PART I

AN IMPERIAL MODEL

The first part of this book explores the imperial model, defining empire as a "negotiated" enterprise where the basic configuration of relationships between imperial authorities and peripheries is constructed piece meal in a different fashion for each periphery, creating a patchwork pattern of relations with structural holes between peripheries. In that construction we see the architecture of empire emerge: a hub-and-spoke structure of state-periphery relations, where the direct and indirect vertical relations of imperial integration coexist with horizontal relations of segmentation. After I define empire, I argue that to preserve this structure, its dominance and durability, an empire needs to maintain legitimacy, diversity, and various resources through a stable relationship with intermediary elites. No matter how strong an empire is, it has to work with peripheries, local elites and frontier groups to maintain compliance, resources, tribute and military cooperation and ensure political coherence and stability.

In different chapters, I analyze the social organization and mechanisms of rule of the Ottoman Empire. For this, I carefully select historical and organizational moments of Ottoman tenure from its inception as a "brokered" frontier state in the early fourteenth century through the seventeenth century after which a large-scale remodeling of imperial relations occurred. In several chapters then, I undertake analytic and where possible, explicitly comparative studies of the emergence, the imperial institutionalization, the organization of diversity and its outcome in the form of a constructed toleration and, the response to dissent in the first four centuries of Ottoman rule. In each chapter, I analyze intermediary processes such as the multiplicities of flexible arrangements, networked structures, institutional mixes, in the form of the layering of old and new institutions, bringing together actors, and their networks in the governance structures, the negotiated arrangements in different domains and structural and symbolic sites of agreement and contention. In each chapter, I demonstrate that the lesson of imperial flexibility and therefore longevity comes from this intermediary level of negotiations.

1

Introduction

When Mahmud II peacefully closed his eyes in his sister's Çamlıca Palace on 30 June 1839, he had successfully shepherded his empire, its institutions, and its diverse peoples toward the road that would ultimately lead "out of empire." A staunch believer in the westernization of Ottoman political thought, culture, and institutions, he had engineered a series of reforms that culminated in the famous Tanzimat reorganization, a program that would make the empire look more like a Western nation-state. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground was far from national. From the demography of the empire, the ethnic and religious mixes, and imperial ways – from the unwarranted violence of petty officials to the lenient and sometimes negligent deal making of the imperial ruling elites – to the half-hearted recognition of the importance of territory and frontiers, most indicators of social and political life were redolent of empire. What ensued was a race against time. Although without knowledge of what was to come – the watershed event of World War I – Ottomans engaged in a race to combine "saving the empire" with "becoming a modern nation." It is in this contradictory duality that the Ottomans lost their empire and the best of what they possessed: their diversity, ingenious flexibility, and resiliency.

At a time when we ask ourselves how to forge long-lasting political and economic cohesion in the midst of ethnic and national diversity on a multinational scale, the current fascination with the study of empire is understandable. It is driven by the recognition that empire is a valuable historical analogy for understanding and informing our current dilemma and possibilities. Many traditional empires were political formations, systems of rule that lasted a long time mostly due to their flexibility and capacity to adapt and innovate. Longevity, resilience, and flexibility remain key features of empire that have been undertheorized. To understand empire is to be able to follow analytically the slow but critical transformation of imperial states, their adaptation and robustness in the face of diversity, crisis, and change.

Heretofore, most studies of empire have been weighed down by a few paradigms that have not served it well. Historiographical tradition has focused

on the rise and decline of empires, especially after Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.[1] Narratives of rise and decline have had a deleterious effect on our understanding of empire. Telling history backward with the knowledge of the end has affected our understanding of the possibilities of empire, as we have searched for a unidirectional explanation from rise to decline. Similarly, the concern with rise and decline pushed historians to separate imperial history into set periods – rise, apogee, stagnation, and decline – casting molds into which chunks of history were neatly arranged. Even the most sophisticated political histories of empire – even of the comparative sort – have not been able to shed this straitjacket. The question of decline has so captured our imagination that we have spent much energy manipulating the onset and timing of decline. I suggest an alternative approach to the study of empire that stresses longevity and resilience.

