Empire of Difference

*Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* is a comparative study of imperial organization and longevity that assesses Ottoman successes and failures against those of other empires with similar characteristics. Karen Barkey examines the Ottoman Empire’s social organization and mechanisms of rule at key moments of its history: emergence, imperial institutionalization, remodeling, and transition to nation-state. She reveals how the empire managed these moments to adapt and avert crises and examines what changes made it transform dramatically. The flexible techniques by which the Ottomans maintained their legitimacy, the cooperation of their diverse elites both at the center and in the provinces, as well as their control over economic and human resources were responsible for the longevity of this particular “negotiated empire.” Barkey’s analysis illuminates topics such as imperial governance, institutional continuity and change, imperial diversity and multiculturalism, multifarious forms of internal dissent, and the varying networks of state–society negotiations.

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Empire of Difference

The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective

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FOR TONY MARX
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Preface

From the hill of Çamlıca on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, one has a majestic view of the multireligious, multiethnic character of the imperial city, the hub of many civilizations founded from 658 to 657 B.C., captured by Justinian and named the “New Rome” in 324 A.D., further named Constantinople in 330 A.D., and conquered by the Ottomans in 1453, to be designated Istanbul (from the Greek, eis tin polin: toward the city). In 1458, Istanbul became the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

From this hill of Çamlıca, I often watched my city and listened to two different lessons of history. One was related by my grandfather, an Ottoman subject and a soldier for the empire in World War I, and the other recounted by my father, a modern citizen of the Turkish Republic, born during World War I and coming of age at a time of national reconstruction.

The history that my grandfather told was one of imperial diversity, toleration, and a cultural bazaar. He worked very close to Yeni Cami and Misir Carşısı (the Egyptian Market) and Rüstem Paşa Cami, finished in 1561 by the architect Mimar Sinan. His retelling of Ottoman life and culture mirrored the sites that he moved through – religious spaces of quietude and serenity; a multihued and vibrant display of eastern smells and tastes; perfumes, incense, drugs, and spices; and along squares filled with boisterous itinerant peddlers, street vendors, and mothers pulling their sons, with threatening images of boogey men lurking around the corner. He took his grandchildren to eat at the Ottoman restaurant Borsa, where he let us order specialties unlike our home cuisine, and filled our minds with the poetry of Bâkı, Fuzulî, Nedîm, and many other Divan poets of the empire. His was an Oriental version of the Orient.

The history that my father told was one of the need to move with history, to acknowledge the necessity for modernity, industry, and national consciousness. His was a tale of modernity locked into an Atatürkist version of history, serene in its notion of progress based on diligence and strength. Ottoman greatness for him was embedded in Byzantine continuity; in the early achievements of the Turks; and in what he saw to be the impeccable way in which the Roman,
Byzantine, and Ottoman worlds produced marvels of architecture, which he tirelessly narrated to every foreign tourist who visited during his long career as an engineer and businessman. His Orient was on the move, but somewhere entirely different than my grandfather’s Orient: the hustle and bustle he saw and appreciated was that of industry and commerce, of trade and economic development, caught up in the relations between the West and a modern Turkey. His was an Occidental version of the Orient.

When I later became interested in the past of this extraordinary city and empire, I realized that neither one of the histories I so carefully listened to were complete, and, in their different understandings of the past and their vision of the future, they did not easily speak to each other. Instead, I have lived with the two pictures together. The manner in which I tried to rearticulate these histories remained unproductive until I understood that the way to bridge these two pasts was through a much more consciously analytic history of the empire. I have tried to understand empire by giving both visions their place, while forging my own representation and interpretation of what I saw as meaningful in my ancestors’ past. For me, trained in sociology, such an enterprise would focus on the actual workings of empire, to uncover the manner in which empires became such powerful political formations, ruled differentiated groups, and maintained cohesion in times of upheaval. In such a moment of upheaval – a period of widespread banditry – I had earlier discovered an important key to empire: that empire was a “negotiated enterprise,” and regardless of its strength an empire has to work with the peripheries in order to maintain a mix of compliance, tribute, and military cooperation, as well as to ensure political coherence and durability.

This theme is further developed in this book, in which my main interest is to understand the longevity of this particular political formation called empire. I carry out an analysis of the Ottoman Empire’s social organization and mechanisms of rule at four carefully selected moments of its history: emergence, imperial institutionalization, imperial remodeling, and transition to nation-state. Unlike most comparative studies, my study also examines Ottoman imperial longevity from the Ottoman point of view and assesses Ottoman accomplishments and failures against those of other empires of similar characteristics. My goal is to understand the organization of empire through different moments and therefore contribute to comparative imperial studies. But I also want to better integrate Ottoman history into comparative imperial studies. In writing this book, I was interested in highlighting the mechanisms and machinery of empire, rather than the narratives of battles, wars, and treaties. I am also not setting out to chart a history of the multifarious relations between layers of text produced during the empire and their historical context. Rather, I am trying to understand how institutional and organizational structures enable or hinder the actions of the agents and networks of agents whom I consider crucial to my analysis. Developing an explanation for the longevity of empire, for me, means reconstructing a relatively faithful representation of a social process and identifying
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the typical actions, interests, and meanings of agents, and networks of agents, relating to each other through webs of association.

To this end, rather than going for new sources and archival material, I have made use of the abundant and carefully researched historical work and published data and have marshaled a theoretical framework and used a wide array of methodological tools to make this history analytically coherent and intelligible. In this process, I have also been highly selective; some institutions are highlighted, some regions underlined, and some processes stressed to the detriment of others.

This book took a long time to come to fruition. During this time, many individuals and institutions have been helpful. I first got a Social Science Research Center–McArthur fellowship to initiate this research, and spent a year at the National Center for Humanities reading and preparing what would become a segment of this book. After a long break from it, I returned to the project, and, despite a major reorganization of my thoughts, I was still able to use the research that these institutions made possible for me to carry out.

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his ability to remain good humored while juggling serious social and political
problems of consequence.

Karen Barkey
Bargecchia
Transliterations

There are various ways of doing the transliteration of foreign words. In this book, I have used Turkish words as much as possible to remain consistent in usage. However, words such as “pasha,” “vizier,” or “devshirme,” which have become quite well known in English, are used in their English spelling. Similarly, although I kept to the Turkish place-names of many regions and towns, I have maintained the English place-names for well-known cities such as Rome, Istanbul, Salonica, Aleppo, and Cairo. I use “Constantinople” to denote the Byzantine city and “Istanbul” the city after 1453.

The following is a key to the pronunciation of Turkish letters:

- **C**: “j” as in Josh
- **Ç**: “ch” as in chess
- **G**: very soft, not really pronounced
- **I**: without a dot, pronounced like the “o” in atom
- **Ö**: pronounced like the French sound “eu”
- **Ş**: pronounced like “sh” in shawl
- **Ü**: pronounced like the French sound “u”

The use of a circumflex indicates a lengthened vowel.