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Imperial paths, big comparisons: the late Ottoman Empire*

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Abstract

The main goals of this article are to review historiographical trends and set new directions for late Ottoman history. First, the paper demonstrates that current research on the late Ottoman Empire still operates within the confines of the centre–periphery model, and sustains dualistic and state-centred narratives. Second, I argue that a 'historical trajectory' framework is a better analytical tool and empirical strategy. It is spatial, path-dependent, and comparative. With special reference to the Middle Eastern provinces, I show that the Ottoman Empire was characterized by distinct imperial paths during the nineteenth century, each representing an alternative route to state–society and local–global relations. The article further suggests that a trajectory-specific approach can provide new prospects for understanding Eurasian land-based empires from a comparative perspective.

The Ottoman Empire was a successful political enterprise. Combining military conquest with imperial wisdom, the Ottomans ruled over vast territories in Europe and Asia for six hundred years. The key to durable rule was the adaptation of the imperial state to local conditions. The Ottomans also brought security and prosperity to conquered territories, with the help of imperial justice and the protection of long-distance trade. A wave of decentralization set in during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and local power-holders grew stronger by appropriating state resources and imperial authority.

During the nineteenth century, the Ottomans faced geopolitical pressures, domestic resistance, and the impact of an expanding Western economy. Russian victories on the military front, Balkan nationalisms, moves towards free trade, and Great Power intervention to protect Christian subjects all reminded the Ottomans of the need for rapid change. Accordingly, the imperial state initiated a programme of political and social transformation. Centralization and modernization then became the central tenets of the Ottoman project to cope with global dynamics and to transform state–society relations.

The main goal of this article is to offer a new framework for understanding the late Ottoman Empire. First, I review the historiographical literature, and conclude that current research continues to operate within the confines of a centre–periphery model. This position

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is compatible with the historical evolution of the field, which recognizes capitalism and modernization on the one hand, and the Ottoman state and local actors on the other, as the paradigmatic bases of the late Ottoman narrative. Second, I suggest that the 'historical trajectory' framework is a better analytical tool and empirical strategy. It is spatial, path-dependent, and comparative.[1] The trajectory perspective is attentive to local dynamics, explores 'locked-in effects' in state–society and global–local relations, and provides new grounds for imperial comparisons.

In line with this agenda, the first part of the article surveys dualistic approaches and state-based accounts in late Ottoman historiography. The second part moves beyond existing frameworks in the literature and offers a new conceptual strategy. With particular reference to the Asian provinces, I demonstrate how coast, interior, and frontier emerged as distinct imperial paths, with varying economic, political, and social orders during the nineteenth century. The article further suggests that a trajectory-specific approach can provide new prospects for understanding the experiences of other Eurasian land-based empires from a comparative perspective.

Late Ottoman historiography

There have been three waves of late Ottoman historiography since 1950.[2] The modernization school was primarily interested in explaining top-down political change. Introducing social and economic history into the field, macro models searched for the impact of the world economy on the imperial terrain. More recent approaches have unseated Westernization and global capitalism as the key variables. Shifting the focus to interactions between Ottoman state and society, current research underlines provincial regimes, centre–periphery alliances, and crises in these links at turning points of late Ottoman history.

This part of the article explores different historiographical traditions in late Ottoman studies, with a primary focus on the nineteenth century. Relying on historical materials produced for the last two decades, I examine contemporary developments in the field. The Asian provinces of the Ottoman Empire are given more weight, for two reasons: first, most current research is being undertaken on the Arab provinces. Second, the historiography of the Ottoman Balkans has remained rather undeveloped, often continuing to view late Ottoman rule in the region merely as alien, corrupt, and backward.[3]

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1 On trajectory thinking, the idea of path-dependency, and its relevance to historical research, see Paul Pierson, 'Increasing returns, path-dependence, and the study of politics', *American Political Science Review*, 94, 2, 2000, pp. 251–67; Andrew Abbott, 'On the concept of turning point', *Comparative Social Research*, 16, 1997, pp. 85–105; James Mahoney, 'Comparative-historical methodology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, 2004, pp. 81–101; Thomas Ertman, *The birth of the Leviathan: building states and regimes in medieval and early modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; James Mahoney, *Legacies of liberalism: path dependence and political regimes in Central America*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

2 Cem Emrence, 'Three waves of late Ottoman historiography, 1950–2007', *MESA Bulletin*, 41, 2, 2007, pp. 137–51. For a three-wave periodization of African historiography that emphasizes political structure, economy, and culture, see Frederick Cooper, 'Decolonizing situations: the rise, fall and rise of colonial studies, 1951–2001', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 20, 2, 2002, pp. 47–76.

3 For a critique of the Ottoman dark ages myth, see Fikret Adanır, 'Balkan historiography related to the Ottoman Empire since 1945', in Kemal H. Karpat, ed., *Ottoman past and today's Turkey*,

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Provincial regimes

Local studies have confirmed the resilient character of Ottoman provincial regimes during the nineteenth century. For instance, Donald Quataert and Michael Palairet documented the experience of Anatolian and Bulgarian textile manufacturers, who survived the challenge of European imports by cutting costs and using non-guild labour.[4] In a similar fashion, Reşat Kasaba and Jens Hanssen argued that it was domestic merchants who controlled long-distance trade networks in western Anatolia and Beirut.[5] In other places, such as Syria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and northern Iraq, Ottoman landholding patterns and regional markets were as important as the impact of the world economy.[6]

Provincial regimes also negotiated successfully with central authority. In a path-breaking study, Beshara Doumani demonstrated the bargaining power of the Nablusi administrative council, which was able to keep a significant share of the agricultural surplus in Palestine.[7] In other cases, local actors simply bypassed the central Ottoman state. Isa Blumi brought to the fore the story of Albanian merchants who evaded paying taxes, an experience shared by their counterparts in other border provinces, such as Yemen and Eastern Anatolia at the beginning of the twentieth century.[8]

Provincial economic interests received a further boost through taxation mechanisms. Extraterritoriality gave tax immunity to a significant number of non-Muslim merchants on the eastern Mediterranean coast. At the same time, tax-farming practices delegated tax collection rights to the ruling Muslim bloc in inland regions. The historical outcome was limited direct taxation by the central state. The ratio of tax revenues to total GDP stayed at around 11% before the First World War, and only one third of state income came from trade between 1887 and 1907.[9] Thus, despite changing circumstances, Ottoman

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Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000, pp. 236–52; Maria Todorova, 'The Ottoman legacy in the Balkans', in Carl L. Brown, ed., *Imperial legacy: the Ottoman imprint in the Balkans and the Middle East*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 45–77.

4 Donald Quataert, 'The age of reforms, 1812–1914', in Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, eds., *An economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 2, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 761–943; idem, 'Ottoman manufacturing in the nineteenth century', in Donald Quataert, ed., *Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1500–1950*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994, pp. 87–121; Michael Palairet, *The Balkan economies, c. 1800–1914*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 58–84.

5 Reşat Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the world economy: the nineteenth century*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988; Jens Hanssen, *Fin de siècle Beirut: the making of an Ottoman provincial capital*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.

6 Among others, see James A. Reilly, *A small town in Syria: Ottoman Hama in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*, New York: P. Lang, 2002.

7 Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: merchants and peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995.

8 Isa Blumi, 'Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: smuggling through the empire's new frontiers in Yemen and Albania, 1878–1910', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9, 1, 2003, pp. 255–74; Doreen Ingrams and Leila Ingrams, eds., *Records of Yemen. Volume 4: 1872–1899*, Farnham Common, Bucks: Archive Editions, 1993.

9 My calculations, based on Stanford J. Shaw, 'The nineteenth-century Ottoman tax reforms and revenue system', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 6, 4, 1975, pp. 421–59. Compare this trend with Latin America, where the state was also weak but relied on trade-based taxes: see Miguel Angel Centeno, 'Blood and debt: war and taxation in nineteenth-century Latin America', *American Journal of Sociology*, 102, 6, 1997, pp. 1565–605.

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provincial regimes survived the fiscal priorities of a centralizing state and the profit agendas of foreign capitalists during the nineteenth century.