The theoretical study of empire has also followed the pendulum swing of fashion in the field of comparative historical studies, moving from macrostructural studies to more cultural studies with different agendas. The main macrohistorical questions that we have abandoned for more formal, yet micro-level studies, or for cultural and linguistic studies, have diverted us from remaining relevant to the social transformations of the world today.[2] Scholars have asked important questions and have theorized on topics ranging from large-scale social and economic transformation, state formation, and the rise of capitalism, to civilizations, social control and discipline, the *longue durée* in the temporal dimensions of change, to population movements, and revolutions. These questions asked by a generation of scholars about how to understand the large-scale structures and processes that are continuously remolding our world have been put aside somewhat.

Cultural studies have gone too far in the direction of ignoring the basic structural determinants of social change, political institutions, and socioeconomic structures that are so important in light of the tremendous political and socioeconomic transformations of the global world today. From such perspectives, a central goal of understanding empire – its administrative and organizational ability to maintain power and establish control over vast and different populations for a long period of time – in brief, an important claim to decode imperial systems of rule, is lost.

What is more, for a long time the understanding of the "state" in the social sciences has been oriented from the European perspective. That is, the social sciences have conceptualized the state from the narrow experience of European

[1] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2005).

[2] From the old masters, such as Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, to the generation of European historical scholars, such as Norbert Elias, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, E. P. Thompson, and Michel Foucault, to the Americans, such as Reinhard Bendix, Barrington Moore, Charles Tilly, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Theda Skocpol, macrohistorical studies has retreated to just a few good practitioners of the trade, such as Thomas Ertman, Rogers Brubaker, Kathleen Thelen, and Paul Pierson, among others.

states, limiting themselves to a set of particular state structures, in fictive opposition to the East. The classical theorists and shapers of the terms of sociology made their mark by careful, rich, and analytically informed historical analysis. This has been the core of our conceptual and theoretical thinking on the state. Moreover, even though recent attempts to bring back other, non-Western cases can be cited, they have rarely engaged with the theoretical perspectives of the West.[3] Furthermore, many such attempts result in postmodern critiques of the West, with no effort to rethink the ways in which diverse systems of rule may be articulated and studied under the same analytic umbrella. These developments, then, do not bode well for the study of empire. The irony, of course, remains the steady growth of the study of empire despite the larger historical and theoretical issues that plague it as an enterprise.[4]

In this book, I want to rethink the study of empire. First, instead of asking about rise and decline, I ask questions about the organization and longevity of empire, about the critical but slow processes of transformation that empires underwent as they inserted themselves into an international arena, constructed domestic institutions of rule, and adapted to change as they navigated the complexity of foreign and domestic tensions. Although empires ultimately gave way to other forms of political organization, the most important historical examples were marked by a special longevity and durability that is worth recognizing and engaging. I argue that our historical analysis has to take temporal processes more seriously and must analyze the manner in which institutions are shaped by historical processes and persist over time, or change in subtle, if not striking, ways. Therefore, I want to suggest, first, that we look at empire as a set of slow-moving, temporally based, entrenched, yet also changing political formations that need to be studied to understand how they change, adapt, and move on to maintain themselves, partly through reproduction and partly through innovation of their institutional structures.

Second, I want to refocus interest on the study of large-scale historical questions that help enlighten the historical and theoretical dilemmas we encounter today. More recently, James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer made an important contribution to reinvigorating the study of comparative historical and political analysis.[5] With them, I believe in the sustained effort necessary to ask questions of relevance and world-scale interest. I still see the role of sociology as striving to understand the larger frame of how social systems and societies maintain themselves, and for that the work of Talcott Parsons,

[3] Commendable exceptions are Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Miguel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State Latin America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

[4] A recent search shows that Amazon has approximately 207,000 books with the word "empire" in the title.

[5] James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

for modern society, and Eisenstadt, for historical empires, remains essential. Their attempts to address these questions were on a grand scale; sociology has increasingly shied away from them. In the United States, in particular, where professionalization has narrowed the scope of disciplines, among recent publications, Harrison White's *Identity and Control*[6] is the only large-scale attempt at understanding how our world functions.

