# Introduction

The working people who constitute the majority of any society can and deserve to be historical subjects. Many aspects of their lives can not be represented by the methods typically deployed to write histories of the political activities and ideas of elites and lettered classes. Investigations into the experiences and consciousnesses of working people cannot retrieve their "true" voice and should not aspire to remake them into the universal subjects of history. But such investigations can tell us many important things about common people and their position in society. Rethinking historical understandings from these premises can demarcate the limits of the powers of states and other institutions of authority and discipline or the ideas of elites and their organic intellectuals. It can also reveal relations of hierarchy and power, processes by which they are established and maintained, and instabilities, tensions, and struggles within societies.

Until the late 1970s most histories of the Middle East took as their subjects either the religious, legal, philosophical, and literary texts of Islamic high culture or the political histories of states. Concentrating on such topics virtually ensured that peasants, urban artisans, small merchants, service workers, and slaves were peripheral to the main concerns of "history." The rare appearances of common people in historical writings were usually refracted through the vision of elites or intellectuals close to them, who had an interest in obscuring prevailing social hierarchies and discourses of power.

Historians of Europe and the Americas dissatisfied with these limitations developed a "new social history" that sought to give more prominence to experiences and cultures of working people. They adopted various methodological approaches: reinvigorated liberal, social democratic, or Marxian labor history, British cultural Marxism, French structuralist Marxism, populist nationalism, peasant studies, feminism, ethnic studies, etc. Just as it began to go out of fashion in European and American studies, new social history made its way to Middle East studies (Batatu 1978; Abrahamian 1982; Tucker 1985; Beinin & Lockman 1987; Baer 1964; Baer 1969b; Baer 1982; Porath 1966).[1]

Some new social historians assumed that class was a material reality that ultimately determined all else. Until challenged by feminists, proponents of ethnic studies, and others, they typically focused on white working men in the public sphere and devoted inadequate attention to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, generational difference, and sexual orientation – categories often identified as "cultural" (Scott 1988). Writing primarily about public struggles such as strikes or political campaigns tended to obscure the activities of daily life in neighborhoods and families, accommodation to structures of power, and weapons of the weak: everyday forms of resistance that avoid direct confrontation and overt collective defiance such as "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage" (Scott 1985: xvi). Many new social historians hoped that examining neglected documentary evidence or reading previously known evidence against the grain would allow them to retrieve the experiences of workers, peasants, African slaves, women, ethnic minorities, etc., speak for them, and restore them to the historical record. This often resulted in an act of ventriloquism. Subordinate subjects were presented as saying what sympathetic historians thought they would or should say.

This book seeks to synthesize some of the achievements of the new social history and its legatees in Middle East studies and simultaneously to mitigate some of the limitations of these approaches by adopting the following propositions. Ideas and materialities do not constitute an absolute dichotomy. They are mutually interpenetrable and interdependent. The spheres of culture, politics, and economics are historically constructed and intertwined, but become relatively autonomous forces once the ideas and social relations they configure win broad acceptance. Classes, nations, modes of production, religious communities, gender identities, and other such categories are formed by an amalgam of historical processes, social relations, and discourses. They are not objective entities independent of consciousness. They acquire social force as people understand their experiences through them and engage in debates over their "true" meaning. The actual beliefs and practices of individuals who identify with or are identified as members of any historically constituted group are unpredictable, though certain combinations are observable historical patterns. Neither the working class nor any other social group has a historical mission. I agree with Salman Rushdie that "description is itself a political act" and "redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it" (Rushdie 1991: 13, 14). It is possible, though not in any final and definitive way, to describe a world. We need not be limited to analyzing texts or representations of a world.

### Workers, peasants, subalterns, classes

This book presents a synthetic narrative covering a broad geographical and chronological range. Can there be a unified history of workers and peasants whose lives were configured largely within highly diverse localities, even if they were not nearly as isolated and self-sufficient as traditional conceptions commonly assert? According to Antonio Gramsci, "the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic." Gramsci offers a long list of topics that are formally external to the subaltern strata, but which must be examined to approach an understanding of subaltern experience and consciousness (Gramsci 1971: 54–55). Several sections of this book adopt this method.