Long-term elite rule depended on political power in the localities. In Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine, this required a stable position in the Ottoman bureaucracy. Hence, the more the late Ottoman state became bureaucratic, the more it was taken over by provincial interests at the local level. As numerous local studies have shown, the number of influential families that dominated political life in Ankara, Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, and Jerusalem never exceeded a dozen in the post-1860 period. In coastal regions, merchants and professionals were integrated into the bureaucratic machinery. Mahmoud Yazbak portrayed a picture of this sort for Haifa, where Muslim and non-Muslim elite families alike competed for bureaucratic posts.[10] In a similar fashion, Jewish moneyed interests and Muslim notables were influential in the local government of Salonica (Thessaloniki).[11]

Not all local leaders relied exclusively on the Ottoman state for political power. In frontier regions, religious credentials certainly helped. In a moving account, Hasan Kayalı discussed the various local capabilities of the Sharif of Mecca in western Arabia when dealing with the inexperienced Young Turk government.[12] Local interests were once again the key in the Albanian Catholic north, as opposed to 'Albanian solidarity or Ottoman loyalty'.[13] Similarly, Albanian, Macedonian, and Bosnian Muslims mobilized their religious identity to oppose Great Power intervention and Christian nationalisms in the Balkans.[14] Generally speaking, then, studies on the borderland provinces have made it clear that local leaders enjoyed specific ideological and cultural resources.[15]

The intriguing question is how provincial regimes prevailed against powerful rivals, such as the state and global actors. Simply put, local horizontal networks mattered. On the economic front, Haris Exertzoglou underlined the 'ethnic banking connection' that Greek merchants enjoyed in Istanbul to run commercial operations in western Anatolia.[16] Roger Owen showed how domestically owned silk-reeling factories in Mount Lebanon relied on familial networks and migrant home-town connections.[17] In the political field,

10 Mahmoud Yazbak, *Haifa in the late Ottoman period, 1864–1914*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998.

11 Bülent Özdemir, *Ottoman reforms and social life reflections from Salonica, 1830–1550*, Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2003.

12 Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

13 Isa Blumi, 'Contesting the edges of the Ottoman Empire: rethinking ethnic and sectarian boundaries in the Malesore, 1878–1912', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35, 2003, pp. 237–56.

14 Fikret Adanır, 'The formation of a 'Muslim' nation in Bosnia-Hercegovina: a historiographic discussion', in Fikret Adanır and Suraiya Faroqhi, eds., *The Ottomans and the Balkans: a discussion of historiography*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002, pp. 267–304; Banu İşlet Sönmez, *II. Meşrutiyette Arnavut muhalefeti*, Istanbul: YKY, 2007, pp. 52–65.

15 İhsan Süreyya Sırma, *Osmanlı devleti'nin yıkılışında Yemen isyanları*, Istanbul: Zafer Matbaası, 1980; Martin V. Bruinessen, *Agha, shaikh and state: the social and political structures of Kurdistan*, London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1992; Kais M. Firro, *A history of the Druzes*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.

16 Haris Exertzoglou, 'The development of a Greek Ottoman bourgeoisie: investment patterns in the Ottoman Empire, 1850–1914', in Dimitri Gondicas and Charles Issawi, eds., *Ottoman Greeks in the age of nationalism*, Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1999, pp. 89–114.

17 Roger Owen,'The silk-reeling industry of Mount Lebanon, 1840–1914: a study of the possibilities and limitations of factory production in the periphery', in Huricihan İslamoğlu-İnan, ed., *The Ottoman Empire and the world-economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 271–83.

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Philip Khoury documented the strength of Muslim intermediaries in Damascus, who consolidated their power through marriage and other means.[18] For the very same reason, the moral agenda of the imperial state did not have a major impact on the frontiers, where religious entrepreneurs and provincial leaders were strongly embedded in local contexts.

Local studies have been instrumental in the rediscovery of provincial regimes that had been vilified by modernization theorists. Portraying the local elite as pragmatic agents, who successfully adjusted to Ottoman centralization and European expansion, these works unveil the power of centrifugal forces in the late Ottoman Empire.[19] They also document the brokered nature of Ottoman state formation, which neither followed the West European transition from indirect to direct rule, nor repeated the decentralized politics of the eighteenth century.[20] The larger conclusion that one can draw from this literature is that there was negotiated rule in the Ottoman territories during the nineteenth century.

Centre–periphery alliances

Institutional readings of the late Ottoman Empire hinge upon the idea that there was an alliance between the imperial centre and the periphery.[21] The most developed argument in this vein has been about tax-farming. This was an arrangement through which the Ottoman state rented out its right to collect taxes to third parties, in return for a payment in advance. Obtaining tax farms required political connections at different levels, and created a chain of powerful subcontracting interests, amounting to five thousand people during the eighteenth century.[22] Discussing tax-farming relations in Diyarbakır, on the Upper Tigris River, Ariel Salzmann portrayed a city that was well run by the local elite, who supported regional interests and yet had strong fiscal links to the imperial centre.[23]

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18 Philip S. Khoury, *Urban notables and Arab nationalism: the politics of Damascus, 1860–1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 26–52.

19 Ehud R. Toledano, 'The emergence of Ottoman-local elites (1700–1900): a framework for research', in Ilan Pappé and Moshe Ma'oz, eds., *Middle Eastern politics and ideas*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1997, pp. 145–62. Kemal Karpat went further, to argue that provincial interests evolved into an Islamic middle class in Anatolia: Kemal H. Karpat, *The politicization of Islam: reconstructing identity, state, faith and community in the late Ottoman state*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 89–116.

20 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, capital, and European states, AD 990–1990*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990; Jane Hathaway, 'Bilateral factionalism in the Ottoman provinces', in Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., *Provincial elites in the Ottoman Empire*, Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2005, pp. 31–8.

21 Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the modern state: the Ottoman Empire, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries*, 2nd edition Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005. For a similar argument, which emphasizes centre–periphery alliances as the key to understanding eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Chinese history, see R. Bin Wong, *China transformed: historical change and the limits of European experience*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 71–126.

22 Mehmet Genç, *Osmanlı imparatorluğu'nda devlet ve ekonomi*, Istanbul: Ötüken, 2000; Ariel Salzmann, 'An ancien régime revisited: "privatization" and political economy in the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire', *Politics & Society*, 21, 1993, pp. 393–423.

23 Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: rival paths to the modern state*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004.

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Karen Barkey took the same argument one step further, and associated tax-farming interests with burgeoning provincial civil society in the Ottoman Empire.[24] As major beneficiaries of tax-farming at the local level, the Karaosmanoğulları family in western Anatolia, notables (*ayan*) owning large estates (*çiftlik*) in the Balkans, and influential Sunni households in the Arab provinces established close ties with foreign merchants, provided protection to local groups, and were transformed into influential community leaders.[25] According to this approach, tax-farming fostered civil society in the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Arab provinces, and sustained the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire during the decentralized eighteenth century.

Late Ottoman institutions were transformed into a policy instrument by Sultan Abdulhamid II during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This sultan 'put Islam into action' to integrate the local elite more firmly into the modernizing Ottoman state, and to produce legitimacy in the eyes of his Muslim subjects. Selim Deringil, in an often-cited book, discussed various 'imperial-legitimation' mechanisms. The Ottoman sultan bestowed honorary medals on local elite figures, sent material gifts to tribal leaders, and promoted a Sunni version of Islam.[26] This line of argument approached pan-Islamic ideology in the late Ottoman Empire as part of a state-building project that mobilized a confessional agenda for the political survival of the state.

The other aspect of regime strength during the reign of Abdulhamid II concerned bureaucratic stability in the higher ranks. Abdülhamit Kırmızı documented that the sultan appointed only ninety-five governors to administer twenty-nine provinces in the period 1895–1908, each governor serving for an average term of five years.[27] Long years of tenure in the bureaucracy, and the desire of the sultan to control each appointment, served two main purposes. First, the Ottoman administration was able to penetrate to the local level better than in the past, and, second, the sultan pre-empted the rise of autonomous governors with distinct interests and alternative visions.[28] The political outcome was the growing prestige of the Ottoman sultan on the one hand, and stronger interactions between localities and the centre on the other.

Imperial schooling accelerated Ottomanization, with its Islamic credentials and prospects for social mobility.[29] As of 1900, the Ottoman bureaucracy became the primary

24 Karen Barkey, 'A perspective on Ottoman decline', in Jonathan Friedman and Christopher Chase-Dunn, eds., *Hegemonic decline: present and past*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005, pp. 135–51.

25 On the rise of locally powerful actors, see Suraiya Faroqhi, 'Coping with the central state, coping with local power: Ottoman regions and notables from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century', in Fikret Adanır and Suraiya Faroqhi, eds., *The Ottomans and the Balkans: a discussion of historiography*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002, pp. 351–81.

26 Selim Deringil, *The well-protected domains: ideology and legitimation of power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1998.