Third, I want to add new verve to the study of empires as macrostructural formations. That is, I want to remain loyal to the main macrohistorical questions of state and social transformation that we have asked in the field, although by moving away from a practice that has often consisted of macrohistorical causes too easily tied to macrohistorical developments. In these explanations, large-scale changes, such as warfare, state centralization, state decentralization, or world systemic adjustments, are all assumed to cause other large-scale transformations, such as revolutions, capitalism, or imperial decline. Instead, I want to ask macrohistorical questions and resolve them from a meso-level of analysis. Often a macrohistorical occurrence, such as war or famine, causes a chain of events that engages the interface of society, that intermediary space where state actors and social actors meet and resolve their needs, interests, and ideals, deciding and shaping the outcome that we study. This is inline with Harrison White's insight that "social reality is in the middle range order."[7]

Overall, then, I argue that the answer to the question of the longevity of empire can be found in analyses of the organizations and networks connecting large segmented and constantly changing structures, and by focusing on the multivalent, networked, vertical, and horizontal linkages and the malleable compacts established between state and social actors. I show that such were the elements that enabled the Ottoman Empire to survive for a long time and over a large territory, my aim being to understand state transformations and enrich the corpus of social science thinking on this issue. This can be done not only by paying attention to state actors, but also to varieties of social and political actors who interact with the state, share power, and aspire to positions of power and privilege, as well as those who try to poke holes in the various hegemonies of imperial control, dissenters. The distinctive contribution of the work, however, lies in the attention paid to the middle level of interactions and relations, embedding it firmly into the movement between institutions and individuals.

I ask a large-scale historical question by focusing on the unfolding of one historical case over time. The larger question, however, is really comparative: what explains the long-term survival of political formations such as empires? In this case, how do we explain the long-term success of Ottoman imperial institutions? In comparative perspective, how does it compare to other empires with similar characteristics, not only its contemporaries and rivals, such as the

[6] Harrison White, *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[7] Harrison White, March 2006. *Identity and Control Revisited.* (Talk at the New School of Social Research.)

Habsburg and Russian Empires, but also its predecessors in the same region, the Romans and the Byzantines? In that sense, the tension in this book between a theory of empire and the uniqueness of the Ottoman Empire is constantly regenerated. I see this as a constant and healthy challenge to bring together places where imperial institutions and networks are comparable and transportable with examples where unique features claim our attention.

The Ottoman case is an excellent one to study. Notwithstanding the numerous misconceptions about it that remain to be clarified, the Ottomans were successful at maintaining imperial rule over a vast territory for many centuries. This success was based on their intrinsic flexibility and ability to adapt. Contrary to the image of wild barbarians who conquered territory and then degenerated into unyielding Asiatic forms of despotism, they showed tremendous adaptability. Furthermore, although they were often brutal warriors, warfare was only part of their success. What was unusual in the Ottoman Empire was an early ability to absorb diverse populations and create new institutions and a new elite, which was the hallmark of all successful empires. Rome and Byzantium also manipulated local elites and created a group of new men, constructed from the best among the different communities. Perhaps specific to the Ottomans was continued flexibility and adaptability. Ottomans persisted in their mode of absorption and adaptation for a long time, showing rigidity only in the nineteenth century, and more so among actors who pursued national solutions than among those who continued to look for imperial ones.

The Ottoman Empire linked three continents, Asia, Europe, and Africa, encompassing an array of cultures, languages, peoples, climates, and various social and political structures. Ottomans negotiated between the contradictory, yet also complementary, visions and organizational forms of urban and rural; nomad and settled; Islamic and non-Muslim; Sunnî Muslims, Shiites, and Sufi sects; scribes and poets; artisans and merchants; peasants and peddlers; and bandits and bureaucrats. They forged political institutions, combined military talent with territorial good fortune, and remained flexible and cognizant of the vastness of the imperial reach. In ways similar to the Romans, the Ottoman Empire was "a haven of relative peace, security and tolerance which the Ottomans offered not just to Muslims but also to Christian and Jewish subjects of their would-be universal empire."[8]

No wonder the early Ottomans saw, proclaimed, and titled themselves as the successors of Rome – they also crafted a uniquely hybrid civilization. Civilizations are hybrid when they contain elements of different traditions that are brought together by "institutional bricolage"[9]; force of circumstance; and exigencies of climate, environment, and territory. The Ottomans constructed

[8] Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 13.

[9] "Bricolage" is a term used in the historical institutional literature that conveys a sense of how institutions and organizations are not built from scratch but through the "reworking of the institutional materials at hand." David Stark and Laszlo Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

