Early modern state formation in the margins? A review of early modern popular politics and limited royal power in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Spanish colonial empire

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The traditional historiography of early modern state-building has usually followed the western European paradigm of historiography, the usual models being France, England, Brandenburg-Prussia and Sweden. Regions that do not follow this paradigm have simply been left out and labeled "backward" or as "lagging behind". In this literary review, our focus is on two different and rather surprising cases of early modern state formation: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Spanish colonial empire in Latin America. By following the scholarship on these two large conglomerates, we focus on two scholarly concepts: the idea of early modern realms as composite/conglomerate states, and state formation as a dynamic process involving several actors and interest groups. Our emphasis is particularly on sixteenth-century developments, as that century can be considered a thorough transition period in both regions. We hope that this literary review will bring the formerly marginalized conglomerates to the fore in discussion and research into state formation.

Keywords: Colonial empire, composite/conglomerate state, early modern history, Latin America, Poland-Lithuania, state formation, transnational history

Introduction: bringing conglomerates to the state formation narrative

In this review article, we look at the latest trends in *state formation* historiography from the viewpoint of state formation as opposed to *state-building* and *composite* or *conglomerate* state as opposed to strict centralization or unification. We focus on early modern state formation in regions and realms that are usually excluded from narratives of this process, namely the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Spanish colonial empire. The historiography of state formation has traditionally followed the western European paradigm of historiography, the usual models being

153

France, England, Brandenburg-Prussia and Sweden, following the seminal work edited by Charles Tilly (1975). Regions that do not follow this paradigm have simply been sidelined and labeled "peripheries" (Wallerstein 1974), "backward" (Chirot 1989) or "lagging behind" (Anderson 1998). As the state formation paradigm is changing in current scholarship, we argue that regions previously given a passing mention at most in state-building histories should now be at the center of state formation research. Here lies our focus in this literary review.

Traditionally, the processes that contribute to *state-building* have been listed as the following: centralization of (state) administration, growth of bureaucracy with educated personnel, generalized and growing taxation, formation of national armies, domestic unification/integration (often interpreted as *nation-building*), standardization of legislation and secularization of state/public institutions. Within this kind of traditional state-building paradigm, historians have emphasized the building of *a military-fiscal state* as a rather centralized process led by entrepreneur-kings and their mastermind chancellors. (See esp. Downing 1992; Tilly 1975.) Still within the centralized state-building paradigm, attention has also been given to cultural aspects such as *confessionalism*, that is, the recognition of state religion and the use of religion as a building block of national identity, and its political ideology (e.g. Gorski 1999; Ihalainen 2005; Schilling 2007).

However, early modern state formation was not merely centralization enacted by royal authority, but was implemented – at least partially – with the consent of the estates and/or in cooperation with the people (e.g. Karonen 2014 [1999]). The nowadays more common term state formation emphasizes this approach, as it defines state formation more as social and political evolution that was (and is) caused and influenced by more people than merely royalty or central authority. State formation as a process does not always need to be an intentional or one-sided (top-down) activity, but may be a dynamic process within a state or society that is influenced by many actors and surrounding conditions. An approach emphasizing the lower levels of a society and their influence on state formation has been labeled by Wayne te Brake (1998) as social history of (European) politics or briefly, *popular politics*. Mats Hallenberg, Johan Holm and Dan Johansson (2008) speak of *popular initiatives* as they focus on state formation as a dynamic process that includes active participation of rulers' subjects. Petri Karonen, among others, emphasizes the perspective of *negotiation* between central authority and local actors (Karonen 2014, 17–24; also Kepsu 2017). This article will contribute to the scholarly discussion on popular politics/initiatives, negotiation and interaction.

In addition to limited royal authority, we also tackle the issue of state formation by utilizing the concept of early modern *composite* or *conglomerate states*. Although Charles Tilly reminded us as early as 1975 that state-building is not the same process as nation-building, many scholars have not made a clear separation between the two (Tilly 1975, 71). Thus state-building is often considered nothing more than the process towards the modern nation-state, often with the implication that this nation-state is the ultimate form of polity and the perfection of social and political organization (Frost 2015, 36; Elliott 1992a, 48–49). The first references to the composite state/monarchy were made already in the 1970s, by H. G. Koenigsberger

(1978). Especially since the 1990s, the perspective of a composite or conglomerate state has gained ground in the political history of the early modern era. This perspective is based on the acknowledgement that an early modern state

> *was a state area consisting of several territories, usually brought together by a ruling house but kept together by a few other factors. Each territory – or rather the social elite of each territory – had its distinctive relation to the ruler, its privileges, its own law code, its administrative system staffed by that same local elite, and often its own estate assembly. In questions of taxation or conscription, the ruler had to negotiate with each territory separately*. (Gustafsson 1998, 194.)

Furthermore, Harald Gustafsson (1998, 194) emphasizes that this kind of conglomerate state was not merely an alternative to the emerging national state but was the prevalent state form in early modern Europe. Since historical research often takes its perspectives from contemporary phenomena, it is natural that the perspective of composite states and, in some cases, early modern unions has arisen during the time of deepening European integration. Lately, the composite state -approach has been adopted in studies of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Holy Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Spain, Britain, the Kalmar Union and – to a growing extent – in studies of early modern Europe in general. (E.g. Bonney 1991; Butterwick 2001; Dybaś, Hanczewski & Kempa 2007; Elliott 1992a; Evans & Wilson 2012; Frost 2015; Gustafsson 2000; Gustafsson 2006; Hopkins 1999; Kármán & Kunčević 2013; Kempa & Mikulski 2011.)

