

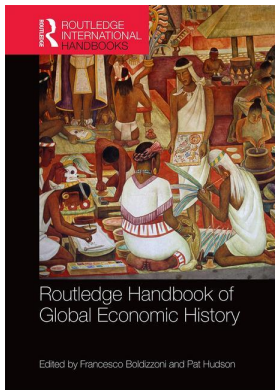
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16

ECONOMIC HISTORY
IN MIDDLE EURASIA

Beyond histories of stagnation and deficiencies

*Huri Islamoglu*¹

A central question of economic history since the nineteenth century has been why capitalist development (often identified with the transformations of modernity) took place in Western Europe and not elsewhere especially in China and Islamic lands which experienced early commercial expansion and the beginnings of industrial development. This question coincided with the establishment of European rule in non-European regions, particularly in Asia. Underlining the difference between the West and the others and acknowledging the superiority of one over the other became indispensable to the legitimation of the European presence in, and domination over, non-European regions. Accordingly, the writing of non-European histories was subjected to terms of comparison with Europe and trapped in a binary vision of world history, contrasting what Europe had with what others lacked. At issue were divergent institutional responses to changing conditions of trade and production. European responses were understood to have been conducive to economic growth and development resulting in Europe's prosperity and progress, while inappropriate responses by non-European societies were the reason for their poverty and lack of progress. The result was a dichotomous view of world history with cultural factors, religious or political, often serving to explain differences.

This chapter will address how economic historians of Middle Eurasia situated their histories in relation to world history, responding to changes in world historical contexts since the Second World War and to societal and political concerns in different areas of the region. With respect to the latter it is important to note that economic history spoke to immediate societal concerns at various points in time. These ranged from nation and state building, to critiques of free-tradism or of statist models of economic development, just as Eurocentric economic histories had spoken to concerns regarding the establishment of European domination. Eurocentric dichotomous visions of world history subordinating non-European histories to the European experience remained a reference point for Middle Eurasian economic historians, often delimiting or defining the questions they asked of history and their subject matter. Yet in the past few years changes in the world historical context, with the possibility of multipolar leadership in the global economy and the rising power of China, have served to demonstrate the limits of European world domination. Most importantly, they have pointed to the limits of understanding the world in terms of irreconcilable differences.

Middle Eurasia addressed here corresponds to what Marshal Hodgson called the 'Afro-Eurasian Oikoumene': the world extending from the Indian Ocean and northern India to

Afghanistan and Central Asia; and to Iran and Ottoman territories in Caucasia. It is a vast area encompassing the Anatolian plateau, Iraq, Syria, Palestine and the southeastern Mediterranean up to Egypt and North Africa. Islam was a common cultural input in the societal fabric which knitted together these different regions. Islam also provided explanations for their institutional deficiencies, their perceived divergence from a world historical course identified with Europe and its history. Max Weber (1978) in the nineteenth century attributed the stagnation of Islamic societies to the fact that Islam, unlike Protestantism, did not allow for a liberation of its law from ethical and religious concerns. This meant that Islamic law could not be 'rationalized' and put in the service of generating institutionally innovative responses to changing social conditions enabling market development. More recently, Timur Kuran (2011) once again evoked the specter of Islamic law impeding the formation of the key institutions of capitalist market societies, most notably corporations.² The vicissitudes of early modern Middle Eurasia, from the fifteenth century onwards, have often been identified with those of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires that shaped the histories of their regions. Therefore a political culture of authoritarian states, or 'Oriental despotism', was often called upon to explain Middle Eurasia's world historical failure or limited development (Islamoglu 1987).³

Since the 1990s Oriental despotism was given a facelift by liberal economic historians. In the rather defensive tone of post-colonial nativism, they sought to revise the despotic image by highlighting the benevolent-king traditions of ancient Iranian statecraft, somewhat re-fashioned to fit the role of night-watchman states with free-tradist understandings. For instance, Pamuk (2004) referred to a pragmatist disposition or culture of the Ottoman state as accounting for the Empire's longevity throughout the early modern period.⁴ This state culture enabled multiple institutional responses to conditions of commercial expansion and inter-state competition, most importantly with respect to financial institutions. At the same time it accommodated multiple societal interests under changing conditions. Pamuk also pointed to the limits of the pragmatic culture as the state intensified its interventions in the economy and the society in the nineteenth century. In doing so it impeded capitalist market development in the Ottoman territories, leading to the Empire's subjection to European commercial imperatives and political collapse.⁵ Pamuk's analysis, while pointing to early modern institutional innovativeness of the Ottoman government, in a commercial environment, did not escape the lure of blaming the autocratic nature of the government and its tendency to meddle in society. Pamuk's perspective provided a glimpse of vibrancy and responsiveness in Ottoman institutional history stemming from its pragmatic cultural disposition. But, in a dramatic act of reversal disturbingly reminiscent of orientalist cultural/essentialist images of the nineteenth century, where cultural essences became exhausted as they moved through history, he pointed to the limits of that culture and of Ottoman commercial development in the free-tradist liberal age of the nineteenth century which belonged to Europe.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) went further in casting those 'limits' in irrevocable flows of history and of historically grounded absences and presences of institutions in the East and the West. In addressing the issue of politics underlying state power in commercial contexts they drew attention to the nature of such politics and its institutions. They argued that whether or not politics, in the commercial environment, was premised on participatory/representative institutions affected the nature and sustainability of economic growth and its consequences. The presence of representative/participatory political institutions in past and present-day Europe (with an eye on the Anglo-Saxon world) accounted for sustainable economic growth while their supposed absence, and the prominence of autocratic institutions in non-European regions (including China and Turkey), pointed in the direction of

unsustainable growth, notwithstanding the spectacular growth rates many of these areas are registering currently. In arguing this, Acemoglu and Robinson bring us back full circle to a dichotomous vision of world history, of irrevocable differences between the East and the West this time carved in a specter of autocratic/despotic non-Europe facing a democratic Europe. Unlike the situation in the nineteenth century, this dichotomous vision of world history did not so much legitimize Europe's singular economic/political superiority but claimed a difference for Europe in an increasingly multipolar global economy.