an uneasy, distinctly productive, and purposefully diverse, but nevertheless homogeneous and unifying, culture. That is, while accepting difference, they built their governance over similarities based on institutional structures and the shared understanding these generated. This achievement, however imperfect, lasted for many centuries. Its remnants are evident today when traveling in the Balkans or in the heartland of Anatolia: we see not only the market building, the *macellum*, imported from Roman times, but also its near Eastern rendering in the form and content of social relations of the bazaar.[10] We see the feat of Byzantine architecture in Hagia Sophia, as well as the Ottoman renewal and its insertion of the minaret as the symbol of the newest religion to conquer these lands. The Mediterranean Basin, although never fully conquered by the Ottomans, became the site of layers of civilization – Greek, Roman, and Ottoman – each of which contributed to the richness, texture, and local color of the canvas of the modern world. Consequently, especially early on, it did not easily fit any particular category exclusively; it was not just Ottoman, Turkish, or Islamic. It was all these combined with Roman and Byzantine, Balkan, and Turco-Mongol institutions and practices. It is as an important cultural and institutional medley that Ottomans gained their identity. Located at the center of where the West meets the East, the Ottomans gained their identity and forged a balance of coherence and diversity that remains a landmark in the modern world's search for precisely that balance.

There have been many social and political histories of the Ottoman Empire. Most of them have been arranged around the question of rise and fall of the empire, with increasingly detailed narrative histories some of which are placed in interpretive frameworks of imperial change. The most recent attempt, by Caroline Finkel is perhaps the most ambitious, detailed and encompassing work to date.[11] Finkel offers the history of the Ottoman Empire primarily in military and diplomatic terms, providing a detailed political history where the focus is on the central state's leading elites, the loyal statesmen who carried the business of the state, with a focus on what happened when. It does not, however, offer insights into the modalities of this empire, on how it was ruled, organized, how its populations understood and participated in the task of empire building or rejected the paradigm of the Ottomans.

My questions are different. How was this empire ruled? How was such diversity contained and managed? How did it maintain itself for centuries, outwitting the predictions and lamentations of many contemporaries and the readings of scholars? What was the logic of empire, the precarious balance of center and periphery, imperial and local institutions, and core structures and frontier plasticity that were all adapted to each other? How was the diversity of cultures, languages, and religions organized? How was dissent organized in empire, around which actors and issues, and for what purposes? Which

[10] Ramsay Macmullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), ix.
[11] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

groups in imperial society were capable of organizing, and what were their relations with state institutions? What were the forces that triggered state transformations at different periods of Ottoman history? In short, how did this complex political formation live and adapt? These are questions geared toward understanding the puzzle of empire.

These are the questions that cohere around the themes of longevity and flexibility as they apply to the empire. That is, there is an inherent flexibility built into the structure of empire that can be maintained for a long time. We can explore these features both in the definition of empire and in what makes and keeps empire a dominant political formation. In the following sections, I explore what I mean by empire, set the scope of my inquiry, and provide a framework to understand what keeps empires dominant. I then link these to the question of flexibility and present the concepts and tools that I deploy throughout the book to undergird this notion of flexibility.

Empire: An Analytic Framework

There have been so many definitions of empire that I am reluctant to add to the long list. Among the studies and definitions that have shaped our thinking most dramatically have been those by Michael Doyle and S. N. Eisenstadt, Charles Tilly, and, more recently, Alexander J. Motyl.[12] I provide my own definition, which is not very different, but is more thoroughly specified.[13]

An empire is a large composite and differentiated polity linked to a central power by a variety of direct and indirect relations, where the center exercises political control through hierarchical and quasi-monopolistic relations over groups ethnically different from itself. These relations are, however, regularly subject to negotiations over the degree of autonomy of intermediaries in return for military and fiscal compliance. The central state negotiates and maintains more or less distinct compacts between itself and the various segments of this polity. Last, but not least, one can say that most of the different segments of the polity remain largely unconnected among themselves. That is why an imperial system is best represented in terms of the hub-and-spoke network structure, where the rim is absent.

Empire, then, is about political authority relations (as well as many other transactions) between a central power and many diverse and differentiated entities. Such a characterization of empire underscores the importance of relations between the imperial state that is in a core central structural position and

[12] Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1963); Charles Tilly, "How Empires End," in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building*, ed. Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[13] Here I present a model of empire that is likely to fit many cases with variations across cases. The deviations from the patterns remain real, and although I present a model as the analytic base of my work, I also continually underscore the degree to which movement and flexibility existed.

the different segments that comprise the imperial domain, where power and control remain key to the state, yet the imperial state does not have complete monopoly of power in the territory under control. It shares control with a variety of intermediate organizations and with local elites, religious and local governing bodies, and numerous other privileged institutions. To rule over vast expanses of territory, as well as to ensure military and administrative cooperation, imperial states negotiate and willingly relinquish some degree of autonomy. No matter how strong an empire is, it has to work with peripheries, local elites, and frontier groups to maintain compliance, resources, tribute, and military cooperation, and to ensure political coherence and durability.