The perspectives of the composite state -approach are evident also in studies of imperial history and dynasticism. A. G. Hopkins, in his aptly titled article *Back to the Future*, has stated that imperial history offers interesting themes for research going beyond the composition of a nation-state. According to Hopkins, empires were "transnational organizations" and/or "multi-ethnic conglomerates" which based their existence on "supranational connections" (Hopkins 1999, 205). The early modern empires were indeed transnational from the beginning, as they were never based exclusively on the resources and efforts of the center, but to a large extent on collaboration with other nations and individual entrepreneurs. The existence and survival of an empire depended on its ability to establish, organize and maintain its international network of connections. The empire became an interconnected conglomerate, where the central government regulated the flow of resources and the disputed rights to property. (Kamen 2002, 487–491.)

The composite state -approach can also be linked with another current emphasis in historical research, that of transnationalism and entangled history. However, in the case of early modern composite/conglomerate states it needs to be acknowledged that "transnationalism" and cultural, political, social, economic transfers have two levels: *between* realms/states and *within* them. By this we wish to emphasize that as early modern states consisted of several territories, communities and ethnic/religious groups, they were (in modern terms) multicultural by nature. The idea of transfer and transnationalism can also be adopted in analyzing how different communities and cultures affected each other *within* a larger realm. So far, most transnational or

transfer history has concentrated on modern times (see e.g. Kaelble 2009; Ther 2009). In comparison, historians of the early modern period have struggled with the concept of transnational (history). This is because it is rather difficult to adopt the term "trans-*national*" in studies focusing on a period when there were not yet clearly defined nations or states. Thus early modernists have used different terminology to mark their transnational approaches, for example by adopting the concept of *entangled history*. (See e.g. Bues 2005; Gould 2007; Riches 2013.)

The transnational approach has been widely adopted in eastern European studies because of the region's multicultural past, which does not fit in with the traditional western European paradigm of nationalism and state formation (Okey 1992; Ther 2009; von Hagen 1995; Zahra 2010). Indeed, the currently popular transnational approach offers a chance to emphasize the "Europeanness" of Eastern Europe in ways never available before. The terminological problem connected to transnational history has created a presupposition that the transnational approach could (and should) not be used in studies of early modern history. However, this would mean that early modern history was doomed to remain outside one of the main theoretical discussions of contemporary historiography and historical theory. This does not seem right – especially as transnational connections, influences and interactions did not simply begin in the twentieth century (Kaelble 2009). Indeed, one can fairly argue that *all* early modern history is (potentially) transnational, perhaps even international and global, as long as we keep in mind the composition of pre-modern states and societies that were, more often than not, conglomerates of different territories and of legal and socio-political systems, as well as ethnic groups. In this review we will focus on the perspective of entangled history, by which we mean transnational connections between and within early modern states and societies, although in the scope of this article these connections can be as wide as trans-Atlantic.

Four aspects of state formation process

Although the perspective of the composite/conglomerate state is becoming widespread in *all* early modern European history, research on the issue of how state formation was conducted in early modern composite states is still rather new. Whereas previous studies on state formation emphasized the centralization paradigm, the perspective of composite states potentially challenges this. As examples of complex early modern conglomerates, our focus is on two very different and rather surprising cases of state formation: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Spanish colonial empire in Latin America. In our review, we focus especially on the sixteenth-century developments in both realms.

Our two cases represent different types of composite states. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is an example of a territorially contiguous monarchy, whereas colonial Spanish America was an overseas region of the (Spanish) Habsburg monarchy whose territories, in addition to Spain and the American colonies, consisted of the Netherlands and the Habsburg possessions in Italy (Koenigsberger 1978, 202). [1] Although these states have not received much attention in international scholarship concerning early modern state formation, in the early modern context they were not marginal actors on the European or global scene: the Spanish empire with its

American colonies had become a global power, whereas the union of Poland-Lithuania created a great power in central eastern Europe. Both cases, we argue, offer insight into the kind of state formation that was conducted under limited royal authority.

Concerning the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Eastern Europe in general, over 40 publications are consulted in our review. The majority of these (27 publications, not including later translations or reprints) are post-2000 publications and our focus is therefore on the current state of scholarship. It must be noted that in this review, the focus is mainly on Polish history, whereas Lithuanian, Ukrainian or other national histories and historiography in the areas of the former Commonwealth are discussed to a lesser extent. Concerning the Spanish colonial empire, 18 studies are consulted, most of which (11) are post-2000 publications. While offering examples of the existing historiography on the early modern states in question, we focus especially on four aspects that we think need to be taken into consideration when studying early modern state formation. These aspects are:

First, what situations created a need for political (and social) reform and who are the actors when they occur? Our emphasis is on the notion that practical state-building can be studied through an analysis of contemporary political decision-making. However, we follow the notion that people were (and are) reluctant to make changes if they could be avoided. As Hendrik Spruyt (1994, 7) has stated, "[u]sually the status quo prevails and institutional change is marginal rather than fundamental." Therefore, there must be an urgent need for political change and reform – and thus, a need to make decisions – that in retrospect can be seen to have contributed to state formation. State formation is not a process of impersonal institutions, but made by the people on different levels of society and/or a political community. (See e.g. Gustafsson 2010, esp. 146–182; Karonen & Hakanen 2017; Spruyt 1994.)

Second, what was the ideal state for contemporaries? The (different) interpretations of an ideal state help us to understand what the aim of political reform was. Here we will focus especially on the concept of *res publica* and how it was interpreted, and implemented, both in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in the Spanish colonies. The concept of *res publica* is a truly interesting and fruitful point of comparison, as it was used in both realms as a theoretical ideal of state and society, albeit with a very different content due to the special conditions of each realm.