The dichotomous vision of world history, with its various explanations rooted in political or religious culture, are traceable to a nineteenth-century Orientalism or a body of knowledge about non-European regions. Orientalist knowledge originated in the environment of maritime ventures of European traders (Dutch and English) in open seas unimpeded by states or religion.⁶ Steeped in the free-tradist *Weltanschauung* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Orientalist visions of world history embodied images of a civilized West, with its commercial economy enabled by the initiative of individuals enjoying representative governments and endowed with natural rights and liberties protected by the law. This faced an uncivilized East, agrarian and impoverished, where individual initiative was stifled by despotic governments and by lack of law protecting individual rights and liberties. Evoked at another moment of expansion of Western world trade in the late twentieth century, this vision became intimately linked to 'reformist' or civilizing discourse assigning the West the mission of introducing into non-European regions what they lacked historically and culturally and recreating those regions in the image of the West.⁷ The promise of 'modernization'/Westernization served to legitimize Europe's domination. Reforms sought to ensure the expansion of European trade including protection of the rights and liberties of European traders, investors and their representatives who, in the nineteenth century, had been chosen from among members of ethnic and religious minorities (Lewis 1968; Davison 1963).

With the development of national capitalist economies in the nineteenth century, 'the image of the West' no longer focused on the commercial activities of individuals unimpeded by states, or the Church. Following Weber, it focused on institutions, most importantly on rational bureaucratic states and on the role of law in enabling the institutions of industrial capitalist economies. It spoke to concerns of the commercial middle classes. In the case of Middle Eurasia (as elsewhere in Asia) the absence of rational institutions, attributed to their religious or political cultures, was understood to have held back their modernization. This perspective dominated the social sciences in the post-Second World War era with cultural features serving to explain the 'deficiencies' and 'underdevelopment' of Middle Eurasian regions in common with the rest of Asia and Africa (Lockman 2009).

Perspectives on modernization highlighting the role of institutions also prevailed in the economic history writing of Middle Eurasian regions. Historical research explored the institutions of Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal imperial states, most notably those of central administrations, military organizations and agrarian systems (Barkan 1943; Habib 1963; Lambton 1969; Inalcik 1973). These economic histories highlighted the secular character of early history pointing to the priority of a notion of justice, rooted in ancient Iranian traditions of statecraft. They embodied a conception of Middle Eurasian histories in terms of a 'golden age' and 'decline' similar to the Western civilizational perspectives of the nineteenth century. At the same time, these histories were responding to concerns arising from the making of secular modern states in India following the end of British rule, in Turkey, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and in Iran, following the end of the Qajar dynasty. Secularist approaches often attributed the responsibility for the empires' decline to the resurgence of Islamic politics (Inalcik 1992).

Free-tradist Orientalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries joined with a civilizational vision of world history (which enjoyed a revival in the wake of 9/11). In this vision, embroiled in the drama of the rise and fall of civilizations, Eastern civilizations, including the Islamic civilization, had their golden age in the past, but the nineteenth-century modern era was one in which Europe dominated the world from its civilizational heights (Gibb and Bowen 1969). The civilizational perspective also assumed an irreconcilability of the cultural essences of different civilizations. In the nineteenth century, that understanding of irreconcilability was not universally shared (as it came to be in the early twenty-first century). Universal histories of the late Ottoman era, while assessing Europe's place in modern history, also sought to determine the place of Ottoman history in that modernity, nowhere identifying that experience entirely with Europe (Toksoz 2012). This identification came later following the collapse of the Empire, when a generation of historians and elites looked at Europe as a benchmark for measuring the deficiency of their own histories.

The counter-reaction this time occurred at the beginning of the twenty-first century when a new generation of Islamist elites and historians took up the Western challenge of 'clash of civilizations' and highlighted the specificity and uniqueness of Islamic civilization. One dimension of this perspective overlapped with postmodernist trends of the 1990s and 2000s, with their decentering drive and their focus on the early modern era. It saw Islamic institutions as the mainstays of civil society: by establishing connections between society and the state, they ensured consensus over state authority (Akarli 2005). The decline of these Islamic institutions was blamed upon the development of Westernized, modern, secular states.⁸ This understanding of the distinctiveness of Islamic civilization does not simply refer to the past but is extended to the present and into the future. Present-day Islamic states, as well as Islamic global organizations (seeking to build solidarity blocs in the global economy) look for institutional solutions in idealized Islamic institutions, most significantly those related to the regulation of financial markets as well as wealth distributive mechanisms (such as *waqfs* or pious endowments). Historical research engaged in uncovering these institutions, in order to examine the cultural distinctiveness of Islamic societies, has become instrumental in the building of that distinctiveness in the present and into the future (Cizakca 2013).

Looking beyond divided world histories: Braudel's vision of world history in Middle Eurasian mirrors

The Second World War signaled the twilight of Europe's world domination and crowned the rise of the US. Fernand Braudel's *Mediterranean*, written during the war, addressed the moment of Europe's dawn, looking beyond what divided world history to what united it. It posed a challenge to the dichotomous perceptions of world history with their ideological totalizing of Europe and non-Europe (Braudel 1966). Braudel's history captured the Mediterranean world at its zenith in the sixteenth century, united by geography and economic activity across the majestic sea and its coastal regions. This was a world flanked at both ends by two grand empires, Spanish Habsburg and the Ottoman, securing regional and interregional trade, linking towns to their hinterlands populated by peasant cultivators and nomadic pastoralists. The Mediterranean, with its trade routes, was the center of an economic system which, at the end of the sixteenth century, would shift towards the Atlantic signaling a dominance of the Dutch and the English. The depiction of that moment lent Braudel's history a bittersweet poignancy as he himself stood at the start of a new era, at the end of Europe's war, and of another shift of the center of the world economy to the Atlantic, this time to

North America. His vision of the unified history of the Mediterranean represented an aspiration for a united Europe and became an inspiration for the later European Union.