27 Abdülhamit Kırmızı, *Abdülhamid'in valileri: Osmanlı vilayet idaresi 1895–1908*, Istanbul: Klasik, 2007, pp. 11–13, 68, 87.

28 Delegation of authority creates problems, especially when the principal has high information costs. For a discussion on the principal–agent framework that is widely used in economics and political science, see Edgar Kiser, 'Comparing varieties of agency theory in economics, political science and sociology: an illustration from state policy implementation', *Sociological Theory*, 17, 2, 1999, pp. 146–70.

29 Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial classroom: Islam, education, and the state in the late Ottoman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Eugene L. Rogan, 'The political significance of an Ottoman

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means through which younger generations in the Muslim local elite kept their privileged position and men from modest backgrounds obtained access to upward social mobility. The former group preferred to go to law school and the school of administration to take up positions in the civil bureaucracy, whereas the latter tended to choose military careers in the Ottoman army.[30] Thus, the Ottoman state became more credible in the eyes of most of its subjects before the First World War (at least, those who were Muslims) because of its relatively stable, politically effective, and culturally inclusive institutions.[31]

At the same time, economic institutionalist scholars explored the position of the Ottoman Empire vis-à-vis the West in varying terms. According to Timur Kuran, the centrality of the state and Islamic legal institutions were the main reasons why the Muslim world could not cope with the European world economy.[32] A more balanced and empirically substantiated view, advocated by Şevket Pamuk, underlined the success of Ottoman economic principles in the early modern era, and yet documented the rising economic disparity between the Ottomans and the West during the nineteenth century.[33] The balance sheet of late Ottoman institutions is certainly mixed: while their gradual consolidation and increasingly Islamic character kept the empire politically intact, they did not foster economic efficiency in the long run.

This historical trend was partially reversed in the Balkans. Here, there was a stronger economic performance, especially in Bulgaria, and yet no effective integration of local interests into the imperial framework at political and social levels. Fikret Adanır demonstrated the latter point with great detail in the context of Macedonia. He showed how educated Christian elites, Slavic churches, Balkan states, and Great Powers were engaged in a fierce struggle to establish control over the region.[34] Frantic revolutionary activity was based on the notion that late Ottoman rule in the Balkans was alien and its days were numbered. Even an account sympathetic to Ottoman rule in the region did not hesitate to conclude that 'in practically all spheres ... the break [from the Ottoman world] came almost immediately after political independence'.[35]

In sum, the main issue for the institutional explanation has been to demonstrate the centre–periphery alliance as the defining feature of modern Ottoman state formation. While studies of the early modern period emphasize the centrality of tax-farming, writers focusing

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education: maktab 'Anbar revisited', in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann, eds., *From the Syrian land to the states of Syria and Lebanon*, Beirut: Orient Institute, 2004, pp. 77–94.

30 Ruth Roded, 'Social patterns among the urban elite of Syria during the late Ottoman period, 1876–1918', in David Kushner, ed., *Palestine in the late Ottoman period*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986, pp. 146–71.

31 Molly Greene, 'The Ottoman experience', *Daedelus*, 134, 2, 2005, pp. 88–99.

32 Timur Kuran, 'Why the Middle East is economically underdeveloped: historical mechanisms of institutional stagnation', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18, 3, 2004, pp. 71–90; idem, 'The Islamic commercial crisis: institutional roots of economic underdevelopment in the Middle East', *Journal of Economic History*, 63, 2, 2003, pp. 414–46; see also Tosun Arıcanlı and Mara Thomas, 'Sidestepping capitalism: on the Ottoman road to elsewhere', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 7, 1, 1994, pp. 25–48.

33 Şevket Pamuk, 'Institutional change and the longevity of the Ottoman Empire, 1500–1800', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35, 2, 2004, pp. 225–47; idem, 'Estimating economic growth in the Middle East since 1820', *Journal of Economic History*, 66, 3, 2006, pp. 809–28.

34 Fikret Adanır, *Makedonya sorunu*, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 2001.

35 Todorova, 'Ottoman legacy', p. 69.

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on the nineteenth century credit the moral agenda of the Ottoman sultan for sustaining a 'tacit contract' between the two units. However, the Balkans took a different historical route. Based on existing scholarship, one can conclude that strong institutional ties between local forces and the central state did not materialize in the Balkan territories of the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman colonialism in question

The final thread in late Ottoman historiography is the postcolonial school, which combines post-structuralist approaches with recent discussions on coloniality.[36] The key issue that drives the postcolonial research programme is that of the homogenization efforts of the late Ottoman state, which in turn created a major divide between the centre and the periphery. Postcolonialists have explored the elitist imprint on reformist ideology, and documented the disciplinary policies of the late Ottoman state in the second half of the nineteenth century. This section unpacks the new imperial ideology, introduces the centralization efforts of the late Ottoman state, and discusses the Young Turk era as a turning point in late Ottoman history.

The Ottoman state became committed to large-scale reform during the nineteenth century. The new imperial ideology found strong resonance among the educated members of the bureaucratic class, who envisioned a socially elitist, politically centralist, and culturally modernist project to transform the Ottoman Empire. Captured aptly by the term 'civilizing mission', domestic reform acquired a specific meaning on the frontiers. The Ottoman bureaucrat became a self-assigned modernizer, constructing the 'backward' in the process. Arabs, tribes, and non-Sunni versions of Islam were viewed with an 'orientalizing' contempt.[37] Selim Deringil recently suggested that this vision was borrowed from European colonialism, and initiated a distinct modality of rule in borderland provinces.[38]

Balkan provinces largely escaped such outright orientalism. Despite the existence of internal orientalisms in the region, neither Europeans nor Ottomans viewed the region mainly in terms of orientalist categories. Surveying changing European views on the Ottoman Balkans, Maria Todorova detected a rupture in the second half of the nineteenth century. Shifting from a Turkophile position to a 'pro-Christian bias', Europeans embraced a moral agenda that imagined the Balkans as a Christian territory under the 'Ottoman yoke'. If Enlightenment and evolutionary thinking shaped the rise of a new saviour ideology, the Balkans were considered to be the 'the dark side within' the European zone, with a transitional character between East and West.[39]

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36 Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern studies as postcolonial criticism', *American Historical Review*, 99, 5, 1994, pp. 1475–90.

37 Ussama Makdisi, 'Ottoman Orientalism', *American Historical Review*, 107, 3, 2002, pp. 768–96.

38 Selim Deringil, '"They live in a state of nomadism and savagery": the late Ottoman Empire and the postcolonial debate', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45, 2, 2003, pp. 311–42; see also Thomas Kühn, 'An imperial borderland as colony: knowledge production and the elaboration of difference in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1918', *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*, 3, Spring 2003, pp. 5–17.

39 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 21–115. See also K. E. Fleming, '*Orientalism*, the Balkans, and Balkan historiography', *American Historical Review* 105, 4, 2000, pp. 1218–33.

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Another aspect of Ottoman reformist ideology was a tendency to conceive of local resistance in terms of communal identities. In an important study, Ussama Makdisi demonstrated that Ottoman statesmen (and Europeans) viewed the Druze–Maronite conflicts in Lebanon (1840–60) as an expression of communal conflict. The political solution to the crisis came with the creation of an autonomous Maronite state in Mount Lebanon.[40] Sharing the legacy arguments of David Laitin on postcolonial Nigeria, and of Mahmood Mamdani on independent Africa, the author concluded that sectarianism in Lebanon was an Ottoman product of the post-1860 period.[41]

The Ottomans employed disciplinary strategies to homogenize the empire. Military campaigns against autonomous local rulers, the settlement of refugees in sensitive regions, and the implementation of the Land Code in Iraq all demonstrated how coercion and modernity were intertwined in Ottoman reforming practice. Cultural politics were also an integral part of the homogenizing vision. The Ottoman state tried to impose the Sunni version of Islam and obtain religious conversions, albeit with limited success. This was especially the case in Eastern Anatolia, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula, where the Ottomans faced geopolitical competition and non-Sunni brands of Islam, including small unorthodox religious sects.