Third, as our aim is to challenge the idea of centralization and/or unification, we ask what social and political integration meant in an early modern (composite) state. Traditionally historians, both within the centralization paradigm and within the composite state -approach, have focused on the question of integration as a unifying process: how integration was conducted and how successful it was (see e.g. Tilly 1975; Dybaś, Hanczewski & Kempa 2007; Kempa & Mikulski 2011; Lichy 2011, esp.189–199; Mazur 2006). Nevertheless, unification was not always voluntary or a peaceful process, but there was often also "forced integration" that drove political reforms forward. We argue that integration – or the lack of it – is not enough to explain how communities and political organizations managed social and political change. Of course, integration does not necessarily need to mean (total) unification.

Hence the question is how much diversity a state or a ruling elite/majority can tolerate and how they are able to integrate new groups and territories by allowing special conditions that differ from other (core) areas of the state. In fact, allowing varying conditions in different areas remained normal practice in any early modern composite state, although the political and cultural ideal was more often strict unification, which might be attempted, for example, by means of religion (see e.g. Kepsu 2017).

Our *fourth* and final point is to contemplate the kind of process early modern state formation actually was: was it inventing, reforming, standardizing, modernizing, preserving – or something else? We argue that there is never a *tabula rasa* -situation, in which the political actors could start their work from scratch – not even in Latin America where the state institutions and political system were mostly built after the arrival of the Spaniards and largely according to the European model. On the other hand, the colonists adopted many of the institutions of the pre-conquest native societies, and local conditions and indigenous agency had a significant impact on the way in which the society developed in different parts of the Spanish American colonies.

The situation and actors

In the cases of early modern Poland-Lithuania and the Spanish American colonial empire, the urgent need for decision-making and change is evident in the contemporary situation of each realm or territory. In both cases, the sixteenth century especially can be seen as a genuine transition period that was influenced by both internal and external (even global) factors of change. In the case of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the realm faced a political transition from dynastic rule to elective monarchy. During the Jagiellon period (1385–1572), the dynasty had been the unifying force within the otherwise loose alliance between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (henceforward GDL). The end of the Jagiellon dynasty required the estates to decide whether they would continue the alliance of the two states, how this alliance would be (re-) organized, how the international status of this union would be preserved and finally, how the socio-political system within the Commonwealth would be secured and/or reformed. After the death of the last dynastic king in 1572, the elected kings were integrated into the Polish-Lithuanian political system via the agreements (*pacta conventa*) between the estates and a monarch. These agreements settled how domestic issues and foreign policy should be managed under the new reign. In addition to these documents, religious freedom for the nobility, first granted in 1555 and confirmed by the famous Warsaw Confederation in 1573, was an important aspect of state formation in sixteenth-century Poland-Lithuania. (Ijäs 2016.)

The Spanish conquest of America was seemingly very rapid. Within a few decades of Columbus' discovery, Spanish *conquistadors* had defeated the great Indian polities. However, only one fifth of the area of the American continent had been conquered by the mid-sixteenth century. In 1680, when their expansion had come to an end, Spaniards and other Europeans had settled about half of the new world, but the peripheries proved very difficult to conquer and settle (Braudel 1992, 388). In addition, no conquest would have been possible without the help of indigenous allies. [2] Nominal conquest of the lands was only the first step and the conquest remained

incomplete for centuries after that. The *conquistadors* claimed possession over lands as soon as they discovered them and declared their inhabitants subjects of the king. But it is important to remember that for decades, even centuries, the majority of the indigenous peoples of the colonies lived in their own communities under their own chiefs, speaking their own languages, and working their own fields. (Restall 2003, 65–73.) According to Henry Kamen, this last point is crucial in understanding Spain's role in America: their overseas empire was a fragile construction. It produced significant benefits mainly through its gold and silver mines, but in fact, the Spaniards were able to control only a small part of it effectively (Kamen 2002, 96). Despite the high mortality of the indigenous peoples, Spaniards were greatly outnumbered in their colonies, and therefore could not rule simply by force even if they had wanted to. They were well aware of this fact themselves.

There were major differences between pre-colonial Mexico and the Andes. At the time of the conquest, Mexico had a great number of urban centres and a decentralized political structure, while the Andean region was overwhelmingly rural and ruled by a powerful imperial state (Ramos 2014, 22). Therefore, the colonial systems also developed very differently in both parts. In addition, there were areas where no state system had existed before the Spanish arrival, most notably in the northern Andes, in Chile, and in northern Mexico. These areas became the frontier zones of the Spanish empire, where building a stable colonial empire turned out to be much more complicated than in the core areas of the overseas empire.

During the early modern period, political initiative was in the hands of a few. This often meant elite power, exclusively accessible to men only – in official terms at least. In the Polish-Lithuanian parliamentary system there were three estates taking part in the political decision-making process. These were the three bodies of the national Sejm: king, senate and chamber of envoys (Grzybowski 1959; Opaliński 2002). The senate is also known as the upper chamber of the Sejm, which consisted of bishops, high officials of the realm and ministers of the royal chancery. The members of the senate were usually from the wealthier male nobility, that is, the magnates. Since 1505, the role of the senate was first and foremost advisory and it could not make decisions on its own. The lower chamber or chamber of envoys consisted of representatives of the male nobility who were elected and sent by their provincial assemblies, called *sejmik*. As the forum of local administration, the *sejmiki* was an important factor in the decentralization of the Polish-Lithuanian state. (Kutrzeba 1985; Grzybowski 1959, 90–91.)

Historians have struggled with the question of the highest authority in the realm and thus with the "battle for power" between the Polish-Lithuanian nobility and their monarch. One group of scholars sees the development of noble privileges as linear, involving a progressive decrease in royal power (see e.g. Lukowski 2001; Opaliński 2002; Zamoyski 2006 [1987]). Consequently, Polish historiography often adopts a periodization that labels the sixteenth century as the so-called golden age or apogee of noble democracy, after which there is a general decline as the noble democracy turns into "noble anarchy". According to this interpretation, by the end of the eighteenth century the nobility were no longer able to govern themselves or the Polish-Lithuanian state, thus creating a path to the partitions of the Commonwealth.