In the 1950s, for historians of the Ottoman Empire, Braudel's conception of a unified world history, beyond demarcation of East and West, Europe and non-Europe, offered a possibility of bringing the history of Ottoman territories back into the mainstream of world history. Nineteenth-century European Orientalism relegated (albeit awkwardly) Ottoman history to a defunct East, the domain of Islamic civilization. The Turkish republic, the main successor state to the Ottoman Empire, seeking to distance itself from the 'nightmare of the East' embraced a Westernist, secular identity. Braudel's view of Ottoman territories as part of a wider geographical/economic landscape, as part of a European (or global) historical drama of shifting world trade routes towards the Atlantic, served to confirm that distance. In other words, Ottoman economic historians of the 1950s did not draw on Braudel's work to question the Orientalist perspective on world history. For them, Braudel's view of the unity of the Mediterranean, by including the Ottomans among European Mediterranean empires, simply pushed back the boundaries of the East which secular Westernist Ottoman histories presented as posing a cultural threat, most importantly in the form of Islam to which, in their view, the Empire had succumbed after the sixteenth century (Inalcik 1994). The implications of Braudel's work were addressed by historians of other Middle Eurasian regions in the 1980s and 1990s, a time of global economic expansion and the opening up of previously closed areas to world trade.

Braudel's world historical vision addressed the domain of economic activity, opening possibilities for comparative histories of different 'economies', beyond institutional aspects, while at the same time including the latter in a conception of total history. In the 1950s, a research group formed by O. L. Barkan, a leading Ottomanist inspired by Braudel and his team at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, set out to publish hundreds of Ottoman tax registers from which population and production data for the Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean could be gleaned (Barkan 1957). This was indeed research of world historical significance providing the economic history of the Ottoman Empire with a valuable quantitative dimension for the first time. This served to repatriate (if not legitimize) Ottoman history, much maligned since the Empire's defeat in the First World War. That history had represented a colonial past of backwardness and Islamic obscurantism in the Arab lands, the Balkans and Anatolia, now the backbone of the secular Turkish republic. Historians working on data on population and production turned to the sixteenth century as the golden age of the Empire, a time of economic prosperity based on agricultural and artisanal production in towns and of social peace secured and enabled by the efficiency of the Ottoman state and its institutions, committed to ensuring social justice (Barkan 1943; Inalcik 1973). State institutions and state power also enabled Ottoman territories to be an *entrepôt* not only for Mediterranean trade but also for the spice trade (as well as trade in dyes and textiles) from India via the Persian Gulf, and the silk trade connecting Iran to Ottoman towns (most notably Bursa) and the latter to Europe via Venice (Inalcik 1978 and 1994).

This economic history placed a strong emphasis on the state, mirroring economic concerns in the post-Depression interwar era. But Braudel himself was not averse to highlighting the state's role in the economy. He pointed to the role of imperial power in the making of the Ottoman as well as the Spanish empire (Braudel 1979, vol. III). Ottoman historians, on the other hand, traced the Ottoman state and its institutions back to ancient traditions of statecraft in Central Asia and Iran predating Islam (Inalcik 1994). This repatriated Ottoman history emphasized the secular and non-Islamic character of the state and its laws.⁹ In fact, for Barkan (1943), and still for Inalcik (1992), 'Islamization' of law definitely contributed to Ottoman

decline in terms of the deterioration of 'classical' institutions and the onset of Islamic ones. In this, they somewhat conceded to Weberian/Orientalist Islam-bashing for explanations of later Ottoman institutional deprecation and degeneration. From the standpoint of these secular statist economic histories, Islamization of law encouraged the expansion of private ownership at the expense of state interests, posing a threat to the principles of distributive justice traditionally embodied in the Ottoman state (Inalcik 1992). In this perspective, Westernization was an evil only preferable to Islamization. At the same time, to demonstrate his distance from the West, Inalcik was careful not to credit Europe with the introduction of secularism. He viewed it as a pillar of Turkish republican ideology, grounding secular measures in pre-Islamic statecraft traditions adopted during the golden age of the Empire.

A second generation of Ottoman historians, Barkan's students at Istanbul University, still focusing on state institutions (and basing their research on state archival documents) extended their work beyond the sixteenth into the eighteenth century (Cezzar 1986; Guran 1998; Genc 2000) though increasingly with little impact as global trends in economic history were moving away from the accent on state building.

The world-systems perspective: a tradist Eurocentrism

In the 1960s the prevalence of culturalist explanations of the plight of post-colonial societies in Asia and Africa, represented by modernization theory, had obscured the world historical perspectives of the years immediately following the Second World War. In the 1970s Wallerstein's world-systems view rejected culturalist explanations of 'underdevelopment' in non-European post-colonial areas; it reverted to the world historical processes identified by Braudel in his account of the 'decline' of the late-sixteenth-century Mediterranean, to explain the modern subordination of non-European regions. For Wallerstein (1974), European domination in maritime trade began in the fifteenth century. First, the discovery of the Cape route resulted in a shift of the overland silk and spice trade to this route, and increased the control of India Ocean trade by European traders. Second, in the seventeenth century, the shift in world trade away from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic started a worldwide trend of subordination of non-European regions to the exigencies of European trade or their incorporation into the European sphere. The latter process spelled peripheralization of non-European regions involving the transformation of their production systems leading to a disappearance of their artisanal production in the face of competition from European industrial products. Peasant production gave way to estate economies producing raw materials and foodstuffs for the industrial European economies. It also involved the formation of 'weak' states which simply served to facilitate European trade in their regions. Peripheralization in Asian and African regions accounted for the lack of industrial development, the experience of famines and poverty, and government by military regimes, oppressive to their populations and subordinate to Western commercial interests. It also largely accounted for the 'development' of European areas as the destination for surpluses of the periphery and the ongoing divergence between a developed Europe and underdeveloped non-European regions. Most significantly, from a Wallersteinian perspective, the predicament of the non-European periphery was structural. It was condemned to a state of relative underdevelopment vis-à-vis a developed Europe: a modernization in reverse.