The term "subaltern" suggests that the subordinate social position of artisans, workers, peasants, and other social groups – slaves, tribal nomads, heterodox religious minorities, women – cannot be explained solely by class relationships. I use it when seeking to emphasize other aspects of social domination or the shared subordinate status of peasants, artisans, and workers with others. Appropriating Gramsci's terminology, the Indian Subaltern Studies school proposes that histories of these groups cannot be written either from the point of view of European imperial powers or entirely in terms of the nationalist movements that eventually arose in opposition to imperialism and established independent states in the image of western Europe. Subalterns are typically only incidentally and indirectly the subjects of archival records or cultural productions of the lettered classes. This makes their experiences and consciousnesses very difficult – some would argue impossible – to retrieve (Spivak 1988).

This book owes a great conceptual debt to the ideas of the Subaltern Studies school and those who have engaged with them. Can those interested in other parts of the world learn something from a history of the Middle East informed by these ideas?[2] Several distinctive features of the Middle East are of comparative interest. The economic, political, and cultural ties of the Middle East with Europe are more substantial and more long standing than is the case for any other part of the world. The central Ottoman Empire was never subjected to colonial rule. It maintained its nominal independence until its demise, albeit over a shrinking territorial base from the late seventeenth century on. Many developments commonly attributed to British colonial rule in India were brought to the Middle East by elites of the Ottoman central government or virtually independent provincial rulers. The settler colonial experiences of Algeria and Palestine are distinctive. Useful comparisons have been made between them and with the cases of South Africa and Ireland

(Lustick 1993; Younis 2000). Other comparisons that consider the particularities of the Middle East are also possible. In most of the Middle East, colonial rule arrived later and was briefer and weaker than in Latin America, India, and parts of Africa. Muslims preserved a literate, high cultural tradition that was both independent of European modernity and in historical tension with Christianity. This may have enhanced the capacity for cultural resistance to European imperialism in the Middle East. Movements of politico-religious revivalism that arose in many parts of the world in opposition to colonialism, imperialism, and the consequences of Euro-American modernity appeared in the Middle East (and some Muslim regions of Sudanic Africa) much earlier. Do these differences matter for the subaltern strata? Insofar as they are subordinated in comparable ways, they may not. However, it is worth investigating whether any relevant differences can be attributed to variations in regional histories.

The category of social class is imbedded in a certain way of understanding the history of Europe. It is common to write the history of the Middle East and all of Asia, Africa, and Latin America against a standard established by the categories and processes of European history. Many scholarly debates in Middle East history are concerned with when and how successfully one or another part of the region entered on the same historical trajectory as Europe and its white settler extensions. This approach virtually ensures that the Middle East will be judged deficient or inferior in comparison to Europe, and it obscures many complexities and local specificities of the region that do not fit the European model, which is often an idealized abstraction in any case. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that certain ideas and institutions – the nation-state, capitalism and its attendant social classes – which originated in Europe spread to other parts of the globe and became a part of their local histories.

I agree with Dipesh Chakrabarty that history as a category of knowledge is, like economics, inseparable from the coerced imposition of modernity on non-Europeans in the colonial era and from the power of colonial and post-colonial states (Chakrabarty 1992: 57). This is because history is most commonly written using the records of modern structures of domination, especially the nation-state. But precisely because the concept of history and the institutions associated with it have become globalized, those who were the subjects of Euro-American domination now seek to empower themselves by, among other things, developing a sense of their own historical identities. Histories of subaltern groups tend to undermine the discursive power of states, social hierarchies, and nationalist mystifications, and this book is offered in that spirit.

### Where is the Middle East?

The mapping of politico-cultural zones is not an innocent process. It is a modern technique of power that asserts the boundaries of sovereignty and "civilization." In this book the Middle East, with some qualifications, refers to the territories of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states in which Islam is the dominant cultural tradition. This definition privileges a state and a religious tradition, though I do not essentialize either of them and fully acknowledge the ethno-linguistic and religious diversity of the region. Like any abstraction, this definition can be critiqued by local empirical details, and I offer it provisionally.