Consequently, eastern Europe in general and Poland-Lithuania in particular has often been labeled a region of backwardness and "outsiders", which was lagging behind western Europe and did not experience the European state formation process as it is traditionally understood (e.g. Anderson 1998, 55–58; Bonney 1991, 242–301; Chirot 1989; Wiesner-Hanks 2006, 318–319). However, the noble privileges or the royal elections (after 1572) did not completely hinder state formation processes, as the political decision-making of the national Sejm tackled issues of taxation, legislation and state system in general (see e.g. Frost 2001; Ijäs 2016; Mączak 1986; Roşu 2009; Wyczański 1982; Wyczański 2001 [1991]).

In political decision-making, the "party-lines" within the Polish-Lithuanian nobility were based on locality (e.g. Poles versus Lithuanians); confrontation between the petty nobility and the wealthier and more powerful magnates in the senate; religious differences; family connections and systems of clientele; relationship with the monarch; and differing foreign policy interests. Likewise, Spanish colonial state-building was characterized by constant conflicts and negotiation between the crown officials, the leading Spanish settlers, the clergy, and the members of the indigenous elite. The sixteenth-century Spanish conquistadors who invaded America were not soldiers of the king's army, but private entrepreneurs, who expected to be rewarded for their efforts, the highest reward being an *encomienda*, a grant by which its holder, the *encomendero*, had a right to tax a certain group of Indians (Restall 2003, 35). Unlike fiefs in Europe, encomiendas did not give ownership of land. Instead, the institution meant that a certain *cacique* (native chief) and his subjects were entrusted to a certain Spaniard, who had an obligation to take care of their well-being and to Christianize them. In exchange, the encomendero had the right to collect tribute from the natives. The entrusted natives were free men, not the property of the encomendero but abuses were very common. (E.g. Bakewell 1997, 80; Spalding 1984, 47; Stern 1982, 27–28; Trelles Arestegui, 1991, 269.)

The Spanish American colonies were actually possessions of the Castilian crown. The king of Castile usually had his hands tied with European affairs, and the day-to-day administration of the overseas possessions was handled by the *Consejo de Indias* (Council of the Indies) and the *Casa de Contratación* (House of Trade), which were based in Spain. On the ground, the crown exercised its power through the viceroys of New Spain (Mexico) and Peru, the royal *audiencias* (high courts), and the growing bureaucracy drawing the colonies under tighter control.

The native peoples were represented through their traditional leaders called *caciques*, whom the crown recognized as legitimate hereditary leaders. They were addressed by the honorific prefix *don*, which in the early modern period was reserved only for true aristocrats. Although they were inferior to the encomenderos in their political and economic power in the colonial society, they had the greater right to be called lords, as most of the encomenderos were not of noble birth (Mumford 2012, 57). The caciques enjoyed certain privileges typical for the Spanish nobility, such as being exempt from paying tribute or working. These native lords became crucial mediators between the Spanish colonial society and their communities. Among other things, they were responsible for collecting the tribute for their encomendero and they represented their people in the Spanish courts.

The role of the clerics in state formation was interesting and ambiguous. In Poland-Lithuania, the clergy had a strong political role, especially since the bishops were members of the senate. In addition, Catholic confessionalism and the (re-) Catholization of the Commonwealth's public life from the late sixteenth century onwards worked as a unifying aspect in creating a shared national identity, although this process often involved forced integration as other religious groups were slowly left on the margins or forced to accept the hegemony of the (Polish) Catholics. (E.g. Brüning 2008; Tazbir 1973 [1967]; Tazbir 1994; Tollet 2006.) In the Spanish American colonies, the so-called royal patronage (*patronato real*), a series of papal bulls by Alexander VI and Julius II, handed the Spanish monarch the highest authority in all ecclesiastical matters in the new world, making the clerics agents of the crown. On the other hand, many of the fiercest defenders of Indians against the exploitation of the settlers were priests and friars, and as such they were a counterweight to the encomenderos. However, as Peter Bakewell states, the men of the Church were inevitably collaborators with the rising bureaucracy in bringing America into Spanish control (Bakewell 1997, 129–136).

Both conglomerates were, in modern terms, multicultural, bringing together people from different ethnic origins, cultures and religions (or belief systems) (e.g. Kopczyński & Tygielski [eds.] 2010; Rappaport & Cummins 2012). Although the peoples of Poland-Lithuania had a longer experience of living side by side – Poland and the GDL were neighboring realms that had been united under one dynasty since 1385 –, in many ways the people of each remained strangers to each other. As much as possible, the Lithuanians also emphasized their separateness from the Poles, both politically and culturally (e.g. Frost 2015; Tereškinas 2005). However, both conglomerates, Poland-Lithuania and the Spanish empire, were managed by their elites, and in many respects the elites shared a common (noble) status and identity that worked as a unifying factor. Officially, the political initiative was in the hands of elite men, but unofficial channels of authority and influence could include other individuals as well. The grave changes of the sixteenth century in both realms – the end of the Jagiellon dynasty in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the expansion of the Spanish empire – demanded that these actors use their political initiative to reform the existing socio-political system and hence, their state.