The world-systems perspective was embraced by historians based in Middle Eurasia (as it was by historians in other regions adversely affected by Western expansion, see for example chapter 20), and initially by Ottoman historians. This was a time of disillusionment with the West in post-colonial Third World areas. In the Cold War era, several Middle Eurasian

countries experienced economic deprivation and oppressive military regimes supported by American governments. The Israeli aggression and occupation of Arab territories, too, prompted the rise of anti-colonial politics in the 1960s and 1970s of which the world-systems perspective was very much a part.

The world-systems approach provided historians of Middle Eurasia with an opening away from the emphasis upon institutional involutions and from torturous processes of internalizing perceived failures through reference to their own cultures (religious or political) and hence getting entrapped in a perpetual cycle of self-hatred followed by bouts of aggressive defensiveness. More specifically, in relation to Ottoman economic history, where it was first introduced (Islamoglu and Keyder 1977), the world-systems conceptualization had the effect of historicizing a unity of the different nation states in the Arab Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans. Previously, nationalist (as well as socialist) histories had dismissed the Ottoman past as corrupt, despotic and religiously obscurantist. What these histories perceived as Ottoman colonial rule was held responsible for the deprivation of the different imperial regions. The world-systems perspective simply shifted the responsibility for the deprivation of imperial territories to European commercial expansion since the seventeenth century. The history of the Empire's peripheralization provided a common world historical reference, unifying the histories of the different regions of the Empire (Islamoglu 1987; Owen 1993; Todorova 2009) and of other Middle Eurasian regions, including Iran – all unified in their subordination to European trade and power (Nashat 1981; Foran 1989). Research primarily focused on port-cities (Keyder et al. 1993); on European trade (Owen 1981); on structures of financial dependency, for example public debt administration; and on changing patterns of industrial production to meet European demand (Owen 1987; Quataert 1993). Transformations in the organization of agricultural production as well as the resilience of peasant production were also a preoccupation (Pamuk 1987).

Notwithstanding its anti-colonial politics, the world-systems vision of world history was one that was divided structurally and historically. It was also Eurocentric in privileging the history of Europe and European commercial development prior to the seventeenth century. And, by condemning non-European regions to trade subordination, it read their development through the terms of that subordination and through institutions enabling it. The world-systems perspective viewed the Ottoman Empire, prior to its peripheralization, as a world empire whereby the political logic of the state apparatus subordinated all economic activity (mostly reduced to the agrarian economy and peasant household production) to the dictates of its concern for tax collection. This conception conformed to a Marxian view of the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP), with its mammoth state not allowing any intermediary structures (such as commercial classes) to develop and laying full claim to surpluses produced by peasant households in closed village communities. European commercial demand penetrated this essentially stagnant economy shaping it to its requirements (Abrahamian 1974; Keyder 1976).

This was, of course, a very different conception of the Ottoman Empire from that of Braudel who identified the Empire in the sixteenth century as a 'world-economy' (*économie monde*), an imperial power resting on the taxation of large agricultural producers, as well as traders but also promoting a significant level of economic prosperity. Braudel could imagine a state presence in the Ottoman Empire which from a Wallersteinian perspective was not admissible. For Wallerstein the 'strong' surplus-extracting imperial state was identified as the despot of the AMP, antithetical to commercial relations. The weak states of peripheral Asian development were seen as accommodative of European trade penetration (Wallerstein et al. 1987). By contrast, European states of the core were described as strong and 'enabling' the

market activities of commercial actors. Braudel had emphasized the unity of the Mediterranean world, inclusive of different world economies (governed by imperial power in Ottoman and Spanish Habsburg lands); he did not envision a division in that world between world economies and world empires.

Recently, Faruk Tabak's important posthumous work has questioned the Wallersteinian vision of a historically divided world. In line with Braudel's understanding of a unity of the Mediterranean prior to its decline, Tabak's history shows that decline was a prolonged process, not solely due to shifts to Atlantic trade but also to a host of environmental factors lasting until the early nineteenth century. He insists that all Mediterranean regions, including the Ottoman, shared in that process (Tabak 2008). Hence, Tabak refers to the 'Mediterranean autumn' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to shifts in agrarian cycles occasioned by climatic changes and declining population, as well as shifts in cereal production to the Baltic regions, responding to demand from Northwestern Europe. It meant an end to large scale production of cereals and cotton, making way for peasant share-cropping economies producing olives and fruits, and for pastoral nomadism. For Tabak, this 'autumn' of the Mediterranean world economy, signaling its involution, was finally reversed with the growth of European demand, especially British demand, after 1815.

Notwithstanding its conceptual flaws, the world-systems perspective provided a generation of Middle Eurasian historians in the 1980s into the 1990s with an impetus to think about the histories of the Ottoman Empire (as well as other areas in Middle and Eastern Eurasia) in world historical terms and in relation to their economic structures. Braudel's world historical vision had had a similar effect on a previous generation. The world-systems perspective also led to an ongoing debate about the role of European trade in these histories. One aspect of that debate has been to counter the stagnationist view of the 'periphery' by focusing upon the analysis of internal dynamics (including economic organization, the nature of state power and government) (Islamoglu 1994; Faroqhi 1994; Toksoz 2010). This resulted in questioning the world-systems approach's emphasis on the impact of European trade in the region's transformation. It also led to attempts to qualify that influence in light of the internal dynamics of the region (economic as well as administrative) and as part of processes involving continual interactions and confrontations among different European and Middle Eurasian actors (Islamoglu 1987; Pamuk 1987; Kiyotaki 1997; Blumi 2005). Finally, objecting to the world-systems perspective's denial of agency to Middle Eurasian peripheries, indigenous historical research has pointed to societal resistance to European trade penetration on the part of workers, peasants, merchants and clerics; a resistance which, in the case of the Ottoman Empire, was often tacitly supported by the government (Quataert 1983; Kurmus 1987; Moaddel 1992; Foran 1994; Floor 2009).