Imperial state–periphery relationships are not direct relationships between state and individual subjects; rather, intermediate bodies, networks, and elites mediate the relationships. Therefore, the authority relations flow from the central state to the local elites and from them to the local populations. Imperial power, then, has a crucially negotiated character, where different negotiations emerge from sets of relations in which state actors and elite groups are engaged. Once the multifarious settlements between state and different communities diminish and stabilize, and standardized relations apply to all segments of imperial society, we are not talking about empire anymore, and have moved toward an alternative political formation, perhaps on the way to the nation-state. That is why, first and foremost, we need to conceptualize empire in terms of one center with many differing political authority relationships between the center and the pieces of the imperial domain.

As such, empires conquered and ruled by maintaining a pattern structurally resembling hub-and-spoke network pattern, where each spoke was attached to the center but was less directly related to the others. The fact that imperial relations were vertically integrated, and that peripheral entities communicated mainly with the center and with one another only through the center, provided centers with added control over the various peripheral entities. Divide and rule, "brokerage," segmentation, and integration become the basic structural components of empire. Ronald Burt and many others define "brokerage" as a structural position or role in which an actor makes transactions and resource flows possible between two other social sites.[14] Particularly when the state has captured the brokerage functions between elites, it can use such structural advantage to separate, integrate, reward, and control groups. Such separation is not sealed tight in the sense that despite this general model, there are always obvious deviations to the pattern as well as tensions on the different parts of the system to rework these relations to the advantage of regional actors. However, that such segmentation and brokerage was important to imperial relations is demonstrated by how actively the Ottoman state, for example, fought the increasing connectivity and alliances between peripheral groups such as the nomads and the local notables in the eighteenth century.

[14] Ronald S. Burt, *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

One by-product of this is that in terms of state–periphery relations, because the different segments of the "imperial domain" functioned through intermediate organizations but without high levels of association and mobilization among them, an imperial whole was not highly and continuously mobilized. Mobilization was achieved under extraordinary circumstances, often at state initiative. What we might call "imperial society"[15] was very weak because it lacked the features whereby it could act coherently and unilaterally to safeguard its own social and political interests. This was certainly true of most land-based traditional empires, especially Rome, where public opinion or a common understanding of an imperial community was lacking.[16] Empires, then, are complex political formations that do not form one "national" community, but rather multiple networks of interaction, different communities with varying institutions and state–domain compacts. This is what empires strived for – they governed over diversity by creating the conditions whereby differentially incorporated communities remained separate in their development.[17] As long as communities continued as differentially incorporated parts of empire, imperial unity could not be achieved, even if a veneer of it was showcased at moments of high tension or war.

In part, that this pluralism did not add up to a whole was due to historical contingency and the eventful unfolding of imperial growth, that is, the fact that empires took over territories, peoples, and communities with different, established political and social systems and traditions piecemeal and at different times, incorporating by conquest, alliance, and marriage. The conquest of the Balkans or the Arab lands by Ottoman forces; the Habsburg expansion based on marriage alliances; or the Russian expansion into Ukraine, Poland, Belarus, the Baltic states, or the Muslim communities in Central Asia or the Caucasus provides a good example of such contingent, parceled, and successive incorporation. With each conquest and integration into empire, new entities negotiated different arrangements, levels of recognition, submission, or accommodation.

As they fought the imperial conquering armies, local groups not only further developed strong and cohesive communities, both in their rhetoric of war and heroism, but also in the organization necessary for resistance. The manner in which Serbian nationalists evoked the Battle of Kosovo (1389) in the 1990s only reminds us of the force of history, both its symbols and its myths.

[15] I use the term "society" for lack of a better way to describe the aggregation of networks that are artificially bounded by frontiers, territorial and other. In this appropriation of the term "society," I understand imperial societies to overlap only partly and unevenly with territory, population, frontiers, and boundaries, as well as with cultural identities. Rather, I see these networks as intersecting and overlapping. Yet, we also need to acknowledge the specific entities that individuals, state makers, scholars, and others were aware of and to which they referred.

[16] Gary B. Miles, "Roman and Modern Imperialism: A Reassessment," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (October 1990): 629–659.

[17] It is interesting to note that there are some examples of these arrangements in modern and very diverse countries such as India, where similar to empire, society is rather weak because relations between the center and the different regions mimic more empire than nation-state.