The ideal state

The early modern understanding(s) of an ideal state should be seen as goals that the contemporary political actors wished to achieve. As it happens, in both of our focus states the political ideal of a state system was articulated as *res publica*. In Poland-Lithuania, noble liberty and civil rights (*libertas*) represented the Polish-Lithuanian state system, which was above all based on legislation according to which everyone – king, officials, and the estates – should do their duties (e.g. Friedrich 2007; Grzybowski 1959, 128–136, 141; Siemieński 1985, 66). The term *res publica* came into Polish political vocabulary during the first half of the fifteenth century in its classical Roman meaning of public affairs (Janicki 2004, 75). In the Polish usage, the term *res publica* had a triple meaning: the Commonwealth as the state, the commonwealth as the estates of the Sejm, and the commonwealth conceived as the

whole (male) nobility (Opaliński, 2002, 156). It is noteworthy that contemporaries could use the term "commonwealth" to refer to the Kingdom of Poland and the Polish-Lithuanian union (*Res publica, Rzeczpospolita*) specifically or to any realm/state (*res publica, rzeczpospolita*) in general, if it was seen to be governed by (written) law as opposed to royal autocracy or "tyranny" (e.g. Brüning 2008, 123–125; Janicki 2004).

Like Poland-Lithuania, Spanish American colonial society was inherently multicultural. According to the Lublin Union of 1569, the whole male nobility of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was considered one nation, whereas the Spanish colonial empire classified its citizens based on ethnicity. The society was divided into two separate public spheres and political communities, *república de españoles* and *república de indios* (Spanish and Indian republics), governed by separate laws. The idea was to keep these two ethnic groups separated from each other, but in reality the communities intermixed from the beginning. The republics were likened to estates of the old world, and both natives and Spaniards had certain rights and obligations according to their ethnicity and their place in their own community. The Indians were allowed to retain their pre-conquest laws and good customs, as long as they were not in conflict with Christianity, but they were subject to the Spanish judicial courts. (Bakewell 1997, 158–159; Yannakakis 2008, 14–18.) Ideally, the republics were governed by the rule of law, and the opposition to this ideal was tyranny. The Spanish conquistadors and settlers who rebelled against the king were usually labeled as tyrants defying the rule of a legal monarch, and sometimes the pre-Colombian native lords were also called that by colonists who wished to dispute their legitimacy.

Historians have struggled to find a politically correct name for the Polish-Lithuanian realm or state. Polish nationalist historiography (from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century) in particular has interpreted the union between Poland and Lithuania as the incorporation of Lithuania into the Kingdom of Poland. In consequence, the history of Poland-Lithuania is equated with the history of Poland. Another line of historiography has treated Lithuania as a vassal of Poland. Finally, the paradigm in late twentieth century historiography moved towards the "Commonwealth of both nations" (*Rzeczpospolita obojga narodów*), that is, a union between two independent states. (See esp. Jučas 2004, 9–80.) Consequently, the term Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth has come into general use among historians. Furthermore, some scholars have introduced the term "Commonwealth of many nations" (e.g. Kostyło 2009; Litwin 1998). Although this term represents a laudable attempt to emphasize the multicultural nature of the union, it has no synonym in the early modern political vocabulary of the Polish-Lithuanian state. In early modern political terminology, the state was known as *Res publica (Rzeczpospolita)*, without any official suffixes.

As a rule, studies on Polish republicanism concentrate on the classical Aristotelian and Roman heritage of early modern political thought (e.g. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2011; *idem.* 2012; Pietrzyk-Reeves 2010). The idea of *res publica* was closely linked with that of noble freedom and liberty. However, noble *libertas* had different definitions depending on the viewpoint of a nobleman. In most cases, *libertas* was understood as the "rule of law" -principle that, together with the noble privileges, secured the state from (royal) tyranny and arbitrary rule. However, *libertas* could also

be understood as freedom to choose one's religion (e.g. against clerical jurisdiction as well as "papacy"), or as the freedom to follow one's "true faith". *Libertas* was also freedom from anarchy, (civil) war and foreign oppression, in other words, equated with the social/internal peace and tranquility of the realm. Finally, noble *libertas* meant the freedom to elect a monarch that protected the realm from "fortune" and violent battles for power (Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2012, 25–41, 60; Ijäs 2016, 85–109). The question of liberty was topical also in the Spanish colonial empire. However, the main concern there was not noble liberty, but that of the natives. The question engendered a heated debate, and Pope Paul III also took part in it with his bull *Sublimus Deus* in 1537, in which he stated that the Indians were true men, who should not be deprived of their liberty or possessions.

The different actors in Spanish colonial society had very different ideas on the ideal state. The *conquistadors* aspired to rule the lands as powerful lords acting under the protection of the crown. The crown, on the other hand, wanted to prevent the formation of a strong feudal class in the colonies and to ensure that the newly conquered lands were firmly under the king's direct control (Burkholder & Johnson 2001, 79). The Catholic Church and the clerics quite naturally prioritized evangelization, and saw the discovery and conquest of the new world as an opportunity to bring a multitude of new souls to Catholicism. Common to the views of all these actors is the idea that the American continent was a new world, which could be molded according to their own ideals. In the early sixteenth century the Spanish humanist Hernán Pérez de Oliva wrote that Columbus left for his second journey in 1493 "to mix the world and to give those new lands the form of our own" (de Oliva 1991, 50). As J. H. Elliott (2009, 131) commented, the Spaniards were successful in mixing the world, but not so much in giving the new lands the form of their own. There was no doubt a sense of disillusionment and disappointment among the conquerors and the clerics, not to mention the humanist commentators, as the reality never quite matched their ideals (Elliott 1992b, 28).