Postcolonial research redirected attention to the Young Turk era (1908–18). For instance, Şükrü Hanioğlu suggested that the Young Turk movement was more Turkish in terms of its actors and ideological orientation than was previously thought.[42] More broadly put, the postcolonial school raised two points. First, the late Ottoman state was more Turkish, elitist, and centralist than was previously assumed. Second, it was the social Darwinism of the Young Turks that initiated reactive Muslim nationalisms, a Christian exodus, and the eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire.[43]

Postcolonialists view late Ottoman history as a series of efforts to dismantle imperial diversity in the name of modernity and the state.[44] A dynamic Ottoman state is portrayed, which tried to transform imperial territories and Ottoman subjects around the discourse of reform and progress. Accordingly, postcolonial scholarship has approached the Tanzimat

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40 Ussama Makdisi, *The culture of sectarianism: community, history, and violence in nineteenth-century Ottoman Lebanon*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

41 David D. Laitin, 'Hegemony and religious conflict: British imperial control and political cleavages in Yorubaland', in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the state back in*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 285–316; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of colonialism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996. For a critique of this position, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.

42 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, 'Turkism and the Young Turks', in Hans-Lukas Kieser, ed., *Turkey beyond nationalism: towards post-nationalist identities*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2006, pp. 3–19. For a different account, see Aykut Kansu, *The revolution of 1908 in Turkey*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997.

43 Renee Worringer, '"Sick man of Europe" or "Japan of the Near East"? Constructing Ottoman modernity in the Hamidan and young Turk eras', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36, 2, 2004, pp. 207–30. On Muslim nationalisms, see Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state: evolving identities, competing loyalties, and shifting boundaries*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004; Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon, eds., *The origins of Arab nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991; George Walter Gawrych, *The crescent and the eagle: Ottoman rule, Islam and the Albanians*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

44 For a programmatic statement, see Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between metropole and colony', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 1–56.

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and Young Turk eras as episodes of 'negative change', in which the centre–periphery alliance and the common understanding between the Ottoman ruling class and imperial communities were terminated. The key event was the modernization of the late Ottoman state, which triggered the rise of a bureaucratic class with a top-down reformist ideology.

I would like to conclude the historiographical part by making several observations about the evolution of late Ottoman historiography. In terms of agendas, old-fashioned political history was replaced by postcolonial questions; social history gave a 'from below' approach to local history; and economic history leaned towards global comparisons. In terms of periodization, the older 'designated' eras of reform are losing ground to the late eighteenth century, the Abdulhamidian era, and the Young Turk period as fresh fields of study. In spatial terms, there is a growing body of scholarship on the Arab provinces, which is not yet matched by similar research on the Balkans.

Current historiography includes areas of consensus and dissension. Historians generally acknowledge the role played by the late Ottoman context in the making of the modern Middle East. There is also a common explanation of the demise of the empire in terms of collapsing bonds between centre and periphery. The major point of contention concerns the nature of the late Ottoman state. While local studies portray an imperial state with a low capacity to intervene, the institutional school gives more credit to Ottoman state power and to alliances between peripheral forces and the state. The postcolonial approach goes further, presenting the late Ottoman state as a powerful actor, practising exclusion towards frontiers and 'unorthodox' social groups.

There are school-specific weaknesses related to this research. First, there is the issue of scale: local historians rightly emphasize the resilience of provincial regimes in the late Ottoman context, and yet they underestimate the constitutive power of imperial and global factors. Meanwhile, postcolonial scholars associate the sociological imagination of the bureaucratic class with reality on the ground, projecting an Ottoman state with more extensive capabilities than it really had. Finally, institutional analysts credit tax-farming with positive political outcomes, overlooking its negative impact on state formation during the nineteenth century.[45]

As a final point, I believe that the most important issue at hand is the continuing hegemony of the centre–periphery framework. Despite changing waves and competing positions, historians still approach late Ottoman history in terms of the tensions or cooperation between local units and the central state. This perspective creates a dualistic understanding of imperial history, and sustains state-centred narratives. Analytical dualities have been kept intact, such as centre and periphery, macro and micro, and global and domestic. The late Ottoman experience is thus viewed through the lens of local actors or the central state.

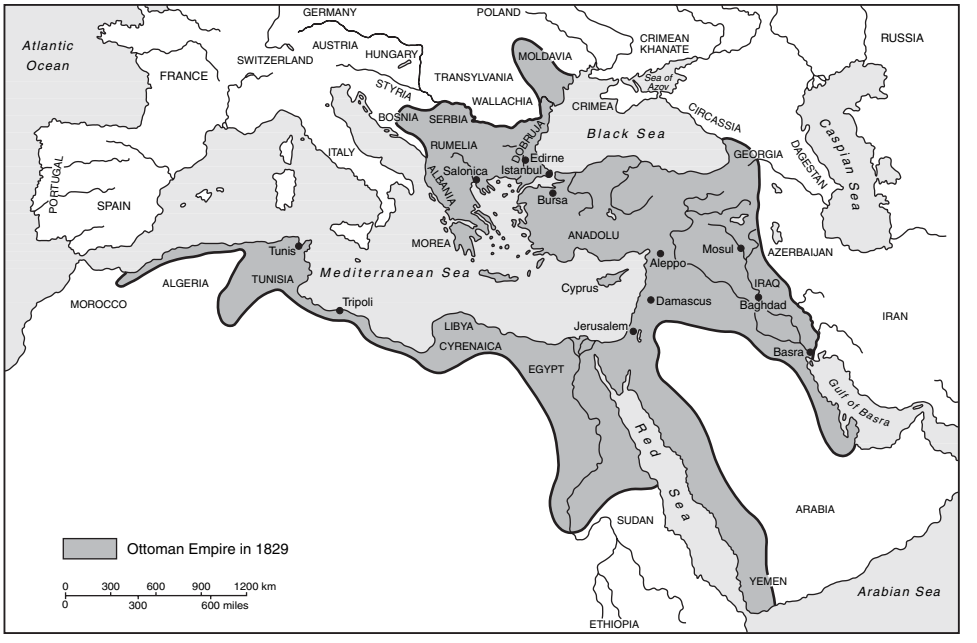
Imperial paths

This part of the article offers a historical-trajectory analysis as a remedy, allowing one to go beyond binary models and state-centred accounts. The Ottoman Empire was characterized by three regional trajectories during the nineteenth century: coastal, interior, and frontier.

45 Emrence, 'Three waves'.

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Figure 1. The Ottoman Empire, 1829. From Resat Kasaba, ed., *The Cambridge history of Turkey, volume 4: Turkey in the modern world*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. xxv.



In a nutshell, Ottoman trajectories were shaped by the discourse of modernity and the strength of market relations on the coast, by the bureaucracy and the notion of an Islamic state in the interior, and by religious networks and the politics of mobilization on the frontier. In terms of the Asian provinces, the coastal framework was represented by the port cities and commercial hinterlands of western Anatolia, Lebanon, and the eastern Mediterranean littoral. The interior path concerned the inland experience of central Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine. The frontier incorporated the borderland regions of Eastern Anatolia, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula. The Balkans have not been subjected so systematically to this approach, although Salonica can be assimilated to the port-city model, and Albania had much in common with the frontier model.

The coast

The historical origins of the coastal path go back to the second half of the eighteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire was progressively incorporated into the expanding European world economy. Benefiting from political decentralization and inflation, governors of coastal cities, powerful notables, and private estate owners from the Balkans responded to rising demand from Europe.[46] They channelled peasant surplus to foreign markets, and

46 On early incorporation, see Suraiya Faroqhi, 'Wealth and power in the land of olives: economic and political activities of Müridzade Hacı Mehmed Agha, notable of Edremit', in Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak, eds., *Landholding and commercial agriculture in the Middle East*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press,

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provided protection services to long-distance trade. However, this integration into world markets, built around alliances between European merchants and tax-farming landlords, proved to be temporary.[47]

After the 1820s, when foreign trade began to exceed levels reached before the Napoleonic Wars, the trade framework was radically altered in the eastern Mediterranean. The major change was the meteoric rise of local capitalists, who expanded their intermediary positions in Ottoman–European trade relations. Located predominantly in flourishing ports, such as Izmir and Salonica, non-Muslim entrepreneurs enjoyed two major advantages: they possessed the necessary human capital and they were perfectly embedded in local networks.[48] While the former was a necessary skill to bypass local Muslim groups, the latter gave them a distinct advantage over Europeans.

