1 INTRODUCTION

Arguments

This book demonstrates that elite families and political order evolved in symbiosis throughout European and Middle Eastern history. Kinship groups like noble clans and royal dynasties were preconditions of stability and legitimacy of political orders. There is a tradition in political theory, anthropology and sociology spanning four centuries that claims that kinship is incompatible with political order. This tradition argues that kinship-based elements either disappeared before the emergence of political orders or were the foes of political order until the emergence of modernity. In contrast to this tradition, I show that neither political order in general nor the state in particular evolved in opposition to kinship groups or to kinship-based principles of legitimacy. Some scholars, like Anderson (2003:19–23) and Oakley (2006), emphasize that dynasties and therefore kinship was central to older political orders. However, the place of kinship in the history of political order remains largely untheorized.

By retelling the development of the state this book pinpoints exactly how kinship-based groups can both support and undermine political order. Contrary to the claims of modernization theorists, a kinship society is not a threat to either political order in general or more specifically the modern state. It is, however, an impediment to democracy.

Because so many leading philosophers and social scientists, from Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau to Marx, Durkheim and Weber,

have considered kinship both the enemy and boundary criterion of political order, demonstrating that it has been at the centre of political order unravels a number of ideas about political order, states and modernity. Since kinship – both as a form of organization and a form of legitimacy – has been a blank spot in research on political order much of the theories on the subject have been built around a void. The arguments of this book reinterpret historical developments and social theory, and provide a reassessment of contemporary conflicts and policies. The book (a) makes a macro-sociological account of the role of kinship groups in the development of political order, (b) draws conclusions of the importance of the historical argument for the crisis of order and democracy in parts of today's developing world and (c) draws conclusions of the long historical argument for state theory.

The argument of this book pushes against several ideas in conventional state theory and state formation theory. In several works, 'the state' is used as a catch-all term for political order (Tilly, 1990). In contrast, I argue that 'political order' is a wider term and the state is but one version of political order. Since interdependence rather than conflict characterized the relation between powerful kinship groups and the political order, I conclude that political science and sociology have overemphasized the coercive aspect of the state and social systems and the centrality of a monopoly of violence for the existence of political order. I offer a new understanding of successful political orders by emphasizing co-operation with power elites in a common framework.[1]

Since the nineteenth century, modernization theorists have drawn a watertight distinction between kinship and politics in the colonial (and later 'developing') parts of the world and in Europe's past. Traits that have been identified as alien to modernity's self-image have been ignored or portrayed as obstacles. Conversely, traits that in retrospect could be identified as modern have been elevated and praised. Inspired by the postcolonial reinterpretations of central Asian and African polity formation this book embarks on a similar, and perhaps also, after a fashion, postcolonial, reinterpretation of the history of European polity formation.

This book analyses the development of politics in Europe, the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire from the early Middle Ages to the present. The formalization of aristocratic houses and their embedding

[1] Chapter 11 presents a synthesis between conflict and consent theories of social systems.

into a public sphere during the high Middle Ages was essential to European state formation. I show that one of the constitutive causes for successful state-building in Europe was that elite kinship groups were organized and formalized as aristocracies and thus able to integrate with the political order before the big rise in state-building in the seventeenth century.[2] In periods and places where elite kindreds were diffuse, political orders also tended to be diffuse. Organized and public elite kindreds, however, went hand in hand with organized political orders. Thus, focusing on how elite kinship groups were embedded in political orders allows us to understand not only how the state developed but also what political order is. Doing so in turn allows us to understand how to build stable polities today.

To understand what made Europe special, it must be compared to developments elsewhere. In the Middle East, the presence of strong kinship groups that were not formalized or integrated into a political system made the formation of durable polities difficult. The Ottoman Empire represents a halfway house polity between the European and the Middle Eastern cases, with strong kinship groups that were coupled to the imperial centre but not to each other. In a system without embedding institutions, the lineage may become a form for 'exit'; in systems with embedding institutions, the lineage instead may become a form for 'voice' as well as for 'loyalty' (Hirschmann, 2004 [1970]). In early European history, the honour of the lineage fused with an early form of patriotism and obligation to the common good and to the king.