Post-colonial free-tradist histories of the 1990s

In the 1990s and early 2000s globalized world economies, increased flows of goods, capital, peoples, information and ideas, and the rise of Asian competitors to the West in global markets, led to new perspectives in economic history both in the West and on the part of Middle Eurasian scholars. These questioned the Eurocentric thrust of earlier accounts with their focus on essential cultural differences accounting for absence or presence of commercial development. Wallersteinian visions of a structurally and historically divided world also lost appeal in a somewhat more optimistic era, keen to create utopias, albeit in the past, or idyllic images of global coexistence in the future. Employing the terminology of prevailing market discourse, A. G. Frank (1998) pointed to the competitive superiority of China as well as of

Ottoman and Mughal regions in world trade prior to the eighteenth century when Europe gained a competitive edge in achieving world domination.¹⁰ Frank's history emphasized the historical, and therefore contingent, nature of Western development, showing that other regions had also known such development and world domination and would likely do so in the future.

Frank addressed a world history unified through trade flows evoking Braudel's vision. But as early as the 1960s, and in relation to the history of Middle Eurasian regions, Marshal Hodgson had rejected the Eurocentric dichotomous vision of world history in his neglected posthumous magnum opus.¹¹ He addressed the unity of the Islamicate world representing the areas where Islam spread as scattered with highly cosmopolitan commercial cities from Samarkand and Bukhara (in Central Asia) through Multan, Qandahar in Northern India, Herat, Isfahan in Iran, to Konya, Kayseri, Bursa in Anatolia, to Aleppo in the Eastern Mediterranean, to Cairo in North Africa and Granada in Spain.¹²

Hodgson's vision, like Braudel's, was marked by the experience of the war; it addressed commonalities in world history more than divisions. Starting with civilizational entities (albeit with numerous qualifications) as units of analysis, Hodgson's civilizations were unified through actions of individuals to achieve material success and to live a moral life in society (Islamoglu 2014). Hodgson saw this commonality among all civilizations, with the success and failure of any civilization depending on individual actions, responding to continually changing conditions and historical contingencies. For him, medieval Islamicate civilization (from the ninth to the thirteenth century and until the Mongol invasions) witnessed an unleashing of energies of individual Muslims resulting in a brilliant moment of commercial and cultural effervescence with merchants, scholars, lawyers, Sufis, artists, musicians, adventurers continuously traveling over the extent of Islamicate lands. They exchanged goods, money, ideas, information and innovations. They contributed to the creation of a string of cosmopolitan urban communities and to the economic and cultural integration of the Islamicate world. Though betraying a certain romanticism, Hodgson's analysis represented a masterful weaving together of strands of economic and cultural dynamism of Islamicate society, a far cry from Eurocentric Orientalist understandings of 'culture' obstructing economic activity and individual initiative.

Hodgson also talked about shared histories of civilizations; no civilizational success was possible without the rich cumulative history of institutional innovations in the Afro-Eurasian Oikoumene. At the same time, if a civilization lost its lead, it did not mean it was condemned to stagnation nor did it mean it would not have its moment again.

Hodgson's analysis attempted to do away with the cultural determinism of Orientalist civilizational discourse, assigning priority to history and historical contingency.¹³ For a new generation of economic historians of Middle Eurasia, steeped in free-tradist liberal ideas and post-colonial understandings of the 1980s and 1990s, Hodgson's vision of the cosmopolitan, international Islamicate world resting on the actions of individuals unconstrained by state actions, had a certain appeal. They looked beyond the closures of national histories and of East/West, center/periphery divisions, envisioning a global history of 'connections' between different regions in Middle Eurasia as well as between Middle Eurasian regions and other world areas in Russia, China and Europe, via maritime and overland routes (Subrahmanyam 1997; Sood 2011, 2012).

Such new trade histories argued that the Middle Eurasian regions witnessed continued commercial vibrancy from the fifteenth until the nineteenth century, questioning interpretations of 'decline' following their glory in the sixteenth century (Faroqhi 1994; Dale 1994; Mathee 1999). Nor was this vibrancy solely an outcome of shifts and turns in overland

trade primarily geared towards provisioning of the European market with silks and spices.¹⁴ New trade histories drew attention to Middle Eurasia's commercial intensity and complexity, to the ways overland and maritime trades were intertwined with, and often embedded in, multiple regional and interregional trading networks within individual empires. Similarly, long distance trade was entangled in webs of power relations, of power struggles over its control between European and Middle Eurasian actors. This involved struggles between merchants and states (Mathee 1999), as well as struggles over access to goods among European actors.¹⁵ In this highly intricate and complex commercial environment European trading companies backed by European states had to compete with multiple merchant networks extending over a hierarchy of markets ranging from long distance trade to interregional markets and down to urban–rural exchanges (Braudel 1979; Faroqhi 1994; Dale 1994; Islamoglu 1994). This may also have accounted for the existence of numerous towns, or centers of commerce, as well as artisanal production of all sizes throughout Middle Eurasian world economies.¹⁶ The new economic histories also pointed to the backing given to Middle Eurasian merchant communities by Middle Eurasian governments, increasingly in the form of protection in their long distance ventures, a practice formerly thought to have been reserved for Europeans and granted by rulers either as a benevolent act or as a sign of their subordination to European power (Faroqhi 1994; Mathee 1999).¹⁷

Thus, new trade histories of the 1990s present a very different picture of overland and overseas trade than the one perpetuated by Eurocentric histories that had imagined overland trade through Middle Eurasian agrarian wastelands in terms of a corridor along which caravans carrying spices and silks flowed from the remote East to an equally mystified destination in Europe, barely touching the lives of people let alone being entangled in webs of regional and interregional markets, of merchants, communities and governmental actions. This view had assumed long distance traders to be European companies, forming isolated communities in coastal towns with their representatives chosen from indigenous religious and ethnic minorities.