The economic shift from subsistence agriculture to cash crops sealed the dominant status of non-Muslim merchants on the coast. The strength of the middle peasantry, high land-to-labour ratios, and the inability of European capitalists to extend credit to small producers were structural factors behind the rise of this domestic bourgeoisie.[49] Local merchants injected credit into the hinterland, and the existence of a vast trade network, ranging from trading houses to purchasing agents, guaranteed domestic control over markets. Non-Muslim entrepreneurs thus dominated silk exports in Lebanon and Bursa, controlled the tobacco business in Salonica, and dealt in a variety of cash crops in western Anatolia.[50]

The rising economic fortunes of domestic merchants coincided with the burgeoning hegemony of a professional middle class in port cities. Mostly of non-Muslim origins, journalists, lawyers, doctors, and literary figures expanded the public sphere and created middle class networks. Rejecting excessive Westernization and orientalist categories, the port-city intellectual was receptive to modernization in a locally embedded way. This elite was cosmopolitan yet local, and favoured reform without opposing the state or the local community.[51] As rooted

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1991, pp. 77–95; Elena Frangakis-Syrett, *The commerce of Smyrna in the eighteenth century: 1700–1820*, Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1992; Trainan Stoianovich, 'Land tenure and related sectors of the Balkan economy', *The Journal of Economic History*, 13, 4, 1953, pp. 398–411; Immanuel Wallerstein and Reşat Kasaba, 'Incorporation into the world economy: change in the structure of the Ottoman Empire', in Jean-Louis Bacqué and Paul Dumont, eds., *Économie et sociétés dans l'Empire Ottoman*, Paris: CNRS, 1983, pp. 335–54.

47 The rapid rise and the dramatic fall of the coastal city of Acre is a powerful testimony in this regard. See Thomas Philipp, 'Acre; the first instance of changing times', in Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber, eds., *The empire in the city: Arab provincial capitals in the late Ottoman Empire*, Beirut: Orient Institute, 2002, pp. 77–92.

48 Elena Frangakis-Syrett, 'The economic activities of the Greek community of Izmir in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', in Gondicas and Issawi, *Ottoman Greeks*, pp. 17–44.

49 On the limited penetration of European capital into the hinterland, see Christopher Clay, 'The origins of modern banking in the Levant: the branch network of the Ottoman Imperial Bank, 1890–1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26, 4, 1994, pp. 589–614.

50 Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *Merchants and migrants in nineteenth-century Beirut*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 65–6; Donald Quataert, 'The silk industry of Bursa, 1880–1914', in İslamoğlu-İnan, *Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 284–308; Orhan Kurmuş, 'The cotton famine and its effects on the Ottoman Empire', in İslamoğlu-İnan, *Ottoman Empire*, pp. 160–9.

51 Haris Exertzoglou, 'The cultural uses of consumption: negotiating class, gender, and nation in the Ottoman urban centers during the 19th century', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, 2003, pp. 77–101; Şerif Mardin, 'Superwesternization in urban life in the Ottoman Empire in the last quarter of

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cosmopolitans, in Sydney Tarrow's phrase, 'Tanzimat men' became opinion leaders, cultural mediators, and enthusiastic reformers. The professional careers of Butrus al-Bustani and Khalil al-Khuri in nineteenth-century Beirut were powerful testimonies to this development.[52]

A major venue for middle-class politics was the municipality. Documented by Jens Hanssen for Beirut, the municipality was controlled by merchants and reformist intellectuals, who closed the doors of city governance to rural notables and religious dignitaries.[53] Professional groups were also interested in the social question, seeking to bring about social justice in the city. They aimed at reconciling private interest with the public good, and were sceptical about the idea that religion could foster a harmonious society.[54] Instead, public charity, donations, and modern education were seen as major ways of helping the unprivileged, the poor, and the community as a whole.

The middle class promoted an urban agenda in the press, local clubs, and municipalities. Faced with rapid social transformation and urban renewal, professional groups demanded increasing control over the city space. The call was to set up a moral order, which would be disrupted neither by seasonal migrants, newcomers, and vagabonds on the one hand, nor by disease, crime, and prostitution on the other. For instance, part of the middle-class solution in Salonica and Istanbul was to eliminate single immigrant men and to repress juvenile delinquency in the name of modernity and progress. As such, domestic expert rule was in the making in the port cities of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century.[55]

The merchant–professional coalition created a cosmopolitan middle-class culture in the eastern Mediterranean, exemplified by the Cercle de Salonique, which had 159 members in 1887.[56] The common ground that united merchants and professionals was the need to carve out a social space that would transcend communal lives and state boundaries. This vision was evident in the discourse of administrative autonomy, and in bitter fights within non-Muslim communities over

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the 19th century', in Peter Benedict and Erol Tümertekin, eds., *Turkey: geographical and social perspectives*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974, pp. 403–46.

52 Fruma Zachs, 'Building a cultural identity: the case of Khalil al-Khuri', in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann, eds., *From the Syrian land to the states of Syria and Lebanon*, Beirut: Orient Institute, 2004, pp. 27–39. As Faruk Birtek argues, the key for Ottoman cosmopolitanism was the multi-layered nature of the Tanzimat intellectuals' selfhood. Depending on the social context, they could switch back and forth between self identity and public persona. See Faruk Birtek, 'From affiliation to affinity: citizenship in the transition from empire to the nation-state', in Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro, and Danilo Petranovic, eds., *Identities, affiliations, and allegiances*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 17–44.

53 Hanssen, *Fin de siècle Beirut*, pp. 145–9, 157, 160–1.

54 Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, 'Levantine trajectories: the formulation and dissemination of radical ideals in and between Beirut, Cairo, and Alexandria, 1860–1914', PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2003, p. 214.

55 On policing, see Ferdan Turgut, 'Policing the poor in the late Ottoman Empire', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38, 2, 2002, pp. 149–64; on public health, see Cem Emrence, 'Alınan koruyucu önlemler ve Istanbul'da kolera salgını, 1893–1894', *Tarih ve Toplum*, 32, 188, 1999, pp. 46–52; on juvenile delinquency, see Mark Mazower, *Salonica: the city of ghosts*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, pp. 230–1. For a comparison, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

56 Mazower, *Salonica*, p. 218.

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education. Thus, despite the resilience of ethnic and religious identities, port cities were run by a middle-class alliance that established strong ties between communities.[57]

The interior

Inland regions evolved according to a distinct historical trajectory in the second half of the nineteenth century. With no foreign intervention from outside and a limited presence of global markets, the interior fostered political coalitions, which increasingly participated in the modernizing Ottoman state, and secured Muslim domination in the regional economy and local politics. Accordingly, Ottoman imperial modernization initiated two long-term trends in the interior: state-led transformation and consensual rule, which extended Ottoman authority inland while confirming the privileged status of urban intermediaries.

The Muslim coalitions of the interior (or the politics of notables, as Albert Hourani put it[58]), were fully consolidated after 1860 with the expansion of a modernizing Ottoman state. The centralization drive in Syria reflected the general historical pattern:[59] the Ottoman state eliminated powerful rural interests in the north, settled nomads and unorthodox religious groups in central areas, and reorganized the whole region in administrative terms by creating the province of Syria in 1865.[60] Subsequently, the Ottomans overcame the resistance of the masses to taxation and conscription, protected long-distance trade and cities from rural racketeers, and reconnected politically with urban leaders.

Merged into a single bloc, the Muslim coalitions of the interior were attached to the state.[61] Office-holding was the major mechanism through which the provincial elite accumulated economic wealth, boosted political power, and reproduced community leadership positions. On the economic front, a bureaucratic post was the key to receiving tax farms and to buying large tracts of land, especially in the Arab provinces.[62] In political life, administrative councils – with their powers over conscription, tax collection, and social services – served as sites of elite coordination and provided social recognition to horizontally networked Sunni households.[63] In terms of religion, Sunni dominance was guaranteed by the state. Moreover, the *ulema* (religious dignitaries) needed the support of provincial

57 On port cities, see Çağlar Keyder, 'Peripheral port-cities and politics on the eve of the Great War', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 20, Spring 1999, pp. 27–45; Reşat Kasaba, 'Economic foundations of a civil society: Greeks in the trade of western Anatolia, 1840–1876', in Gondicas and Issawi, *Ottoman Greeks*, pp. 77–87.

58 Albert Hourani, 'Ottoman reform and politics of notables', in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of modernization in the Middle East: the nineteenth century*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968, esp. pp. 45, 48–9.

59 Norman N. Lewis, *Nomads and settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800–1980*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 3–37, 58–73.

60 Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The establishment and dismantling of the province of Syria, 1865–1888', in John P. Spagnolo, ed., *Problems of the modern Middle East in historical perspective*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992, pp. 7–26.

61 Khoury, *Urban notables*, pp. 1–52.

62 James A. Reilly, 'Status groups and propertyholding in the Damascus hinterland', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 21, 4, 1989, pp. 517–39.

63 Elizabeth Thompson, 'Ottoman political reform in the provinces: the Damascus advisory council in 1844–45', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25, 3, 1993, pp. 457–75.

