Foundations of Modernity

Human Agency and the Imperial State

Isa Blumi

Foundations of Modernity

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Abbreviations

ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato
AHR	American Historical Review
AiT	Ambasciata d'Italia in Turchia
AMAE	Archives Diplomatiques de Ministère des Affaires Étrangères
AQSH	Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror
ASMAE	Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Serie Affari Politici
ASMAI	Italian African Bureau
AUSSME	Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito
BBA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
CP	Correspondence Politique
CSSH	Comparative Studies in Society and History
DDF	Documents Diplomatiques Français
DDI	Documenti Diplomatici Italiani
DH.ID	Dahiliye Nezâreti Idare Kismi
DH.MUI	Dahiliye Nezâreti Muhâberat-ı Umumiye
DUIT	Dosya Usulu Iradeler Tasinifi
EIC	East India Company
FO	Foreign Office of British Government
HAT	Hatt-ı Hümayun
HHStA	Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv
HR.MKT	Haricye Nezâreti Mektubi Kalemî
HR.SYS	Haricye Nezâreti Siyasi
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
IJTS	International Journal of Turkish Studies
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
IOR	India Office Record
MAE	Ministeri Affairs e Estare
MV	Meclis-i Vükelâ Mazbatakları
PA	Politisches Archiv
PR	Political Resident
PRO	Public Records Office at Kew Gardens

xii *Abbreviations*

SAP	Serie Affari Politici
SHAT	Service historique de l'armée de terre
SNA	Swiss National Archives
TFR.1	Rumeli Müfettişliği Tasnifi
TFR.1.KV	Rumeli Müfettişliği Tasnifi Kosova
TFR.1.ŞKT	Rumeli Müfettişliği Tasnifi Arzuhaller
YA.HUS	Yıldız Tasnifi: Sadâret Hususî Mâruzât Evrakı
YA.RES	Sadâret Resmi Mâruzât Evrakı
YEE	Yıldız Esas Evrak
Y.MTV	Yıldız Tasnifi: Mütenevvi Mâruzât Evrakı
YA.HUS	Yıldız Tasnifi: Sadâret Hususî Mâruzât Evrakı
Y.PRK.MŞ	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Meşihat Maruzatı
Y.PRK.MYD	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Yaveran ve Maiyyet-ı Seniyye Erkan-ı Harbiye Dairesi
Y.PRK.UM	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Umum Vilayetler Tahriratı

Preface and Acknowledgements

For those with any sense of historic perspective, the way our world has mutated since World War II—and especially after 9/11—must seem like a cruel joke. Beyond the clichés that “history repeats itself” is the insertion of a meta-narrative of History into applications of power that frustrates, disorients, and finally angers. After all that has been done in the last thirty years to collapse the arrogance of “Western” epistemologies about how the world is divided between “civilized” and “primitive” peoples, after all the work to confront power in its various forms—military, institutional, culturally, and intellectually—we are back to square one.

Today, politicians make the necessary xenophobic gestures with impunity. “Different” peoples with easily identifiable “traits” are the focus of a never-ending barrage of innuendo and very real persecution. These dark-skinned peoples who dress “different” are easy targets for a political order desperate for diversions. Amid all of this, most of my colleagues and I have run to the safety of the academy. Sitting, watching outside our office windows, cowering as the world collapses onto itself, we just sit and hope the “robo-audits” do not take our homes away.

The irony is, as some would think Marx predicted, the destruction of the American and European Middle Class we are witnessing today is a by-product of the inherent contradictions of this “Modern” world. A world driven by a capitalist system, the fundamentals of which are so obscure that even the armies of MBA’s now toiling to make ends meet fail to understand just for what do they work. But as the self-anointed “West” begins to rip apart with the richest 0.01 percent taking the spoils while everyone else is left in debt and faced with a menace of fascism, war-mongering, and the politics of fear, the way forward proves impeded by a debilitating failure to understand the past.

