', he wrote to Voltaire, and 'I sent emissaries throughout Germany'; and he selected the 'most virtuous and the most understanding men to be governors and intendants'. Yet the backing of top French ministers and input from the king himself for a model 'colony of enlightenment' did little to prevent disaster: of the up to 14,000 settlers, 10,000 died within months; 3,000 struggled home, only to spread the diseases. One of the paradoxical lessons drawn from the spectacle and news of the episode was, as the Abbé Raynal observed, to double down on 'the horror of slavery and the necessity of slaves' elsewhere, as in St Domingue.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Rivalry and borrowing created dynamism as well as disequilibrium within an arrangement with multiple points of contact and exchange across the imperial links. This system developed the traits of a regime, an emerging set of norms and rules that determined the behaviour of agents who played within it even as it grew more competitive and violent. What is more, elements of this regime were increasingly summoned to bridle the disequilibrium. To call this an early form of global governance would be a stretch; but we can detect the precursive facets of diplomacy, scientific colonization, global knowledge, and greater intervisibility across imperial states.

It is important to note that greater competition and intervisibility did more than spawn instability within the regime as a whole. 'Reforms' yielded instability within empires. Imperial expansion fuelled by reform and reinvention in the latter half of the eighteenth century provoked a global riptide of opposition and resistance from below. As plebeian populations rose up, to a striking degree, they drew upon news and ideas from elsewhere. One need not draw hard and fast lines between globalizing potentates and localized subjects. In varying degrees, rebels borrowed from, and were aware of, distant upheavals as much as rulers did – though there were some obvious limitations on subaltern intervisibility. State censorship, control of information, and increased vigilance – especially once the slave uprising of St Domingue demonstrated just how far plebeian subjects could carry their cause – were obstacles to any kind of communicated, never mind coordinated, agency. And yet,

50 John Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic world: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006, esp. chs. 10–11; Raynal and Choiseul cited in Emma Rothschild, 'A horrible tragedy in the French Atlantic', *Past & Present*, 192, 2006, pp. 74, 88.

even for the malcontents, news travelled. After the fall of New France, the English colonies became more unruly not less, and were alert to Parliament's indulgence of the East India Company's monopoly trade in tea. The Túpac Amaru revolt in the Central Andes in the 1780s, Comunero uprisings further north, and seditious activity across New Spain all testified to local opposition to fiscal demands and commercial privileges. The conspiracies in Minas Gerais in Brazil in 1789 drew direct inspiration from the US Declaration of Independence. By the time that slaves were burning plantations in St Domingue in 1791, fear of slave insurgency had spread from Philadelphia to the River Plate. Meanwhile, the Sultan of Mysore formed a Jacobin Club in Srirangapatna and appealed to Napoleon for a great coalition against the British empire.⁵¹

Fear and learning on a global scale took on a different meaning thereafter and shaped the ways in which some people portrayed the global arrangement. 'The eyes of the world are now on St Domingo', observed one writer in the German magazine *Minerva* in 1804. The journal's editor, Johann Wilhelm Archenholz, otherwise critical of the violence of the French Revolution, was intrigued by the figure of an African slave giving new meaning to the definition of liberty. Among *Minerva's* regular readers was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (as well as Goethe and Schiller), for whom lordship and bondage provided the dialectical seam of freedom. It is true that Hegel had recently read Adam Smith's *Wealth of nations*, and its reflections on trade and division of labour helped frame his thoughts about civil society. But Archenholz's fascination for reporting on the periphery presented Hegel with altogether new possibilities for a universal history in the modern age.⁵²

To get to that point, however, took three centuries of imperial disequilibrium. We have an impression of the revolutionary years as an upheaval that threw a system into the air like a pack of cards. When they all settled back into a pattern, we got the coordinates of a new order, new norms, and the idea of a democratic peace shaped by a world of liberal nation-states which would eventually inform an idealized model of global affairs and give intellectual ballast to global institutions.

One might speculate just how much post-revolutionary arrangements overcame earlier dynamics that were simultaneously ordering and disordering, stabilizing and destabilizing. C. A. Bayly has made the case that modernity 'was a *process* of emulation and borrowing'. He has described the ways in which people around the world adopted the badges of belief in moving forwards and upwards with the times. Without denying that there was something more strongly fuelled about the ways in which global print capitalism issued its representational artefacts faster and farther around the planet after the 1830s, this article has suggested that the process had deeper taproots.⁵³

51 See C. A. Bayly's *Empire and information: intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780–1870*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, though it stops short of analysing the role of intelligence sometimes sown into the process. On viral revolts, see Jeremy Adelman, 'An age of imperial revolutions', *American Historical Review*, 113, 2, 2009, pp. 319–40; Anthony McFarlane, 'Rebellions in late colonial Spanish America: a comparative perspective', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 14, 3, 1983, pp. 313–38; Ashli White, *Encountering revolution: Haiti and the making of the early republic*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012; David Geggus, ed., *The impact of the Haitian revolution in the Atlantic world*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.