The discrepancy between ideal and reality stems from the fact that while the American continent was indeed a new world for the Europeans, it certainly was not an empty world. It was occupied by millions of indigenous people, who had their own ideas on how society should be structured. In 1561, a group of native lords from the Cuzco area offered the king a considerable sum of money in exchange for being removed from the Spanish encomenderos' authority and confirmed as independent lords of their subjects. The bid was a response to an earlier bid by the encomenderos for perpetuity of their encomiendas and jurisdiction over the Indians, but it also signals the role the native nobility aspired to in the colonial empire. They claimed a political role as natural lords freely acknowledging the supreme authority of their king without the meddling of the Spanish settlers. (Mumford 2012, 53–59.) The indigenous peoples were not a unified group, and they did not have one single ideal, but this example shows that the elite of the former Inca empire were willing to submit themselves to being vassals of the king of Spain, but they also wanted autonomy. In that sense, they and the Spanish encomenderos had similar aspirations.

In sum, the ideal of the elites in both realms was the early modern version of the rule of law principle, as opposed to tyranny and anarchy. In addition, in both realms the

elites aspired to autonomy from the king. The monarch was a unifying figure, whose authority was not disputed, but who was not an absolute ruler either. The elites wanted to rule independently but under the protection of the king.

The issue of integration

In previous studies, scholars of composite states have concentrated especially on the issue of integration. Traditionally, integration is regarded as important because it is considered to guarantee loyalty to the regime and resistance to foreign domination, as well as effective and standardized government policy towards the subjects (Tilly 1975, 79). In the historiography of early modern Poland-Lithuania, historians have contemplated the problem of how different territories and their local (noble) groups were integrated into the common socio-political system and how successful that integration was. Consequently, these studies have usually focused on the political institutions of Sejm and *sejmiki*, or the noble political thought of republicanism. Most of these studies conclude that although integration took place, it remained a constant challenge in the multicultural and regionally divided Polish-Lithuanian union (e.g. Dybaś, Hanczewski & Kempa 2007; Kempa & Mikulski 2011; Lichy 2011, esp.189–199; Mazur 2006).

It is difficult to say whether this focus on integration is caused by the traditional narrative of national unification and nation-building during the early modern period, or by present-day ideas of European integration. The concept of integration has gained popularity among many early modernists as the issue of integration versus diversity has proved to be an interesting research problem. Successful integration is often viewed as a unification process – either political, social, cultural, or all of them. However, in the reality of early modern composite states, sometimes political integration – or at least pacification – of new territories may have been achieved better and easier by allowing certain special conditions to different territories. This emphasized the conglomerate character rather than the assumed centralization process, even in states like early modern Sweden (Kepsu 2017).

Although the Union of Lublin created a political union between the Kingdom of Poland and the GDL in 1569, the Lithuanian, Prussian and Ruthenian nobility still had their own public institutions, identity and ambitions. The question of how to combine local needs and ambitions with the need for deeper integration of the Polish-Lithuanian union was of high importance. During the Jagiellon era, the dynasty worked as a unifying factor within the otherwise loose union between Poland and Lithuania. The need for deeper integration became urgent as the dynasty came to its end in 1572. One way to emphasize the unity of the nobility was found in the noble ideology of *Sarmatism*: the myth that the Polish nobility were descendants of the ancient Sarmatians. As the political culture of the multiethnic Polish-Lithuanian union developed during the early modern era, nobility of other regions were also included among the Sarmatians (e.g. Bogucka 1996; Bömelburg 2006; Czechowicz 2009; Friedrich 2000, 103–108; Potkowski 1996; Vasiliauskas 2006).

Another unifying ideology was noble republicanism and the ideas of *libertas* that potentially united the nobility of the whole Commonwealth. We say *potentially*, as the

republican state system marked – first and foremost – the Polish political system, and in many cases the estates of the GDL were reluctant to take part in this. The Lithuanians had opposed a deeper union with Poland since the beginning of the Jagiellon period (1385) and finally agreed to it only in 1569. During the royal elections, the Lithuanians still conducted so-called separatist politics to improve their status within the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian nobility needed to compromise with the Polish estates to secure the continuation of the union. In the end, preservation of the union with Poland seemed the best alternative to secure the existing socio-political system of the GDL against domestic rivalries and especially the military threat posed by Muscovy. (E.g. Frost 2015; Ijäs 2016; Kempa 2004.)

For sixteenth-century Spanish monarchs, the unity of their vast empire was always a concern. It was virtually impossible for the crown to control its diverse possessions directly. Unlike in Poland-Lithuania, they were geographically scattered on both sides of the Atlantic. The crown treated most of the kingdoms and provinces as distinct entities with their separate laws and privileges. Benign neglect of the crown and a degree of self-government of the local elites was typical for the Spanish Habsburg monarchy, for example in the kingdoms of Aragon and Naples and in the provinces of the Netherlands. In exchange, the local elites did not challenge the status quo. The Spanish possessions in the Americas constituted a special case within the Habsburg Spanish Empire. They were incorporated directly into the crown of Castile, with its inhabitants possessing the same obligations and rights as in the motherland (Elliott 1992a, 52–57). Despite that difference, benign neglect and self-government were a reality in the colonies as well. A Spanish medieval legal tradition made it possible for the local administrators to submit to royal orders without carrying them out in full if they were not compatible with local circumstances, and that tradition was commonly used in the Americas as well. [3] Obedience to the absent king was demonstrated and enforced with a series of rituals. For example, when the king's seal entered a royal audiencia, it was received as if it was the king himself. The seal was a symbol of royal authority, and stood in for the absent and distant king (Rappaport & Cummins 2012, 213–214).

The distance from the motherland, the size of the American colonies, and the diversity of their original inhabitants posed serious challenges for integrating them into the empire. The laws of the Indies where the same everywhere, but the colonial system developed differently in different regions. Another challenge was ethnic diversity. Despite their high mortality, the indigenous peoples remained a majority in the colonies and in addition, there was a growing number of black slaves and freed people, and mestizos. The creolization of the Spanish population increased the mental distance from Spain. The integration of the colonies with the motherland was never entirely completed.