Many definitions of the Middle East include Morocco and Iran, which, though they never came under Ottoman rule, share much with the Ottoman Empire and its successor states. Desert areas of contemporary Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and the Arabian Peninsula are on the margin of this definition because of the weak Ottoman presence there, and they are peripheral to this book because of the irregular character of agriculture and the paucity of any stable group that might be designated as artisans or workers. Sudan partially entered the Ottoman realm only in the nineteenth century. Israel is in the Middle East, but its ruling circles have sought to ensure that it is not an integral part of the region culturally or politically.

Focusing on regions that were once part of the Ottoman Empire somewhat artificially excludes regions – such as Iran and Morocco – that could quite reasonably be included. I do so partly to enhance the coherence of the narrative in this book and partly to emphasize that much of Europe was politically, economically, and culturally connected to the region for hundreds of years. That is to say that the boundary between Europe and its others is not nearly as sharp and impermeable as it is often thought to be.

The Ottoman Empire, the longest continuous dynastic state in human history, extended its rule from its Anatolian and Balkan heartland to much of the Arabic- and Berber-speaking regions from 1516–17 until World War I. Ottoman rule was not, as commonly portrayed by Arab nationalists, an era of political oppression and economic stagnation for Arabs, nor was it, as Islamists and Turkish nationalists assert, a golden age. Muslims of many ethno-linguistic identities – Arabs, Berbers, Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Abkhazians, Albanians, Bosnians, etc. – considered Ottoman rule legitimate in Islamic terms. Christians and Jews found secure and recognized places for themselves under the Ottoman umbrella, though certainly not as citizens with equal rights – categories which are equally anachronistic for both the Ottoman Empire and premodern Europe.

The territories comprising post-World War I Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia, Kossovo, Romania, Bulgaria, and other parts of the Balkans were central components of the empire. These regions – Rumelia, in Ottoman parlance – share with Anatolia and some of the predominantly Arab areas the lack of a landed aristocracy, a peasantry relatively free from personal dependence and serfdom, and cities that were fully integrated into the structure of state power, unlike medieval western Europe (Todorova 1996: 60–61). Therefore, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, it is reasonable to consider topics such as the state of the peasantry, the landholding regimes, and urban guilds in the Balkans in conjunction with those questions in Anatolia and the predominantly Arab provinces of the empire. I do not do this as fully as possible because of intellectual limitations shaped by training in area studies. Despite their common Ottoman heritage and majority Muslim populations, it would be idiosyncratic, though not necessarily unfruitful, to consider Albania and Iraq part of the same politico-cultural zone in the twentieth century. The primary focus of attention in this book is Anatolia, greater Syria (*bilad al-sham*), the Nile valley, the Tigris–Euphrates valley, and the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula. Other regions are addressed when it is analytically useful.

### Orientalism and its critics

Traditional Orientalist scholarship argues that the Ottoman Empire, after an exceptional period of fluorescence, began a period of protracted decline in the late sixteenth century (Lewis 1961). In the 1950s this conception was buttressed by the postulates of modernization theory, which divides history into two periods: "tradition" and "modernity"(Lerner 1958). Scholarship guided by these conceptions viewed the eighteenth century as a period of economic, political, and cultural stagnation in the Middle East (Gibb & Bowen 1950). According to Orientalism and modernization theory, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and its corollary, Egypt's occupation of greater Syria in the 1830s, marked a radical rupture and initiated the modern era by providing the impetus for the ideas of secularism, nationalism, and liberalism, the state system as we know it today, economic development, and scientific and technological progress (Safran 1961; Lewis 1961; Vatikiotis 1969 and subsequent editions; Polk 1963; Maoz 1968; Polk & Chambers 1968; Hourani 1962; Shamir 1984).

Since the late 1970s, the Orientalist conception of Ottoman "decline" and the dichotomy of "tradition" and "modernity" posited by modernization theory have been largely discredited. Scholars inspired by rejec-

tion of Orientalism and modernization theory have established that at no time was the Ottoman Empire or any of its component parts frozen in timeless tradition. On the contrary, the years between 1600 and 1800 "were the point of departure for the modern experience" (Barbir 1996: 101).