Yet the vision of a global history of 'connections', lacking the world historical sweep of Hodgson's or Frank's works, was restricted in time to the early modern period between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, abandoning the nineteenth century, the modern era, to European trade and domination, when those 'connections' were understood to have been disrupted or reconfigured to respond to European exigencies. This was tantamount to a withdrawal from modern history into an early modern free-tradist utopia. However, the integrated view of the commercial environment, and the blurring of lines between internal and external trades, provided the new economic histories with an opening for questioning Eurocentric (most notably Wallersteinian) perceptions of subordination of Middle Eurasian regions to the dictates of European trade. This questioning primarily focused on Middle Eurasian merchant communities and their activities, and on the issue of their competitiveness with European trading companies. Hence, histories told of Gujerati merchant communities, as well as Muslim, Indian and Armenian merchants, transporting silk, spices and cotton textiles from Indian Ocean coastal regions and Indonesian islands to the Mediterranean via the Persian Gulf, Basra and the Red Sea, supplying Ottoman and Venetian markets throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Subrahmanyam 1997; Hanna 1998). Indian Ocean trade also linked the coastal regions of the Indian Ocean, inland to northern India, to Iran and via the sea to China. Along the vertical North–South route, in the same period, Hindki or Indian merchants from Multan in Northern India conducted a vibrant overland trade in Indian textiles and other goods linking that region to Isfahan and other cities in Northern Iran, up to Uzbek Turan and Astrakhan in Russia. Hindki merchants

also branched out from Isfahan westward into Ottoman territories in Anatolia (Dale 1994; Faroqhi 1994). Similarly the overland silk trade from Safavid Iran, dominated by Armenian merchants of New Julfa in Isfahan, linked Safavid Iran to Ottoman territories and from there to Europe (Herzig 1991; Mathee 1999; Aslanian 2011). Furthermore, Ottoman Armenian communities in Amsterdam were a formidable presence in Dutch trade with Ottoman territories (Kadi 2012). Cairene merchants, on the other hand, controlled the Red Sea coffee trade from Yemen to Cairo. From there, coffee reached Ottoman regional markets via Ottoman merchants, thence European markets via Venetian, as well as Dutch and English merchants (Hanna 2011).

Eurocentric histories had described the Middle Eurasian merchants essentially as ‘peddlers’, unable to compete with European trading companies which were organized as joint-stock companies, with a worldwide organization, and backed by European states.¹⁸ Countering the ‘peddler thesis’, new trade histories pointed to the versatility and flexibility advantages of small-scale enterprises based on networks, enabling them to move between different markets, trading in diverse products in regional and local markets as well as engaging in overland trade (Mathee 1999). These merchants also engaged in alternative activities, particularly financial transactions, and were thus able to weather trade fluctuations. Most significantly, historians pointed to a relationship between success in overland trade and the ability of traders to penetrate internal markets (Dale 1994; Faroqhi 1994 and forthcoming) pointing to a disadvantage of European trading companies with their limited reach in regional trading networks.¹⁹ New economic histories suggested that this occurred especially in the regions which were not subjected to colonial administrations, such as the Ottoman Empire as well as Qajar Iran during the nineteenth century. In the Ottoman case the solution of employing members of ethnic and religious minority groups as representatives of companies did not seem to deliver optimal results for the European trading companies, limiting the volume of goods, especially cotton textiles, sold in Ottoman markets.²⁰

Furthermore, an economic history literature on the nineteenth century, questioning the post-colonial and world-systems vision of the century as one of subordination for Middle Eurasian regions, showed continuities in both regional and inter-Middle Eurasian trade linking to long distance trade with Europe and Russia (Tabak 1988; Clarence-Smith 1989; Shields 1991; Quataert 1994; Gilbar 2003). There has also been a surge in works addressing indigenous economic dynamics. Continued prosperity of inland cities and industrial production largely artisanal (both rural and urban) mostly in textiles has been stressed, notwithstanding expectations of de-industrialization (Quatert 1993, 2003; Martin 2005). Upward trends in the agricultural economy, including a vibrancy of the nomadic/pastoral economy have also been uncovered (Guran 1998; Palairat 2003; Kasaba 2009; Toksoz 2010). With respect to Northern Indian/Central Asian trade, a revisionist perspective, while pointing to continuities in that trade, has highlighted how, under British rule, Indian merchants of Qandahar were marginalized. These merchants had previously played an important role in Central Asian trade but British administration sought to re-route that trade from Qandahar to Kabul, a city to be linked to the south and to the Indian Ocean via a main army route. Unfortunately that route secured the entry of the East India company in this regional trade (Hanifi 2011). This, in turn, points to a priority of governmental action and politics in determining which groups of merchants prevailed over others. In this perspective, governmental action in the nineteenth century, in the Ottoman context, largely accounted for the continued presence of Middle Eurasian merchants in major trade circuits as well as in regional markets.

A central issue for Middle Eurasian economic history, as we have seen, has been the economic role of the state. Braudel (1966), as part of a generation of historians (including Karl Polanyi)

who had witnessed the 1930s Depression, understood well the importance of the institutional shaping of the economy by states.²¹ Statist histories of the Ottoman Empire inspired by him focused on such institutional shaping of the economy, albeit reifying such institutions to represent an idealized image of the state vis-à-vis religion and its equally reified, idealized institutions (Inalcik 1994). Free-tradist historical perspectives downplayed the politics of government, most pertinently the state's role in shaping the Middle Eurasian commercial environment in the early modern period. Some histories completely ignored the state. So enthralled were they with merchant networks that one often got the impression that the environment was self-governing (Dale 1994; Sood 2012; cf. Subrahmanyam 1995). When their presence was acknowledged, early modern states were either assigned personal attributes of flexibility, tolerance (Barkey 2008) and pragmatism (Pamuk 2004) or they were identified with the actions of rulers described as benevolent, just or vigilant in protecting merchants, somewhat in conformity with the Smithian night-watchman state (Subrahmanyam 1997; Mathee 1999).

Personal attributes of states or state actions represented cultural dispositions.²² States were shorn of their societal substance; politics was reduced to the personal politics of rulers (Mathee 1999) while institutions were instrumentalized to achieve the state's ends as defined by its cultural disposition (Pamuk 2004). The concept of 'negotiation' was resorted to for explaining the early modern state's positive dispositions and role (Scott 1998). Its flexible and accommodative character presented the state as a 'negotiated process', a favorite term in postmodernist histories of the 1990s (Barkey 2008; a critical view in Islamoglu and Perdue 2009), while modern states and their practices were understood to be non-negotiable. One popular focus of this discussion related to the ability of early modern states to manage 'difference' (religious and ethnic) contrasted with rigid, nationalistic, exclusionary practices of modern states (Barkey 2008).