This is the context in which I finalized this book. It started, however, under very different pretexts. In fact, it started before it was ever imaginably a book. In this respect, the “book” goes back to the incubator called the New School for Social Research. It is there that Professor Ferenc Fehér first introduced me to Louis Althusser, whose work contributed so much to the final development of my project. The period between then and now constitutes many hours on planes, no doubt years of my life sitting down in archives and countless more typing away, digging through dictionaries, losing files,

patience, loves, and yet, I just went back for more. In the process, my life has been transformed by the people with whom I have shared this toil.

In expressing my gratitude to those who have helped me with this under-compensated life, I admit the words I conjure up here fail to adequately express what everyone's contribution has been. That being said, I can safely say my beautiful wife—Dardane Arifaj—who has only known me for half the life of this book, has already seen my better half pass away, many many drafts ago. We met because of the work I put into this book and for that, she has made me something other than this book, and for this: *te dua*, SHUME, Daki.

My mother has once again left me with more than I can possibly embrace. Her sacrifice and her insanity have made me possible. Without her strength and without her love, this all would be meaningless. Amid this familial insanity is Rrugac. My beautiful little man . . . your feet are all over this one.

Love and thanks go to my Kosovar family; may we continue to thrive together. In this vein special thanks goes to Visar for helping with the images and maps, again.

I dedicate this book to Istanbul, my home, my true home. Istanbul, you have brought me endless material for life. I have met beautiful souls within your walls, and I dedicate this to you and for those who have lived in that empathetic place as it has long been designed. May you last another thousand years.

One of the cornerstones to Istanbul is Ebru Sönmez (and Pasha), to whom I am indebted for all their companionship and support.

And then there are the new friends, those who actually weaved their way into the very words of this book, whose interest, shared compassion, and indignity all translates into an enduring friendship, and perpetual gratitude for being there when I need you. Jon Schmitt, this must be the start of years of collaboration and perhaps changing something. But just do not forget, ART is the only real way out. You my friend, have the map. Keep it, it is yours. Casey and Michelle Lacoss too, have proven to be adults amongst the posers. They too will find greener pastures if I have anything to say about it. But they will have to jump the Atlantic, like me, in order to find them. I also wish to thank most sincerely the last minute assistance from Robert Baker, Teija Korhonen, Alex Manavi, and Cheryl L. Nye.

The research conducted to make this book's complicated argument could not have been conceivable without my experiences at the New School for Social Research. It was an honor to have had the opportunity to work with Aldo Lauria-Santiago, Talal Asad, Eric Hobsbawn, Ferenc Fehér, Aristide Zolberg and Charles Tilly; I thank all of them for having such a life-long impact on the way I interact with the world. My nine years of affiliation with New York University also proved crucial. Zachary Lockman deserves most of the praise and will forever be my model for being decent and human to colleagues and students alike. I am also extremely grateful to Frederick Cooper, Maria Todorova, Khaled Fahmy, and Ruth Ben-Ghiat for sharing their time with me as I wrote the dissertation and then again, whenever I needed to share ideas. Again, I have been so very fortunate.

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I wish to extend my greatest appreciation for a wonderful editorial partnership at Routledge USA; Laura Sterns in particular for the trust and support she invested in this book, even when my “colleagues” proved less than collegial. Dear Laura Sterns, who bravely pushed and pulled for the early manuscript to

find a reader deserves the right to tell me what is this project's best title. But Foundations? In some interesting ways I hope she picks up on when reading it, I now suspect she understood what I was after before I was fully aware. That title *Foundations of Modernity* was a real roadblock for me; it twisted my ideas in such a way that I still cannot really say what I mean; but I have worked with Laura's inspiration and it has pushed me deeper into what it is I needed to do with all these years of work. Thanks also goes to the great Stacy Noto, patient and ever supportive, may there be plenty of trips to beaches and Berlin in your future. I have been blessed by you guys; I look forward to doing it again one day. When you are ready for my proposal, let me buy the first round. I wish to also thank Michael Watters of Integrated Book Technology, Inc. for his willingness to integrate my frequent changes to the text, a thankless task from which I have reaped the rewards.

I also need to send my kindest regards to the anonymous reader whose comments and encouragement, I hope, was not wasted with this complete revision. Your comments have shaped a project that had something else destined for it. I look forward to buying you coffee and hearing what you think.