Comparing Arabic, European and Turkic societies gives greater insights into the long-term causes of state stability and fragility than would studying each individually. All societies faced a similar predicament: kinship-based elite groups had political and military power and legitimacy. Rulers that tried to 'break' the power of kinship groups by force, decree and engineered elite circulation provoked rebellion and promoted disintegration. In contrast, political systems with the will, ability and institutions to embed kinship-based groups generally evolved into durable and powerful formations. Building on recent advances in European and Ottoman history, I show that neither European nor Ottoman rulers were hostile to kinship-based elites; rather they were partners in the business of rule. In contrast, this book demonstrates that elite families and political order evolved in symbiosis

[2] For an explanation of constitutive causation, see Wendt, 1999:83–8.

throughout European and Middle Eastern history. Kinship groups like noble clans and royal dynasties were preconditions of stability and legitimacy of political orders. The state did not evolve in opposition to kinship groups or to kinship-based principles of legitimacy.

Toolkit

The trademark of social science is the use of theory. However, in this work I do not use a pre-formed theoretical corpus. Instead, I use a theoretical vocabulary drawn from a range of sources in anthropology, political science and sociology. Below I discuss the two main concepts of this book, political order and kinship.

Political Order

I use the word order in the sense of an arrangement of rules and relations.[3] A political order, then, is the authoritative arrangement of human relations and common matters (Mann, 1986:1–33; Onuf, 1989:195). The social world consists of many kinds of relations and interactions, but a political order imposes a normative direction oriented towards central values, a hierarchy of relations. A political order is thus an arrangement of rules and relations that bind interactions into a certain shape. 'Political order' is a broad term that bridges several divides that are often used as starting points of analysis in modern social science: state and society, public and private, and politics and religion. Politics, in this broad reading, relates to the common aspects of a figuration and thus encompasses the allocation of resources, the capability to designate friends and enemies (and thus matters of war and peace), and the rules regulating action and identity. My source of inspiration for this definition is the Roman term *res publica*, which was defined as the common matters as opposed to private ones (Mager, 1984:552). Politics is that which concerns the entire community, however defined. This understanding does not entail any kind of democracy; decisions about the community can be taken by a small group of people. The idea that politics is about communal affairs points towards the idea that a political order requires some degree of self-description; an explicit idea of a collective. It is not a spontaneous or

[3] The following section builds on a framework that I developed in Haldén, 2011:18–30.

implicit structure of which its members are unaware. An implicit order that has to be uncovered rather would be a 'social' one. A political order requires some form of corporate existence that lives on although individual members may die (Kantorowicz, 1997 [1957]).

Like all social systems, political orders require that boundaries can be drawn. Political order also involves, in some way or another, the potentiality for collective violence. Carl Schmitt captured both aspects when he defined the core of politics as the distinction between friend and enemy. The enemy in this sense is the public enemy (*hostis*), namely the enemy of all, the entire collectivity (Schmitt, 2007:26). Schmitt goes on to say that '[w]ar is neither the aim, nor the purpose nor the very content of politics. But as an ever present possibility it is the leading presupposition which determines a characteristic way [of] human action and thinking and thereby a specific political behavior' (Schmitt, 2007:34). I stated above that politics cannot be reduced to coercion and the capacity for and exercise of violence, but these elements are part of politics and cannot be absent from a political order.

Political orders have shapes, and they are oriented towards a certain normative goal or sets of values (Reus-Smit, 1999). Edward Shils argued that societies have centres that consist of values and beliefs. He argued that: '[i]t is the center of the order of symbols, of values and beliefs, which govern the society' (Shils, 1982:93). It does not exhaust or encompass all values and beliefs of the society but it consists of the values that are pursued and affirmed by the elites of the subsystems of society (Shils, 1982:95). In the societies that this book analyses, the idea that power and social stratification was, on the whole, legitimately hereditary was an important part of the central values. This understanding encompasses both 'politics' and 'society' since social stratification was eminently political. Shils argues that this centre does not touch everyone, and people who are touched by it are so to different degrees. In older societies, only a small minority participated actively in politics. However, all were in some way cognizant of the political order and touched by the central values upon which it rested. David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins argue that human societies exist in a hierarchy that encompasses cosmic forces and powers (Shils, 1982:27; Graeber and Sahlins, 2017:2). This is reflected in the fact that political legitimacy in all older societies was achieved by anchoring the polity to supernatural powers. It is also reflected in the fact that all hereditary power groups rule by means of charismatic qualities. Or, as Gaetano Mosca put it:

'Hereditary aristocracies often come to vaunt supernatural origins, or at least origins different from, or superior to, those of the governed classes' (Mosca, 1939:62). Naturally, there are always dissidents who have 'a very intense and active connection with the center, with the symbols of the central value system, but whose connection is passionately negative' (Shils, 1982:100). Although there was substantial discord in these societies, the number of people that were 'passionately negative' to this order of things was, for most of history, small.