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bureaucrats to obtain judicial positions in *sharia* courts and for the protection of pious foundations.

The inland economy was based on bulk agricultural goods, notably cereals, and livestock. The demographic expansion of cities, high agricultural prices on domestic markets, and faster modes of transportation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century initiated the emergence of a 'grain belt' in interior regions.[64] Located in inland market towns and allies of the nationalist project in the long run, domestic grain merchants expanded their position in a dramatic fashion. They had important connections in Jabal Hawran in Syria,[65] and a powerful presence in central Anatolia[66] and Lebanon.[67] They also accumulated substantial economic wealth in Baghdad and Aleppo.[68]

The other major economic activity in the interior was the revival of manufacturing during the 'Great Depression' of the late nineteenth century. Despite pressures coming from the world economy and coastal regions, domestic manufacturers were especially strong in east-central Anatolia and the urban centres of Syria.[69] They operated on a low-cost basis, benefited from an intimate knowledge of customer tastes, and targeted the lower end of the market. Textile merchants used extensive chains of subcontracting, fragmented the production process, and benefited from unorganized labour. For instance, to produce one piece of *alaja*-type silk/cotton mixture, the 'input of fourteen specialists was needed'.[70]

The commercialization of the economy strengthened the position of middling market towns in particular. They emerged as regional textile centres, sold manufactured products to the hinterland, traded with large caravan cities, and established connections with port cities. For instance, while Konya merchants used Mersin as an outlet for grain exports, Homs relied on Tripoli to connect to foreign markets. Hama turned into a regional textile centre that produced cheap cotton fabrics. Mosul specialized in pastoral products for northern Iraq and south-eastern Anatolia. Aleppo, Damascus, and Baghdad reigned over the 'Arab interior', as they forged economic ties and functioned as regional distribution centres.[71]

Social conflict in the interior was first and foremost about elite rule. The local Muslim elite resented egalitarian measures embodied in Tanzimat reforms, and challenged free-trade policies. Driven by the fear of a new social order, Muslim interests fought against the intrusion of European capital and the rise of non-Muslim groups. The Ottoman state was

64 The rise of landed interests was a general pattern in the developing world during the last quarter of the nineteenth century: see Jeoffrey G. Williamson, 'Land, labor, and globalization in the Third World, 1870–1940', *The Journal of Economic History*, 62, 1, 2002, pp. 55–85.

65 Michael Provence, *The great Syrian revolt and the rise of Arab nationalism*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005, pp. 27–47.

66 Donald Quataert, *Workers, peasants and economic change in the Ottoman Empire, 1730–1914*, Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1993.

67 Y. Eyüp Özveren, 'Beirut', *Review* 16, 4, 1993, pp. 467–97.

68 Hala Fattah, 'The politics of the grain trade in Iraq, *c.* 1840–1917', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 5–6, 1991, pp. 151–65.

69 Quataert, 'Age of reforms', pp. 888–933.

70 Sherry Vatter, 'Militant textile weavers in Damascus: waged artisans and the Ottoman labor movement, 1850–1914', in Donald Quataert and Erik J. Zürcher, eds., *Workers and the working class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, 1839–1950*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995, pp. 35–57.

71 Suraiya Faroqhi, 'Introduction', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 5–6, 1991, pp. 1–27.

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invited, as 'the protector of Muslim privilege', to tell non-Muslims where their *hudud* (limits) were.[72] In less than a decade, mass mobilization turned violent, especially in major inland centres such as Aleppo (1850), Mosul (1854), Nablus (1856), and Damascus (1860).

Collective violence in the 1850s served as a turning point for the inland regions. It helped to shape the interior trajectory by securing the long-term victory of Muslim urban coalitions. As influential non-Muslim families migrated to the coast, the Muslim domination of the interior evolved in two related ways. First, local notables monopolized bureaucratic posts, despite the egalitarian Tanzimat discourse. Second, the urban Muslim bloc enjoyed the spoils of market integration in the succeeding decades, when the Ottoman state eliminated rural interests and provided public security, especially in urban spaces.

Having pacified its Christian, European, and rural rivals early in the game, the Muslim urban bloc was divided by internal competition in the second half of the nineteenth century. Provincial bureaucracy turned into the key site of contention because it practically determined who had access to political power, economic resources, and religious authority. Urban politics then took the form of alliances, bargaining, and rivalries between the influential local households. Furthermore, the rise of a state class with modern education added a new layer of loyalty to the Ottoman state. Judging from the cultural influence of Istanbul on Damascus, it is clear that the Ottomans were building diffused legitimacy in interior regions.[73]

The frontier

The frontier trajectory was distinct in the Ottoman Middle East. It not only encapsulated the most politically volatile and fiscally troublesome provinces but also hosted the least economically developed, most demographically sparse, and most pastorally oriented regions. The Ottoman frontiers were primarily ruled by culturally distinct and politically autonomous leaders, drawn from non-Sunni heterodox groups. Thus, Eastern Anatolia, Iraq, Hawran, Transjordan, the Arabian Peninsula, and Yemen shared a common borderland experience, which set them apart from the rest of the empire during the late Ottoman period.

Ottoman state-making followed a different track on the frontier. Centred upon the idea of the 'politics of emergency', Ottoman frontier governance combined efforts for increasing direct rule with negotiation and bargaining. Accordingly, the Ottoman frontier policy operated with two guiding principles at the beginning of the twentieth century: first, to penetrate further into networks of trust and introduce imperial modernization, and second, to bargain with local leaders through the leverage of Islam. As Maurus Reinkowski put it, Ottoman policy clearly reflected the 'dilemma between the exigency of *realpolitik* and the ambitious Tanzimat reform policy'.[74]

72 Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab world*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 159.

73 Stefan Weber, 'Images of imagined worlds', in Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber, eds., *The empire in the city: Arab provincial capitals in the late Ottoman Empire*, Beirut: Orient Institute, 2002, pp. 145–71.

74 Maurus Reinkowski, 'Double struggle, no income: Ottoman borderlands in Northern Albania', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9, 1, 2003, pp. 239–53.

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Despite much progressive rhetoric, the success of the modernizing package in frontier zones was at best meagre. It dropped dramatically as the state progressed from military operations to bureaucratic consolidation, and from bureaucratization to market integration and ideological operations. The reformist Ottoman bureaucrat soon found out that he had limited technologies of control to govern Arabia, for example, facing strong challenges from domestic groups in Yemen, 'Asir, and Hawran. Military mutinies in the Hijaz, economic discontent in urban eastern Arabia, tribal revolts in western Arabia and Yemen, and fiscal difficulties encountered in implementing domestic reforms in Eastern Anatolia all reminded the Ottomans of the significant gap between their resource base and their state-building discourse.

When the modernizing Tanzimat package failed, negotiation gained ascendancy on the frontier. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this operated through the innovative pan-Islamic framework of Sultan Abdulhamid II, who was convinced of the foreign threat on the frontier. The sultan's pan-Islamist project was supranational but statist, and deeply religious but confessional. Using Sunni Islam for legitimacy, bargaining, and regulation, the sultan's intention was to buy trust from the outlying provinces on the frontier, where power and information asymmetries haunted the Ottomans.

The negotiation model suggested piecemeal change rather than radical transformation, and was more interested in keeping local leadership structures intact, rather than destabilizing them. In fact, this inclusivist agenda was the complementary path to securing the survival of the Ottoman state against foreign powers, their domestic allies, and non-orthodox leaders. Divide and rule, taking hostages, political exile, and imperial rewards were typical policy tools. Generally speaking, the nature and method of negotiation between the frontier elites and the central government were determined by the relative strength of both parties on the ground, the perceived immediacy of any foreign threat, and the confessional composition of the region.

Economic and fiscal structures on the frontier were in close affinity with 'thin rule' in such regions. The fiscal base of the state was limited, tax collection was costly, and high military expenditure, due to insurgency, caused a major drain on the central treasury.[75] With no monopolization of internal violence by the state, markets remained undeveloped and the quality of life changed little compared to the rest of the empire. Hence, overland trade, smuggling, and the collection of protection money remained major sources of revenue for frontier economies.