I wish to acknowledge the professionals who helped facilitate my extensive research throughout Europe/Middle East. In particular I want to thank the staff at the Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror in Tirana, Haus, Hauf und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, the former Politisches Archiv des Auswaertigen Amtes der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn, Centres des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes/Paris, Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri in Rome, the Başbakanlık Arşivi in Istanbul, the Public Records Office at Kew Gardens, the National Archives in Maryland and finally the Atatürk Library in Istanbul. Special acknowledgement must be given to the organizations and institutes that have provided generous funding to help research and write this book: The Fulbright-Hayes Committee, American Council of Learned Societies, the American Research Institutes in Turkey and Yemen, CAORC and the Social Science Research Council contributed generously to my research all over the world.

Finally, a brief explanation of the terms and spelling of geographic locations is in order, especially in respect to the Balkans. As this book's fundamental agenda is to argue that there are different ways to interpreting events in the world before Modernity, I have been particularly keen on demonstrating this by adopting terminology that reflects regional variety. In other words, I utilize place names and spellings on several occasions throughout the book that are normally not found today in English. I employ these spellings interchangeably with the more conventional place-names and their spellings to highlight the fluidity of identity claims and associations among people living in the western Balkans at an earlier time. This is most often done for "Albanians" whom I refer to in their Ottoman characterization—Arnavut/Arnavutlar (pl.)—because this compels the reader to be conscious of possible shifts and distinctions. I trust this will not be too confusing.

Introduction

Relocating the Great Transformation in the Balkans and Arabia

A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest . . . Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult.

Michel Foucault “Practicing Criticism”¹

Scholars of all disciplines regularly accept as common knowledge that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represent the apex of “European” hegemony.² Fascinated by the scope and pervasiveness of such an accomplishment, readers are reminded that we can measure this European power not only by the number of “subalterns” killed, exploited, and denigrated. The world’s commercial networks, claimed to be diligently regulated by a codified standard of law, a pervasive standard of high and low culture, or the predominance of certain kinds of governmental institutions and practices, also are mobilized prodigiously in the historiography to suggest a dramatic caesura in human history that emanates from “Europe.”³ The point is often made more poignant by the plethora of detailed statistics that highlight Europe’s material ascendancy and its subsequent, increasingly ambiguous, legacy on colonized cultures. Not merely descriptive, these documented “facts” of both genocide and humanism are also used to instil the impression that Europe physically and epistemologically dominated the world, in effect *creating* the world in which we are all now living as either hapless beneficiaries or victims.⁴

This world analytically framed to concede the past to the forces of globalization is, however, a discursive phenomenon, an ideological project, a myth. The work that follows will mobilize a number of disparate scholarly voices to disassemble this pernicious mythology. In the course of adopting what is ultimately a revisionist methodological approach, *Foundations of Modernity* suggests another orientation is possible when exploring both theoretically the confines of our contemporary world, and the means by which we can correct perceived injustices inherent in it. At its core, the following proposes

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to engage with the dominant concept of “Modernity” as an extension of “European” power and thus confront a persistent assertion that we can only understand our “European-dominated” world through this conceptual prism. The central problem is that “Modernity” (from now on, I drop the quotation marks but acknowledge its hegemonic pretensions by keeping it capitalized) in many ways subsumes all our ability to actually discuss “alternative” realities. This Modernity operates in its own kind of “sublime,” ideological order beyond the corrective machinations of subversive theory and actual “facts” on the ground.⁵ As such, the centrality of Modernity in the way we discuss the past and present means it resists deconstruction, and thus critique. Indeed, whether acting as an instructor using textbooks marketed to English-language undergraduate university students or monitoring events in the mainstream or alternative media, one finds that, despite recent efforts to refashion these surveys to be “more inclusive,” Europe remains the destructive (and thus generative) force in the post 1789 period.⁶ In other words, this Modernity (a.k.a. “the West”) is a transcendent truth, one that interweaves patterns of domination and exploitation with forms of presenting our past, present, and future.⁷ The collective failure to disentangle the components of these hegemonic discourses has thus left academic “knowledge,” much like corporate media and government propaganda, implicated in the social construction of subordination-as-reality.