### Political economy

Edward Said's denunciation of hostile and essentialist representations of the Muslim world in the West, though it is the most widely known and influential, is not the first or the most intellectually powerful critique of Orientalism and modernization theory (Said 1978). Some scholars working within the Orientalist tradition wrote economic and social histories that shed light on the experiences of ordinary people or demonstrated that the normative prescriptions of Islamic texts were very broadly interpreted and did not constrain daily life in ways commonly imagined (Rodinson 1978; Goitein 1967–93). Studies of political economy – liberal, empirical versions and several varieties of neo-Marxism – argued for a new periodization of the modern history of the region and focused attention on the economic relations between Europe and the Middle East and the connections between economic exploitation and political domination (Chevallier 1968; Chevallier 1971; Owen 1969; Owen 1972; Owen 1981a; Raymond 1973–74; Davis 1983).

One political economy school – world systems and dependency theory, developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, and others – was very influential for a time. In opposition to the traditional Marxian focus on relations of production, this approach argued that through relations of circulation regions of the globe where capitalist production did not prevail became peripheral parts of the world capitalist system as early as the sixteenth century. Indeed, the development of industrial capitalism in Europe and North America depended on unequal trade with the noncapitalist world and forms of coerced labor such as slavery, indenture, or debt peonage. Several of Wallerstein's Turkish students brought a research agenda inspired by his theory to Middle East studies (Wallerstein 1979; Wallerstein & Kasaba 1983; Kasaba 1988; Islamoğlu & Keyder 1987; Keyder & Tabak 1991). World systems theory situates the Middle East in relation to the emergent European center of the world capitalist economy. The principal question posed in this conceptual framework is when the region or some part of it was incorporated into the capitalist world economy. While it directs attention away from the Ottoman state apparatus and Islamic high culture, world systems theory is ultimately Eurocentric and teleological. It reduces complex local histories to a

single, albeit a very important, dimension: integration into the capitalist market. Focusing on long-term economic trends shaped by dynamics at the capitalist center and on the undeniable fact that western Europe did come to dominate the Middle East economically and then politically draws attention away from the diverse local processes and chronologies in particular regions. Though their conceptual framework was flawed and the explanations they proposed proved empirically unsustainable, those who adopted or developed Wallerstein's ideas posed a useful question. The debate over world systems theory and other political economy approaches stimulated research on the economic and social history of Ottoman provinces in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (McGowan 1981; Schölch 1982; Schölch 1993; Thieck 1992; Gerber 1987; Schilcher 1985; Schilcher 1991a; Marcus 1989; Khoury 1991; Cuno 1992; Khoury 1997; Doumani 1995; Khater 1996; Fattah 1997).

### What is modernity?

As its intellectual proponents conceived it, Middle Eastern modernity is a derivative project seeking to remake the region and its people in the image of Europe by deploying science and technology to achieve economic development, enhanced military prowess, and cultural and moral revival. Modernity was to be inculcated by educational and political reforms: study of the European curriculum, revision of the Islamic curriculum, and selective introduction of responsible government, human rights, citizenship, and moderate women's emancipation – ideas and institutions cultivating individuals, mass politics, and nation-states. These reforms were organized by a belief in the idea of progress that assumed that the Middle East must follow the trajectory of European history, with some nonessential modifications to accommodate the local culture.

The elite and new middle-class promoters of Middle Eastern modernity sincerely desired to change their societies. Simultaneously, as the rulers and teachers of their peoples, they acquired and maintained an array of privileges by deploying modernity as a political strategy. Recalcitrant, "traditional," primarily lower-class sectors of the population were often coerced into adopting "modern" practices, exemplified by the conscription of peasants for factory work and the army in nineteenth-century Egypt and restrictions on women wearing the veil in republican Turkey and its outright ban in Pahlavi Iran. Such coercion is inseparable from the developmental or liberatory content of expanding education, emancipation of women, increased income from wage labor, etc. Because new ideas and institutions can not remake the world *ex nihilo*, Middle Eastern modernity, like modernity everywhere, is an untidy phenomenon incorporat-

ing attitudes and practices that its local and Euro-American promoters label "traditional" or "backward." Modernity is constituted by an ensemble of ideas, built physical structures, institutions, social relations, and public and private practices. It is simultaneously a discursive strategy deployed by elites and middle classes to reshape their societies and create new social hierarchies and a field of social struggle. The experience of modernity is inseparable from the contest over its meaning.