Integration remained a continuous challenge, if not altogether impossible to implement in an early modern composite state. In addition, forced integration – understood here as violent and oppressive unification – could have led to further problems and discontent, as it would often have meant domination of a ruling class, estate and/or group over a weaker majority, minority ethnicities and religious or social groups. Because the structure and functions of the society were based on estate power,

the relative weakness or a minority position of a territory or a social group was not always defined in numbers, but according to a more complex power hierarchy based on estate rules and status.

The nature of the process

State formation, and especially its (alleged) Western European model, has traditionally been viewed as "a road to modernity" and the "right path" that eventually resulted in the formation of nation-states. Nevertheless, it should be noted that even in Western Europe there were different experiences (and experiments) during the state formation process. Indeed, the western European centralization process has gone much further in works of social theory than it did in historical reality (Tilly 1997, 61–62). On the other hand, when we take into account the early modern experience of increasing centralization of political power and administration, we see that in many cases it was an extremely violent process, or remained difficult to achieve. Therefore, it becomes more understandable that the Polish-Lithuanian estates emphasized their *libertas* and felt the need to secure their socio-political system against royal tyranny of the type that was evident, for example, in the French wars of religion (1562–1598) (e.g. Cameron 1991, 372–381; Grzybowski 1979, 89–92).

If state formation is viewed from a narrow perspective, and seen purely as centralization under strong royal power, historians of early modern Poland-Lithuania and the Spanish colonial empire could deny that this kind of state formation took place at all. On the other hand, in early modern Poland-Lithuania the political initiative was in the hands of the nobility, and in fact several decisions that contributed to state formation in the European sense were implemented also in the Commonwealth. This happened especially in the 1560s and 1570s as part of the transition from dynastic rule to elective monarchy.

Firstly, there was a standardization of Polish-Lithuanian legislation, which took place through the so-called execution of laws in the 1560s as well as in the *pacta conventa* of the elected kings. Together with the contract of the Lublin Union, the standardization of legislation was intended to make the conglomerate Commonwealth a more unitary state in respect of its different territories and estates. Secondly, the aim of the tax reform in the 1560s was to widen the base for tax collection to meet the growing demands of public administration and warfare. Thirdly, the first steps towards secularization of the state were taken in sixteenth-century Poland-Lithuania. The reforms of the judiciary and taxation show that there was an initiative to create a division between state and church authorities and/or institutions. The jurisdictional rights of the clergy were restricted at the same time as taxation was extended to make them pay taxes together with the lay nobility. The special status of the clergy, which was based on the medieval idea of *libertas ecclesiae*, began to be eroded. However, this development was neither fast nor straightforward, as the strengthening confessionalism and re-Catholicization of the Polish-Lithuanian public life from the late sixteenth century onwards clearly indicates. (Ijäs 2016.)

Finally, in the Polish-Lithuanian political system, there was a division between the royal institution and the person of the monarch. Most importantly, this was visible in

the elective nature of the Polish-Lithuanian monarchy and the renunciation of any hereditary right to the throne. Thus republican and constitutionalist political thought outweighed ideas of strong monarchy and absolutism. Whereas in Poland-Lithuania there was a "transition period" (from 1560s–1570s) during which the estates took part in a planned decision-making process required by the political change from dynastic rule to elective monarchy, sixteenth-century Spanish colonialism was in many ways characterized by improvisation, invention, and adaptation. The history of conquest and early colonialism may appear to be a series of accidents, but already by the 1520s, one can see the beginning of clear attempts at standardization.

Spain gained possession of its colonies through military conquest, so quite naturally military government characterized the early years of colonial rule. This phase was followed by a transition towards a more bureaucratic system, which started in the 1520s in Mexico, and in the 1540s in South America, but it was a long process full of setbacks (Bakewell 1997, 104–111). According to Karen Powers, the process of colonial state-building in Spanish America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had a multiplicity of regional variations. However, mainly it was characterized by three steps: first, the imposition of state apparatus over indigenous peoples; second, the crown's power struggle with the colonial elite and the temporary consolidation of rule; third, and the breakdown of royal authority and creolization of government. (Powers 1995, 81.) As J. H. Elliott so aptly put it, "[t]he *conquistadores*, who had been driven forward by their greed for booty, land and lordship, watched in dismay as the officials of the Spanish crown encroached on their feudal paradise" (Elliott 1992b, 28). However, the crown's control over the colonial Spanish elite was incomplete, and it could not govern without their assistance. Spain was never able to control its colonies through coercion, but rather through consent and compromise. (Kamen 2002, 141–142.)

The crown's control over the indigenous peoples was equally incomplete. Scholars sometimes refer to the arrangement with the indigenous communities as a colonial pact. The term refers to the unstated agreement by which the natives provided the Spaniards with tribute and labor in exchange for retaining some of their lands and a degree of autonomy (Mumford 2012, 158). The guarantors of the pact were the indigenous elites, who gained a privileged position in society for ensuring their communities kept their part of the deal. The native elite became, to use Karen Spalding's term, the cutting edge of colonialism (Spalding 1984, 210).

María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi has suggested that Spain's success in building an empire was largely based on its ability to impose a set of laws and juridical norms over people of different cultural traditions. The new vassals of the king, the indigenous peoples, used the colonial courts to settle their internal disputes and gain more prestige, and paradoxically, at the same time they helped to bolster the Spanish judicial system. (Romero Frizzi 2010, 107, 127.) The different actors in the emerging colonial society used the law and the courts of justice as a means of settling their disputes and gaining advantages over their opponents. The courts formed a space of interaction and political engagement among the peoples of the colonies. Negotiation through state institutions was not only permitted but also encouraged by the Spanish officials, and embraced by the subjects (Owensby 2010). While pursuing their

interests, struggling for power, contesting foreign domination and settling their disputes, the settlers and the natives little by little enhanced the importance and the legitimacy of the colonial empire over the local power groups, which was not their initial purpose. This is one of the paradoxes of early colonial history in Spanish America.