52 Susan Buck-Morss, 'Hegel and Haiti', *Social Inquiry*, 26, 4, 2000, pp. 821–65.

53 C. A. Bayly, *Birth of the modern world, 1780–1914*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 10, emphasis in original.

One might say that struggles over freedom renewed the lease on older portraits of empire that criss-crossed borders. In his crusade against Spanish armies, Simón Bolívar read Las Casas. There he found, in tales of Spanish spoliation under Cortés, a facsimile of the avenging style of the Spanish king's commanders three centuries later. Nor was he alone in rekindling the Black Legend tales of the gory origins of empires as a betrayal of spiritual liberation to girdle the world. English publishers had reissued Las Casas' eye-witness indictment on the eve of the seizure of Jamaica to give that territorial grab a patina of moral necessity. The US government did the same, for similar reasons, before declaring war against Spain in 1898, positioning itself as the saviour of Cubans and Puerto Ricans even as the Sioux were getting mown down on the Great Plains.⁵⁴

Older currents and counter-currents found themselves refashioned to challenge and justify ongoing rivalries. Indeed, rival, resilient, epics of empire were rolled out to justify emerging liberal practices. Shortly after his tour through the United States, having seen what opening the frontier did there, and envious of Britain in India, Alexis de Tocqueville visited Algeria. This herald of democratic peace theory was captivated by the thought of 'restoring national pride' and reversing the 'softening of social mores' of the French middle classes by opening up some colonial opportunities in the Maghreb. As for the incumbent peoples: 'They are Muslim barbarians', he famously declared. 'I think that all the means available to wreck tribes must be used, barring those that the human kind and the right of nations condemn.'⁵⁵

Perhaps the most virile case of nation-building through competitive empire was the one which did the most to invent an epic of a self-determining peoplehood. American leaders used the circulating medium of print journalism to re-enact the westward crusade as something unique about Protestant America. They also redeployed old images that connected the enterprise of Europeans to American 'vacant' territory to African labour. While slavocrats fastened their gaze on a new slave empire in Mexico and Mesoamerica, others hatched plans for that other myth of El Dorado, the Amazon. Matthew Fontaine Maury, a Virginian scientist and staunch Confederate, launched his crusade for 'a great slave empire' to integrate the Mississippi valley and the Amazon. In a few years, he dreamed aloud, the Amazon 'will become regarded for all commercial purposes as a sort of American colony', ridding it of 'an imbecile and indolent people' to be replaced with a 'race that has energy and enterprise'.⁵⁶

The history of interlocking empires that constituted a global regime highlights dimensions of Europe's history that question whether we can draw hard distinctions between cores as active sources of change and peripheries on the passive end of someone else's designs. Influences did not simply flow from capitals to hinterlands. They reversed course, skipped boundaries, and fused contact points between empires all along the chain

54 Ricardo García Cárcel, *La leyenda negra*, Madrid: Alianza, 1992.

55 Alexis de Tocqueville, 'Travail sur l'Algérie', in *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1991, pp. 704–5; Jennifer Pitts, *A turn to empire: the rise of imperial liberalism in Britain and France*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

56 Gerald Horne, *The deepest south: the United States, Brazil, and the African slave trade*, New York: NYU Press, 2007, pp. 113–14; Rogers S. Smith, *Stories of peoplehood: the politics and morals of political membership*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003; Michael Adas, 'From settler colony to global hegemon: integrating the exceptionalist narrative of the American experience into world history', *American Historical Review*, 106, 5, 2001, pp. 1692–1720.

of power. The result was unstable, combustible integration. As empires connected peoples, their agents also created narratives and images that moved beyond any single state and yielded to repertoires of encounters, conquests, and fantasies that could be adapted and mimicked for deployment elsewhere. Envy and emulation built a dynamic disequilibrium into the heart of the global regime. Instabilities were not the result of external, exogenous shocks or shifts; they were endogenous to how empires knitted parts of the world together. The rise of state power on a global scale was unstable from the start. To borrow Fernand Braudel's words, 'the fragility of this first unity of the world' was one of its legacies.⁵⁷

Jeremy Adelman is the Henry Charles Lea Professor of History and Director of the Global History Lab at Princeton University. He is the author or editor of ten books, most recently Worldly philosopher: the odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman (Princeton University Press, 2013). *He is currently writing a global history of Latin America.*

57 Fernand Braudel, 'European expansion and capitalism', in *Chapters in Western civilization*, 3rd edn, New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, vol. 1, p. 285.