Historically speaking, long-distance trade and the fate of the *hajj* (pilgrimage) caravan depended on transit dues extracted by the Bedouin for safe passage in the desert. In Iraq, tribes obstructed river transport between Baghdad and Basra, collecting fees from merchandise and human traffic.[76] In Eastern Anatolia, stealing livestock occupied the number one spot on the racketeers' agenda. Like the Kurdish landlords of Eastern Anatolia, the Wahhabi clans of Najd expected protection money from commercial centres and the

75 Ali Karaca, *Anadolu ıslahatı ve Ahmet Şakir Paşa, 1838–1899*, Istanbul: Eren, 1993, pp. 128–37; Caesar Farah, *The Sultan's Yemen: nineteenth-century challenges to Ottoman rule*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2002, p. 112.

76 İlhan Ekinci, *Fırat ve Dicle'de Osmanlı-İngiliz rekabeti: Hamidiye Vapur İdaresi*, Ankara: Asil Yayın Dağıtım, 2007.

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peasantry in eastern Arabia. Even the Ottoman authorities paid the tribes of lower Iraq and western Arabia for the upkeep of telegraph lines and railroad tracks respectively.

Urban interests, sedentarized populations, and social groups with little access to protection schemes tried various methods to cease paying protection money, especially on the 'near frontier'. The urban notables of Diyarbakır informed the Sultan about possible invasions of the city by tribal forces. Armenian delegates from twenty-four towns met with state officials in the capital to call for a stop to raiding and plunder.[77] In Süleymaniye, in northern Iraq, the peasants fled their villages in 1859 to avoid plunder.[78] Armenian peasants of Eastern Anatolia complained bitterly about Kurdish chiefs who took their lands through semi-legal means, and demanded unpaid labour and arbitrary taxes.[79]

Another key dynamic in the making of the frontier trajectory was armed collective action. Frontier mobilization benefited from inaccessible terrain and the superior local information of insurgents, combined with access to local powerbrokers and third-party support on the ground. Inhabiting rough terrain, frontier leaders had historically remained detached from the imperial centre. Mountains, highlands, deserts, strategic passes, and narrow tracks were the topographical features that made Arabia, Yemen, Jabal Druze, and Eastern Anatolia nearly impenetrable.[80] Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, geographical constraints made long-term military campaigns extremely costly, and for no apparent gain.

Frontier mobilization utilized communal units such as clans, tribes, and religious networks to organize patron–client movements. Local leaders shared fictive kinship bonds, a cultural-linguistic world, economic ties, and a common historical memory with other community members. However, communities suffered from internal divisions, and what turned them into a unified opposition force was often the efforts of religious figures. Negotiating among tribes, clans, and chiefs, religious entrepreneurs followed the mystic-esoteric way in the Druze mountains and Eastern Anatolia, and promoted a puritan agenda in 'Asir, central Arabia, and Yemen.

In contrast to its political articulation in the interior zones, religion was used as an ideological tool for mobilization on the frontier.[81] One important reason was confessional. The Wahhabi amirs of Najd, the Druze chiefs of Hawran, and the Zaydi imams of Yemen represented non-Sunni brands of Islam, which historically underlay a mobilization approach. Despite some 'orthodox' Sunni misgivings about mysticism, the Ottomans favoured the widespread Naqshbandi Sufi network in Eastern Anatolia to counter Christian missionary influences, since the call for pure Islam had been a trademark of frontier, rural, and tribal Islam for centuries.[82] Inspired by North African neo-Sufism, the Idrisi movement in 'Asir

77 Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian revolutionary movement*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963, pp. 78–9.

78 Sinan Marufoğlu, *Osmanlı döneminde Kuzey Irak, 1831–1914*, Istanbul: Eren, 1998, p. 156.

79 Great Britain, Foreign Office Historical Section, *Armenia and Kurdistan*, London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920, p. 29.

80 It is no coincidence that two robust findings about civil wars (1945–99) were the presence of rough terrain and the superior local knowledge of insurgents: see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war', *American Political Science Review*, 97, 1, 2003, pp. 75–90.

81 Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, 'Islam in the Ottoman Empire: a sociological framework for a new interpretation', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9, 1, 2003, pp. 183–97.

82 Ernest Gellner, *Muslim society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

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was a perfect illustration of the perpetuation of this tradition, albeit one even more in conflict with Sunni 'orthodoxy' than the Naqshbandi version.[83]

Collective action on the Ottoman frontier was motivated by hopes of local autonomy. Mobilized against the threat of state expansion, the hereditary frontier leaders expected to lose their customary rights if they did not act.[84] Along with others, Imam Yahya of Yemen and the Sharif of Mecca insisted on dispensing tribal and group-based *sharia* justice, and collecting taxes to protect local autonomy. At this point, arbitrary tax collection, the fear of conscription, and the dislike of an imposed Ottoman confessional identity united the populace with local leaders, creating exceptional moments of mobilization.

Limited state capacity turned contentious mobilization into an effective tool for bargaining. On the distant frontier, there were massive rebellions for local autonomy. As the Yemeni example shows, frontier elites were successful in their bargains with the central state. In the intermediate zone of lower Iraq and Hawran, where neither the state nor local leaders fully controlled the situation, smaller revolts targeted the local elite and the Ottoman state to regain customary rights. On the 'near frontier', relative tranquillity was the norm, since the Ottoman state was stronger, had similar interests to those of elites, and shared a confessional affinity with local leaders. What made Eastern Anatolia a unique case during the 1890s was the mobilization of rival communal networks by skilful political brokers on the ground.

In sum, the late Ottoman Empire was characterized by socially and materially distinct political geographies. 'Thin rule' defined the arid frontiers, where rural religious networks collecting protection rents clashed with the Ottoman state over centralization. There was 'contested rule' on the coast, where non-Muslim middle classes enjoyed the spoils of foreign trade and European services, but had limited political bargains with the Ottoman state. 'Consensual rule' characterized the interior, as the hegemony of the state was backed by an urban Sunni bloc, a stress on domestic markets, and functioning bureaucratic institutions.

Comparing empires

Late Ottoman history was part of a broader historical experience. Other Eurasian land-based empires – notably Russia, China, and Iran – resisted West European polities, kept the capitalist world economy at arm's length, and implemented domestic reforms during the nineteenth century. In addition to these factors of political survival, economic resilience, and defensive modernization, I would suggest that these empires should be classified as a distinct regime typology because of the regional trajectories that they had in common. This section demonstrates the relevance and the patterned nature of the frontier, interior, and coastal paths across Eurasian land-based empires, and concludes with broad comparisons that can be employed to write non-Eurocentric global histories.

83 Anne K. Bang, *The Idrisi state in Asir 1906–1934*, Bergen: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1996, pp. 143–88.

84 For the mobilizing impact of fear and threat on contentious politics, see Jack A. Goldstone and Charles Tilly, 'Threat (and opportunity): popular action and state response in the dynamics of contentious action', in Ronald Aminzade et al., *Silence and voice in the study of contentious politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 179–94.

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The frontier trajectory emerged at the junction points of historic empires. Characterized by distinct forms of leadership, economic organization, and social hierarchy,[85] frontiers became hot spots for geopolitical competition during the nineteenth century.[86] As a response, empires redeployed traditional methods of governance, and developed modern tools to secure frontiers against foreign intervention. The construction of the Trans-Siberian and Hijaz Railways were two grandiose projects in this vein.[87] Broadly speaking, imperial frontier policy followed a certain pattern. It emphasized bargain-based strategies when geopolitical threats and strong local leaders were present, and transformed frontier zones in line with the colonial model in the absence of interstate conflicts, and if imperial capacities were sufficient.

Frontiers produced mass collective action. Mobilization utilized religion as an ideological framework, and organized the masses against colonialism, imperial expansion, and confessional orthodoxy. The historical outcome was state building in the Arabian Peninsula, durable local autonomy in southern Iran, and recurring collective resistance in the Caucasus. These movements relied heavily on religious entrepreneurs' ability to activate pre-existing social ties, and benefited from tribal power and rural leadership.[88] Illustrated by the Imamate of Yemen, the best-case scenario in this regard was an overlap between social and religious forms of authority.

Frontiers evolved into a distinct regime type during the nineteenth century. Modernizing imperial centres and culturally distinct frontiers clashed over cultural schemas, and put culture into action.[89] They mobilized religion, confessional identity, and imperial symbols for legitimacy and power. The competition for the frontier ended with the creation of 'hybrid' historical settings; the imperial state incorporated local practices into its bureaucratic machinery, the perfect example being the religious sphere.[90] This was most apparent in imperial Russia. Thus, it was neither the civilizing vision of the empire nor the traditional order of local leaders that solely defined frontier zones.

The interior path was the symbolic expression of expanding imperial authority during the nineteenth century. The key was the institutionalization of the public sphere around the state by integrating economic, political, and moral orders into the imperial framework.