My understanding of political order can be clarified by contrasting it with a sovereign state. Most definitions of what a state is centre explicitly or implicitly on war. The most accepted definition was formulated by Max Weber: ' [. . .] a compulsory political organization with continuous operations will be called a "state" insofar as [it] successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order' (Weber, 1978:54). In contrast, a monopoly of violence, residing in a single centre, is not a requirement of a political order. Also, the stress on a permanent community as the core of a political order is distinct from an understanding of the state that emphasizes organizational capabilities like taxation, capturing capital, coercing and warfare. In my understanding a state is a kind of political order, one that binds interactions in a certain shape. But a political order does not have to monopolize the means of violence. Only the sovereign state, which is but one kind of political order, does so.

All socio-political systems can be described and analysed as forms of rule – a scheme that allows us to sidestep the conceptual primacy of the sovereign state (Haldén, 2011). Empires, 'feudal' organizations, estate-based polities, modern states and modern systems of states can all be understood as forms of rule/different political orders. Each form of rule contains the following elements: (1) the nature of the members, (2) their relation to each other, (3) their relation to the centre and (4) their relation to external actors and institutions. A political order must have a centre, a definition of who its members are, their relation to each other and their relations to outsiders. The composition of institutions determines relations between the members of a form of rule. Order is created by the combination of rules with authority that gives the rules a unified direction. Scripts and institutions define a form of rule by giving it a purpose, a raison d'être, constructing the identities of the members and the relations to each other.

Institutions give shape to patterns of action and determine the character of relations between the members of the form of rule. Systems determine action in different ways because they are different contexts of intersubjective meanings. Institutions, in turn, consist of concepts that give the institution meaning. The introduction of new concepts and categories thus opens new ways of acting and also closes down previous ones. At this point it must be pointed out that forms of rule/political orders are not deterministic, rules can be followed and rules can be broken.

Kinship

This book studies kinship-based elites, groups who have a certain cohesion based on their biological or fictive kinship ties, their position and resources are transmitted through inheritance and they maintain their resources partly through kinship ties with other groups and who legitimate their claims to rule on the basis of descent. From opposite ends of the political spectrum, both Mosca (1939:51, 60–2) and Therborn (2008) emphasize that all societies are dominated by elites, many of which have been hereditary. Second, I focus on the idea that descent is a basis or even the primary basis of legitimate rule in the political order.

Kinship is usually considered a 'primordial' relation and sometimes as a natural, rather than a social, fact (Searle, 1996). Older generations of anthropologists treated kinship as consisting of fixed structures that bound their inhabitants (Kuper, 1982; Levi-Strauss, 1995; Peletz, 1995). I will not follow these lines of reasoning. Instead I will treat kinship as a socially constructed relation that is historically and culturally variable (Sahlins, 2011a, 2011b). For example, the ancient Romans treated adopted children on the same basis, and sometimes better than, natural children. This is evident from the practice of emperors to adopt their successors. By contrast, in high medieval and early modern Europe, royal children born out of wedlock were illegitimate and could not inherit the throne – but achieved high positions under assumed names. Yet another example could be cited from the tenth century, when all sons born of Viking kings were considered legitimate, regardless of the status of their mother.

Kinship is not an 'independent variable' or separate factor. The concepts, practices and institutions regulating kinship and descent

always exist in a figuration together with other concepts, practices and institutions (Sahlins, 2011a:13). Kinship was (and in some places and cases, still is) an important part of politics.[4] Concepts, institutions and practices associated with kinship, such as marriage, inheritance, descent and heritage, existed in the same figuration as concepts associated with rule, such as the common good, property rights and the ways that the polity was conceptualized (e.g., realm, empire, sultanate, caliphate). As the empirical chapters will demonstrate, kinship and political order were not only interdependent but co-constitutive.

Thus political and religio-political decisions shape kinship relations. Families can be made more or less hierarchical, more or less standardized and regulated. Families can be stratified internally and social strata can be organized, formally and informally, on the basis of kinship. Law codes, both ancient and recent, often lay down the law for inheritance and other family relations. Such decisions concern, as feminist scholars have argued, not a subsystem (e.g., family law) but they are deeply political. Internal family stratification and the ordering of families in a system of rank in the cases that this book analyses, have political consequences in the sense of Harold Lasswell's famous definition: 'Who gets what, when, how' – not only of the family's assets but of the assets of the political order (Lasswell, 1958). Variations in the political order created entirely different conditions for identity and action. Or, as Hirschmann put it, whether major kinship groups would aim for strategies of 'exit', 'voice' or 'loyalty' (Hirschman, 2004).