In the end, the building of the colonial empire was essentially a negotiation process between these different powers in society. The local elites had a lot of freedom, and they formed informal power groups, social networks and flexible alliances held together by mutual interests. (Stern 1982, 92–102.) In many ways, the situation was similar in Poland-Lithuania, where the nobility's control over local administration limited centralized (royal) power and governance. Moreover, during the (repeated) *interregna,* political initiative was exclusively in the hands of the Polish-Lithuanian estates. In the American colonies, the crown faced many challenges, such as distance from the homeland, the huge size of the colonies, the power struggle with the leading settlers, and the numerical advantage of the indigenous peoples. Considering the circumstances, however, Spain was exceptionally successful in the administrative organization of its colonies. Its rule was fragile, but the crown's authority was not truly questioned until the late eighteenth century.

Conclusions

In this review article, we have scrutinized scholarship on the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Spanish colonial empire. Our focus has been especially on the current (post-2000) scholarship that tackles these two realms as composite/conglomerate states. Based on the existing historiography, we have tackled the political structure and decision-making of these two great realms of the early modern period, which, in their time, were not on the margins of either a European or a trans-Atlantic political map.

As recent studies on states like early modern Sweden, previously considered as highly centralized and unified model state, show, the historians' attention is turning towards the composite nature of early modern states in general. The paradigm is shifting from centralization and the emphasis on military-fiscal states to (considerable) segregation and conglomerates. Thus, we argue, the early modern realms and conglomerates that have previously been marginalized in historiography, especially in international and more theoretical scholarship on state formation, can now be included and even brought to the centre of scholarly focus. The challenge is, however, that we as researchers need to be aware of the existing scholarship on the previously relatively unknown early modern conglomerates in areas like central Eastern Europe and Latin America. Although some language barriers may remain as a hindrance, we hope this literary review can serve as a tentative guidebook for other researchers in this quest.

We have emphasized that in many respects state formation process in composite states followed the general pattern of the European state formation process, although the *primus motor* behind state formation lies in other social and politically active groups rather than in mere royal ambition. Again, this notion follows the recent scholarship on popular politics/initiatives and limited royal authority during the early modern

period in general. Thus the previously marginalized composite states transform into representative examples of the early modern state formation process. Based on conglomerates like Poland-Lithuania and the Spanish colonial empire, it is possible to study socio-political system(s) and decision-making in realms where royal/central power was limited, society was multi-ethnic and -religious and where early modern estate society existed, but often in different forms than in western Europe. These examples also highlight the fact that state formation is generally not a straightforward or an inevitable process, but a complicated one.

We have also noted that the perspective of composite states potentially makes a link between early modern history and the present emphasis on transnational studies. Here we have argued that early modern history is in modern terms multicultural, transnational and global almost by default, as the early modern realms and societies were by no means unitary (nation-) states. Again, we hope that the inclusion of previously marginalized realms like the Spanish colonial empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth can focus further attention onto the notion that early modern states were indeed multi-ethnic and -cultural within themselves, and then took part in transnational contacts, even in a global context. Perhaps the complex conglomerates could even set the trend for further research on the topic!

We consider it important to draw attention to early modern decision-making with a close look at the contemporary situation of a given political community. State formation is not something that simply occurs as a natural development in the flow of history, as there has to be a need for political decision-making that contributes to change, which may in retrospect amount to state formation. Likewise, it is important to scrutinize the actors and power groups of political decision-making, their relationships with each other, and their goals, that is, the (different) understandings of an ideal state. A state formation process usually involves conflicts and negotiation between different actors and their interests and ideals.

As we have scrutinized the current state of scholarship, we have noticed that although there were clear differences in the Polish-Lithuanian and colonial societies, there were similarities in the ways in which political decision-making and state formation were conducted in the long run. Despite some ethnic and political differences, the nobilities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth shared a common background first as neighbours, then as partners. The Spanish colonial empire, on the other hand, brought together strangers that had to find a way to build their socio-political reality anew. However, in both realms the political initiative was – at least officially – in the hands of a few, and the elite men shared similar interests and ideas on how to reform their state and balance their power with the distant or otherwise restricted royal authority.

The question of integration is closely connected to the political actors and their (power) relations with one another. Much scholarship has focused on the importance of integration, but here we have also criticized the idea of integration as purely a positive process, as early modern state unification could be carried through also as forced integration. On the other hand, allowing a degree of self-government could help to maintain the support of the local elites in the different parts of the realm. Thus, the constant question in early modern composite states was how much diversity

within the state could be allowed and still secure loyalty to the regime. The question is familiar even in our own day, as modern democracies are multicultural by their nature with an emphasis on individual freedom.

This leads us to the last focus point of our review: state formation is a continuous process that has no clear beginning or end. It is a process of creation and invention, but also a process of standardization and preservation. Above all, it is a process of *re*-defining and *re*-forming those political and social conditions that make our political structures. This requires political agency and active participation, and it is never a dominion of just one (central) actor.

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Notes

[1] H. G. Koenigsberger divides the composite monarchies into two different categories: those consisting of separate countries divided by land or sea, and contiguous composite states.

[2] Henry Kamen (2002, 113) goes as far as to state, that "the conquest of some indigenous Americans by others laid the basis of the Spanish empire."

[3] This right was called *se obedece pero no se cumple* (obey but not implement), and it was originally a means to preserve municipal law in the face of the expansion of royal jurisdiction in medieval Spain.

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