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85 Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's steppe frontier: the making of a colonial empire, 1500–1800*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002, pp. 1–45.

86 For the centrality of geopolitics in frontier regions, see Mark Bassin, *Imperial visions: nationalist imagination and geographical expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, 'From borderlands to borders: empires, nation-states, and the peoples in between in North American history', *American Historical Review*, 104, 3, 1999, pp. 814–41; Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Small players of the great game: the settlement of Iran's eastern borderlands and the creation of Afghanistan*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

87 Ufuk Gülsoy, *Hicaz demiryolu*, Istanbul: Eren, 1994; William Ochsenwald, *The Hijaz railroad*, Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1980.

88 Anna Zelkina, *In quest for God and freedom*, New York: New York University Press, 2000.

89 Bin Wong, 'China's agrarian empire: a different kind of empire, a different kind of lesson', in Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin W. Moore, eds., *Lessons of empire*, New York: The New Press, 2006, pp. 189–200.

90 Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: imperial borderlands and peoples, 1700–1917*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997; Robert Crews, 'Empire and the confessional state: Islam and religious politics in nineteenth-century Russia', *American Historical Review*, 108, 1, 2003, pp. 50–83.

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The Russian Empire consolidated its interior trajectory through Orthodox Christianity, the Russian language, and the nationality principle, with the introduction of modern institutions helping to construct a diffused imperial identity. The Ottomans replicated this model by bringing Anatolia, Syria, and (to a lesser extent) Palestine, into their bureaucratic orbit. The Iranian empire made the least headway in this regard, since merchants and the lower ranks of the *ulema* depended less on the central state and became alienated from growing foreign influence. Both trends were aptly demonstrated in the Tobacco Protest of 1891–2.[91]

The interior trajectory provided a panacea for land-based empires to survive, and the growing legitimacy of the state was critical in this regard. For instance, modern ideologies such as pan-Slavism, pan-Islamism, pan-Asianism, and neo-Confucianism helped to consolidate an interior moral order. Similarly, landed interests and religious orthodoxy attached interior elites firmly to the imperial state.[92] The final step in this direction was expanding state education and generalizing conscription, especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Both these imperial projects relied on the human resources of the interior and, in turn, strengthened state–society links in these regions.[93]

The coastal path was particularly prominent in the Ottoman and Chinese contexts. With the introduction of foreign trade, coastal towns such as Shanghai and Izmir were transformed into cosmopolitan urban centres with multiple interactions. Slipping away from imperial control, the coast experienced the dramatic expansion of the public sphere. Accordingly, the press, professional groups, and class mobilization constructed a novel historical setting. The Russian and Persian experiences diverged somewhat from this pattern, as spatial autonomy was limited in scope and the institutional elements of the coastal trajectory were limited. Nonetheless, the middle classes pursued a similar agenda in the municipal councils of urban Russia, only to be eliminated by the restrictive policies of the Tsar.

Imperial trajectories did not only create exclusive spaces, for there were transition zones where salient features of two or more trajectories coexisted or clashed with one another. Historically speaking, Eastern Anatolia was characterized by rival paths that represented alternative routes to market integration and state legitimacy. Likewise, the Kazan region of the Tatar people in imperial Russia was 'neither metropole nor frontier'.[94] After the Russian advance to the south, three historical paths emerged side by side in the eastern

91 Nikki Keddie, *Religion and rebellion in Iran: the tobacco protest of 1891–1892*, London: Frank Cass, 1966.

92 Dick Douwes and Norman N. Lewis, 'The trials of Syrian Ismailis in the first decade of the 20th century', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 21, 2, 1989, pp. 215–32; Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, 'Conclusion', in Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of religion and empire: missions, conversion and tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001, pp. 335–44.

93 For mass conscription in the interior and its limitations in the frontiers, see Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian nation: military conscription, total war, and mass politics, 1905–1925*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003; Erik Jan Zürcher, 'The Ottoman conscription system in theory and practice', in Erik Jan Zürcher, ed., *Arming the state: military conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia, 1775–1925*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, pp. 79–94.

94 Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: national and imperial identities in late tsarist Russia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

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Black Sea provinces of the Ottoman Empire and the Caspian provinces of the Iranian state.[95] In fact, Iranian Azerbaijan embodied them all: global links via trade and ideas, well-entrenched urban coalitions in Tabriz, and typical issues of a frontier region.[96]

Transition zones were prone to inter-communal conflict. Elites were divided, economic forms were multiple, and cultural identities were fractured. In the Ottoman realm, Macedonia and Eastern Anatolia were perfect examples of how mutual predation over resources, together with rival cultural schemas, could lead to violence.[97] The tension between the Muslim Tatar and Christian Russian communities in the Kazan area, which crystallized around the issue of religious conversion, had similar dimensions. On a broader level, one can argue that the partial success of land empires in transforming geopolitically sensitive and culturally distinct frontiers through the 'demographic solution' of settlement created problems of this sort.[98]

Finally, Eurasian land-based empires, like their European counterparts, experienced the expansion of public spheres and intensifying state–society relations during the nineteenth century. The rise of the associational realm found its expression in private presses, clubs, and societies that dealt with the social question and promoted class interests along economic lines. The consolidation of the imperial state also meant integrating local elites into the ranks of provincial bureaucracies. These historical trends point to a need to revise the way we think about empires, namely the contrast between strong state and weak society that has shaped the interpretation of the Ottoman, Russian, Iranian, and Chinese empires for so long.[99]

Conclusion

This article has examined various intellectual positions in late Ottoman historiography and has offered an alternative. In the first part, I discussed the state of the field and demonstrated how current historiography represents a step forward by placing state–society relations at the centre of late Ottoman history-writing. This has been a timely corrective

95 The salient features of the three paths in both regions were the consolidation of local forms of leadership because of geopolitical competition (Of, Astarabad), global integration based on cash crops (Samsun, Gilan), and the existence of interior regimes (Mazandaran). See Mohammad Ali Kazembeyki, *Society, politics and economics in Mazandaran, Iran, 1848–1914*, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003; Michael E. Meeker, *A nation of empire: the Ottoman legacy of Turkish modernity*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002; Mehmet Bilgin, *Sarıalizadeler: Doğu Karadeniz'de bir derebeyi ailesi*, Trabzon: Serander, 2006, pp. 41–115.

96 James D. Clark, *Provincial concerns: a political history of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan, 1848–1906*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006.

97 Mutual predation occurs when adjacent networks compete for the same sources. See Charles Tilly, *Trust and rule*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 85.

98 Colonization of the frontier was primarily a state enterprise. Among other things, state capacity and demographic pressure determined the degree of success of the imperial project in the long run.

99 Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel, 'Introduction', in Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel, eds., *Imperial Russia: new histories for the empire*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. xi–xxiii. For state-centred approaches, see Richard Hellie, 'The structure of Russian imperial history', *History and Theory*, December 2005, pp. 88–112; Homa Katouzian, *Iranian history and politics: the dialectic of state and society*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

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to free the history of the Ottoman Empire from Eurocentric narratives. Nonetheless, I also concluded that local history studies, the institutional school, and postcolonial approaches all reproduced unsatisfactory dualistic accounts and state-centred imperial narratives.

The second part argued that the historical trajectory framework does a better job in capturing the varied nature of key processes, and in explaining long-term historical outcomes in Ottoman territories. The regional trajectory approach locates the global flows into the coast, emphasizes state loyalty and imperial legitimacy in the interior, and underlines rival cultural schemas at the frontiers. It is no wonder, then, that it was the market, imperial state, and interstate competition that initiated rival historical trajectories. The regional paths were later consolidated by social networks that were embedded in local politics, economy, and contentious collective action.

The trajectory framework also provides new avenues for comparing empires. This approach shows that Eurasian land-based empires were not homogeneous entities, but that they had much in common, namely similar historical paths with distinct identities. I believe that this research strategy captures the nineteenth-century imperial experience better than other comparative accounts that relate empires to one another in terms of interactions, evaluate imperial performance in terms of state power, or require a common cultural base as the founding principle for comparison.

The next task at hand, then, is to work around conceptual categories and make more detailed and deeper comparisons. A good starting point would be to flesh out the distinct nature of state–society and global–local relations in each path, and to compare similar trajectories across empires. In the long run, trajectory comparison can refine our conceptual and historical understanding of empires, colonialism, and frontiers, shed new light on issues such as economic development, global integration, and state sovereignty, and unveil diverse long-term historical outcomes. After all, it might not be a bad idea to think about global history as a common experience with multiple tracks.

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