As will become evident in later chapters, the capacity to order, regulate and organize kinship, particularly elite kinship relations and forms, was a considerable advantage with regard to polity formation. I am talking here about the invention of nobilities as formalized and public systems (rather than more or less regular practices). This was a major innovation that helped European polities to solidify. Another invention was the evolution of stable rules of inheritance that stabilized royal and noble successions of power.

This book studies societies where status, rank, membership in political bodies, property and often control over military capabilities was transmitted through inheritance and political alliances are facilitated – but not determined – by biological relations. In such societies controlling family formation becomes a paramount means of

[4] For the term figuration, see Elias, 2012.

controlling that society. Control over the most powerful families, including the royal one, was important. This was achieved by controlling the delimitation and definition of the family, reproduction, gendered divisions of labour and gender status, and rules of inheritance and general rules of marriage as well as allowing, prohibiting and advancing specific marriages. Such means amount to what Foucault called 'biopolitics': 'Biopolitics has to do with the administration of lives and livelihoods via discursive "rules" that establish and regulate bodily activities such as birth, death, gender, marriage, work, health, illness, sanity, rationality and so on' (Sylvester, 2013:69). In the societies that this book studies, the management, either personally (e.g., by kings, queens, sultans and servants) or by administrative means, of the lives and bodies of people was essential to management of the political system.

Political decisions and emergent evolutionary processes thus impact on kinship systems, which generates feedback effects on the political orders. For example, stabilization of rules of succession and the formation of main and cadet branches of royal houses made politics more regular and ended the tendency for internal wars of succession that characterized the Middle Ages – but they also generated international wars of succession that characterized the early modern period. However, kinship is also fluid and open to modification and negotiation by actors on a micro level. For Lévi-Strauss, a guiding principle is the idea that societies have an underlying structure that directs everything, much like languages have grammar. However, albeit important, grammar is not set in stone. It can be changed, played with and broken to create advantages (Barnard 2000:128, 176). For example, in medieval Europe people were not bound by patrilineality, the idea that descent is counted on the father's side. People often chose to emphasize their ancestry on their mother's or their father's side, depending on which one gave the most status, wealth and resources (Althoff, 2004). Actors within the same group can switch back and forth between different practices of marriage, inheritance and succession.

Today, many of us tend to assume that clans and tribes are well defined and cohesive and that they bind members unambiguously and strongly. In fact, many societies display a considerable degree of fluidity and ambiguity with regard to kinship. The fluidity and overlapping nature of group identity is a feature of what Ernst Gellner called 'agro-literate societies'. In such societies a person can belong to

several different groups and use the full range of connections, identities and possibilities of action open to them (Gellner, 2008 [1983]:13, 1998:146). The very ambiguity of belonging may be a considerable asset since it allows a person to 'navigate' and adapt their behaviour to the circumstances as they arise. Since this possibility is an asset that many recognize and want to be able to use there are few systemic incentives to regulate, formalize and simplify the standards of belonging. I am certainly not claiming that this is a feature of all kinship groups everywhere and at all times. In some times and places, such as early to high medieval Europe, kinship (as regards the nobility) had this fluid character. Later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, belonging and the system of nobility became more tightly regulated and bureaucratized as part of the formation of the state. What is important to recognize, however, is that although the system of political kinship groups changed and became more enmeshed in the state (as we know it; it was previously enmeshed in a system of rule that was not a state) it did not become obsolete or unimportant. Political kinship remained part of the form of rule for centuries to come.

Previous Research

Ultimately the disconnection between several academic disciplines and fields of study produced the subject matter of this book. As such, the book stands at the crossroads between anthropology, comparative history, political science, sociology and war studies. From fairy tales and myths, we know that crossroads can be perilous, but they are also places where insights can be gained. To avoid the former and gain the latter I will orient the reader as to how the different strands of research are connected. It will be evident in Chapter 2 that the division between kinship and political order to some extent represents a division of labour between anthropology and political science.

This book approaches a theoretical and empirical problem that has fallen prey to the fault lines between several disciplines. Political scientists have long neglected the issues of kinship and descent, treating them as belonging to a pre-political stage. I show that they were central to political life for millennia. Anthropologists have generally neglected politics and the state. Yet both have fundamentally shaped a key topic of anthropology: kinship.