### When does the modern era in the Middle East begin?

As is the case with mapping regions, periodization is both a necessary and a provisional element of historical understanding. No single moment or event changes everything of significance for all the topics addressed here in equal measure. The chronological scope of this book and the periodizations of the chapters are offered as approximations and arguments that draw attention to conjunctures which are often rather different from those that are commonly emphasized in narrating the political histories of states and their elites or the development of high culture and its prominent figures.

Rejecting the proposition that the experiences of Europe and its white settler extensions constitute universal terms of modernity requires us to locate at least some of the constituent elements of Middle Eastern modernity in the region and in the dynamic interaction between Europe and the Middle East. In the mid-eighteenth century the internal structure of the Ottoman state and society and Ottoman–European relations were reconfigured. These changes should not be understood as leading inevitably to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. However, from this period on, the spread of capitalist relations of production, circulation, and consumption, the formation of new social classes and hierarchies, and the reformation of understandings of political community and self did produce changes that can be associated with the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the contemporary Middle Eastern state system. Substantiating this proposition requires investigation into: (1) the Ottoman state and central government; (2) regional particularities; (3) the relations of production, circulation, and consumption; (4) the changing character of elites and social hierarchies; (5) the daily lives and culture of peasants and artisans; and (6) the production and circulation of ideas and other cultural forms. Some of this work has been done, though vast areas of relative ignorance remain. Here I will only outline the major events and processes that justify this periodization.

The main features of the Ottoman Middle East in the mid-eighteenth century are: the diminished power of the central government; the rise of

provincial notables and warlords; accelerating trade with Europe and localized economic growth; the first sustained period of self-conscious adoption of European styles and techniques by elites; and the rise of Islamic movements challenging the legitimacy of the state. Towards the end of the century the loss of Ottoman capacity to challenge Europe militarily and the declining power of the central government over the provinces led successive sultans and their bureaucratic elites to institute military and administrative reforms modeled on their understanding of European practices.

After the failure of the second Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 and the associated efforts of the Köprülü grand viziers to revive the centralized system established by Sultan Süleyman the Lawgiver (1520–66), the Ottomans experienced even more decisive military defeats by the Hapsburg Empire resulting in the loss of Hungary (1699) and parts of Serbia and Wallachia (1718). Consequently, some Ottoman elites began to look towards Europe as a source of techniques and technologies that might restore the power of the central state apparatus. During the Tulip Period (1718–30) the central government attempted to restore its power through innovations such as the first Turkish printing press and the appointment of the first European military advisor to the Ottoman army. The recentralization efforts of the Tulip Period were blocked by the 1730 Patrona Halil revolt.

Consequently, around the middle of the eighteenth century provincial notables (*ayan,* Tur.; *a'yan*, Ar., also called *derebey*s, ağas, or *mütegallibe*s) were able to consolidate power and undermine the authority of the central Ottoman state. Some notable families – the Kara Osmanoğlus of western Anatolia (1691–1813); the Jalilis of Mosul (1726–1834); the 'Azms of Damascus and Hama (1725–57, 1771–83); the Shihabs of Mount Lebanon (1697–1841) – had established themselves in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The number and power of provincial notables increased after 1760 (Hourani 1968: 42–44). They formally acknowledged the sultan but established virtually independent rule over key regions. Loss of control over the provinces and confirmation of Ottoman military inferiority by defeat in the first of three wars with Russia (1768–74) led Sultan Selim III (1789–1807) to establish a new European-style military unit (*nizam-ı cedid*) and a new fiscal apparatus to finance it (*irad-ı cedid*) – the first systematic adoption of western European military and administrative techniques. Selim III was deposed by notables and others who opposed his efforts to restore the authority of the central government. His successor confirmed the rights of the provincial notables in the 1808 Document of Agreement (*sened-i ittifak*) – the acme of the decentralization process (İnalcık 1991: 24).