Rethinking government: the politics in Middle Eurasian histories

In the past decade, a new trend has crystalized in writings on Middle Eurasian history. The new trend, concerned with government and politics in commercial environments, is situated closer to government studies and politics though rife with possibilities for economic history (Klein 2002; Ateş 2006). The new focus on government and politics resonates with similar concerns in present-day Middle Eurasia, most visibly in Iraq and Afghanistan, which since the 1980s have experienced global capitalism in the form of plunder of their resources enabled by military occupations leaving behind mayhem and civil strife (Mattei and Nader 2008). Most importantly, histories written from a governmental perspective have questioned the free-tradist underplaying of states or governments. These histories, primarily focusing on the nineteenth century, also question conceptions of world history in terms of an early modern/modern divide and the relegation of modern history to colonial history, to a history of modern states which were understood to stand outside of the societies concerned (Mitchell 1988). From the perspective of governmental histories, such conceptions deprive these regions of agency. Governmental histories question understandings (rooted in the post-colonial thinking of the 1980s and 1990s) of the 'absolute', non-negotiated character of the state's administrative power (Islamoglu 2004). Post-colonial perspectives vilified the Tanzimat or the reformed Ottoman state of the nineteenth century, which they identified as colonial, pointing to its oppressive practices vis-à-vis the local populations in the Arab lands as well as in the Balkans (Deringil 1998; Makdisi 2002).

Instead, the new governmental research (and some previous research recently revisited) points to continuities in the states' governmental practices and their institutional capacities from

the earlier period into the nineteenth century (Islamoglu and Perdue 2009; Inalcik 1943). Also at issue are continuities between the practices of earlier imperial governments and nineteenth-century colonial governments (Mazumder 2009). For instance, Subrahmanyam (2009) argues that British administration in India assimilated the institutional capacities of Mughal government to manage regional diversity and religious denominational difference, independently of concerns for taxation capacities, which contributed to regional economic change.

At the same time, distancing itself from conceptions of the state or government as reservoir of institutions (North 1900; Pamuk 2004), the governmental perspective sees state government as reflecting political power relations (Islamoglu 2004). In this context, institutions or governmental regulations and rules which order social life (trade, provincial administration, landed property) are viewed as contested domains with different local as well as state actors confronting each other to negotiate their often conflicting claims (Islamoglu 2000). In the Ottoman Empire, such deliberations often resulted in the issuing of special provisions whereby governmental rulings addressed the demands of local elites, merchants and even peasants. These negotiations addressed property law, taxation and provincial administration. They took place in provincial councils, where different groups were represented, or in special commissions formed to respond to certain grievances with participation of all parties concerned (Thompson 1993; Rogan 1999; Islamoglu 2001, 2004; Ceylan 2006; Petrov 2006; Saracoglu 2007; Unlu and Rogan 2010). At issue here is a treatment of negotiation not as an explanatory principle in defining attributes but as an object of analysis which allows for evaluations of the different contexts in which negotiations took place and for tracing shifts in these contexts such as the development of modern states in the nineteenth century. The new context of the modern state signaled a new governmental politics where certain interests were given priority and others marginalized, according to the alliances forged and the outcomes of conflict mediation.

New governmental histories address, though in a preliminary way, the unity of the sovereign imperial state around a dominant group, with a political vision defining its goals. In the Middle Eurasian environments that vision focused on a certain understanding of societal justice aiming at a balance between moral/distributive concerns and those of economic growth and warfare. The claim to achieve that balance lay at the root of the legitimacy of Ottoman and Qajar states and of their general rulings in the nineteenth century. In fact, deliberations and contestation by peasants, workers, as well as local and central elites around specific governmental orderings continually held the governments to account, hence also representing the terrains for continually negotiating the legitimacy of the state (Inalcik 1943; Islamoglu 2001, 2004; Saracoglu 2007). Moreover, such claims provided a reference point for political resistance on the part of peasants and workers, both in Ottoman lands (Quataert 1983, 1987; Kurmus 1987) and in Qajar Iran (Burke and Yaghoubian 1993; Martin 2005), against European penetration, with tacit support on the part of these governments. This perspective on the sovereignty claims of Ottoman and Qajar governments in the nineteenth century, point to political possibilities in those imperial contexts. It represents a challenge for the Eurocentric image of the Middle Eurasian region as a patchwork of ethnic groups, religions, tribes, with no statehood or sovereign structures, let alone legitimate states. That image continues to plague Western perspectives on present-day Middle Eurasian regions that often dismiss their democratic movements as outbursts of religious fanaticism.

Conclusion

At the start of the twenty-first century global developments are attenuating differences between Western and non-Western regions in terms of material progress. The Western world

hegemony is visibly waning, and non-Western regions (including those of Middle Eurasia), most notably China in the East, are recovering decisive positions in the new global order. Since the 1980s, Middle Eurasian histories have significantly distanced themselves from Eurocentric perceptions which designated the regions as economically stagnant and politically despotic, questioning the culturalist assumptions of those perceptions with historical research focusing on internal economic and governmental dynamics in different regions.

Yet, this new trend has led to a certain self-satisfied involution in history writing in Middle Eurasia which is often accompanied by attempts at ideologization of histories in defense of political and ideological positions. Conjoined with a trend of revisionist Islamist histories, economic histories of Middle Eurasia, especially those with an institutional focus, have taken a new 'culturalist' turn (Cizakca 1995, 1998; Pamuk 2004; Kuran 2011). They are inward-looking, continually and tirelessly seeking explanations for perceived past failures or successes. Institutionalist or not, the historical imagination of economic historians remains stuck at the point of free-tradist assumptions, reproducing the conceptual limits of those assumptions in dealing with the state as an economic actor. Incorporating politics and power relations in historical analysis, as well as a conception of institutions as part of political power fields, offers to be extremely important at a time when economic formulas resting on free-tradist themes are beginning to ring hollow amidst a serious crisis of employment and the unequal distribution of wealth and income worldwide. One central problem with current market development models is that they tend to subsume political power relations into their individualistic abstractions. The entire institutional framework is then put in the service of the individual which in the global context is identified with transnational corporations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, economic history addressed issues of social change in the 'underdeveloped' world, including Middle Eurasian regions, and debates (e.g. between substantivists and formalists; Marxist and world-systems scholars). In so doing it provided a point of departure for understanding the roots and possible solutions to underdevelopment. At that time, economic history was prominent in the economics departments of major Turkish universities. In the 1980s, throughout Middle Eurasia, politically repressive regimes hostile to 'progressive' subjects and sometimes favoring neoliberal policies (as in Turkey and Egypt) made the economy an act of faith, subtracted from public discussion, leading to the marginalization of economic history. Today, when economically inclined scholars address time series, for instance wage rates (Ozmucur and Pamuk 2002), they generally do so not to question present-day categories used in various fetishized aggregate measurements but in support of certain theoretical views. Similarly, from the perspective of 'qualitative' global history, the emphasis has moved away from comparative world histories addressing big questions towards tracing the global movements of goods and people. Yet, a problem-oriented perspective on global history as comparative world history could offer us a new chance to rethink the unity of history, emphasizing commonalities of historical experience worldwide rather than the differences that have earlier attracted so much attention.

Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank the Institute for Advanced Study, Nantes, for providing excellent research facilities and warm hospitality.
- 2 Kuran subscribes to the Northian institutionalist perspective on ideology as limiting or influencing an individual's ability to make rational decisions dictated by his/her self-interest.
- 3 K. Wittfogel (1957) employed the notion of Oriental despotism to study the Communist bureaucratic states in China and Russia during the Cold War. Oriental despotism, deployed to describe Asian

- political power, acquired its negative connotation with Enlightenment thinkers and then with the Orientalists. By contrast, in the eighteenth century French kings caught in the midst of social crisis and losing their foothold in world trade saw in Oriental despotism an explanation for the long-lasting rule of the Ottomans (Kaiser 2000).
- 4 For an incisive critique of this culturalist perspective in relation to pragmatism as an attribute of the Ottoman state see Dağlı (2013).
 - 5 Pamuk (2004), in the wake of North (1990), emphasizes the role of the state as a reservoir of institutions enabling market activity. For accommodative capacities to respond to changing conditions in the Ottoman and Qing empires, cf. Islamoglu (2001).
 - 6 Hugo Grotius, the seventeenth-century Dutch jurist, provided an antecedent for later Orientalist conceptions when he suggested that the activities of the Dutch East India Company in open seas – including appropriation of native lands and labor – had a civilizing effect on uncivilized natives (Tuck 2001).
 - 7 Mattei and Nader (2008) critically address America's civilizing mission in Iraq promising to introduce free trade, human rights and democratic government, following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 which ultimately sought to open the country to foreign investments.
 - 8 In Turkey, Fatih University in Istanbul has programs on Islamic civilizational studies pursuing this line. Another program at George Mason University is funded by Islamic international organizations. The Global University of Islamic Finance in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is a major center in this effort of operationalizing historical institutions in present-day global economies.
 - 9 Repatriation of Ottoman history served to create a distance from nationalistic histories which sought to ground themselves in remote histories of Turkic peoples in Central Asia; cf. Islamoglu (2012).
 - 10 Other world histories in the 1990s sought to relativize the European divergence by offering historical/environmental explanations (e.g. Pomeranz 2000).
 - 11 Along with the binary vision, Hodgson also rejected a narrow concept of the Islamic civilization shared by the Orientalists, who confine it to the Arab period with its 'golden age' between the seventh and tenth centuries as attested by classical texts of high philological value (Hodgson 1974).
 - 12 Hodgson's incisive critique of Eurocentric Orientalist thinking was ignored in the 1970s by an entire generation possibly because of its moral overtones mistaken for a religious Islamic orientation in the face of anti-colonial leftist perspectives (Wallerstein 1974) and of culturalist critiques of Orientalism (Said 1979).
 - 13 Hodgson's thinking was wedded to the universal categories of the European Enlightenment; he would have felt uncomfortable with the particularistic culturalism of present-day postmodernists. The moral dimension was for him a universal category extending through all religions.
 - 14 In the sixteenth century, Ottoman state policy succeeded in keeping the Portuguese from diverting the spice route away from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean following the discovery of the Cape route in the fifteenth century (Inalcik 1994; Findlay and O'Rourke 2007). This policy benefited both Ottoman and Venetian merchants.
 - 15 Venetians (backed by the Ottoman government) confronted the Portuguese; Mediterranean merchants confronted the English and the Dutch. Cf. Subrahmanyam (1997); Inalcik (1994); Findlay and O'Rourke (2007).
 - 16 A vibrant economy of urban artisans, with guilds fully integrated in merchant networks, is described by Faroqhi (2009), Genc (1994), Masters (2008) for the Ottoman Empire; by Hanna (2011) for Egypt. On Iran see (Ricks 1973; Floor 2009). On rural cottage industries, Faroqhi (1994); Shields (1991).
 - 17 The practice of requesting Iranian merchants trading in Ottoman territories to submit a document of protection by the Iranian ruler was more strictly enforced beginning in the late seventeenth century (Faroqhi forthcoming).
 - 18 Kuran (2011) attributes the peddler phenomenon to Islamic law preventing the establishment of corporations, and hence capitalist development in Islamic regions.
 - 19 The Russian government's banning of Indian merchants from access to Russian internal trade had adverse effects on Hindki merchants' trade with Russia (Astrakhan) via Central Asia (Dale 1994).
 - 20 British trade representatives in the Ottoman Empire complained about the sluggish demand for British exports of factory-made cotton cloths on Ottoman markets. British cloths could not compete with imports of fine Indian cotton textiles in urban middle-class markets, nor could they stand the competition from the rural cottage industry in mass markets (Inalcik 1987).

- 21 Braudel also highlighted the importance of imperial power in defining the boundaries of a world economy. Shah Abbas's intervention to secure the monopoly of Armenian merchants from New Julfa in overland silk trade, keeping the Dutch India company at bay, could also be seen as an act of consolidation of the Safavid world economy (Mathee 1999; Ricks 1973).
- 22 On the personalization of the state see again Dağlı's (2013) critique.

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