From this perspective, *Foundations* is both an account of and an intervention in a process of epistemological mutation that has really only taken on its hegemonic properties since World War II. At its heart, therefore, this study challenges the assumptions of a rational, progressive, and teleological historical development that have long been associated with Modernity—what is today uncritically accepted as an irresistible historical force, as opposed to merely a post-WWII trope—by introducing a dynamic set of cases within and along the fringes of the Ottoman Empire and its many competing interlocutors in the larger Eurasian, Indian Ocean, and Mediterranean regions. Far from helping reinforce the generic binary constructs that still assert as given truths the “Ottoman Empire” as the consumed opposite of “the West,” the primary purpose of using a comparative and contrastive study of events in the Balkans, Red Sea, and Persian/Arab Gulf regions is to highlight just how unrepresentative the meta-narrative of Modernity is in the context of several different pre-WWI worlds.⁸ Put differently, rather than being a mere subordinate to a “western” story of ascendancy, the dynamic territorial edges of the Ottoman Empire, let alone its core in Istanbul, prove to be ideal sites for the analysis of complex, interdependent exchanges between indigenous and external actors.

IDENTIFYING NEW SOURCES OF CHANGE

Rather than concede that the modern forms of power we see today are inevitably part of *everyone’s* past, *Foundations* actually situates the discussion

along the grid of exchange that proves more than likely to have actually induced certain adaptations in the way states and their masters interacted with indigenous agents of history. As demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2, despite assertions that this was a time of conspicuous state centralization, the period from 1800 to 1875 really marks a power vacuum in terms of actual states' capacities to manage events. The Ottoman Empire and its many external imperial adversaries and/or allies often would be forced to adopt and adjust the way they used institutions as local contingencies initiated any number of crises. Such variability to the day-to-day performance of the imperial state frequently resulted in a considerable shift in the distribution of power and the introduction of entirely new constituencies into the inner-confines of the state.

It is important to stress that identifying this process with just a sampling of cases found throughout the archives implicitly revokes the accuracy of the hegemonic narratives of Modernity found in the scholarship today. Cases drawn from the Ottoman borderlands prove the British, French, Italian, or Russian empires were still sitting precariously on the margins of many different worlds while the peasants, refugees, merchants, sailors, and urban poor of the Ottoman Empire had as much leverage in world affairs as those today celebrated in the historiography as "founding fathers."

The forces at play that drove these respective societies towards an organization of institutions we have since associated with the modern empire/colonial state had their origins in the intersections of many other possible human trajectories. These are the "Foundations" to which I refer in the title of this book. They constitute the ruins of all those other human potentialities on which those who evoke Modernity rest their hegemonic claims.

As a kind of taunt to those who so arrogantly claim such authority over the past, I highlight the capacities of various peoples to organize, engage, and ultimately resist nineteenth century state power. Chapter 2 begins this insubordinate gambit by suggesting that much of the immediate aftermath of the formal occupation and direct administration of three different regions (Western Balkans, Red Sea/Persian Gulf littorals) entailed a complicated series of adjustments that went beyond the issue of simple physical control to methods of dealing with a range of local reactions, adjustments, and socio-economic shifts. In time, the methods of incorporating each of these regions into the larger "global order" via diversified social engineering schemes ultimately led to programs of territorial and ethnographic abstraction usually known today in terms of the "frontier."

Events in the Western Balkans and the larger Red Sea and Persian Gulf littoral suggest there may be another way of understanding the remarkable transformations associated with the rise of the modern world.⁹ Rather than reading the experience of European (or) Ottoman imperialism as monolithic, and thus playing their rigid, fixed roles in the eurocentric teleology, it may be useful to highlight just how dramatically different the experience of the nineteenth century was for so many different peoples located at the intersections of these supposedly distinct historic

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entities. What, in other words, the following work intends to make clear is that populations living within three “peripheral” districts of competing empires—the Ottoman, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, British, French and Italian—all conformed to different (and often fluid) social orientations, what could be called contingent positions, that render the social scientific typologies informing our conventional notions of the hegemonic Modernity inadequate and ultimately silent.¹⁰

Using the above assertion as an ingress, we will not only argue throughout that modern imperialism took on quite different forms depending on time and place, but an even more important general claim will be made that the kind of exchanges taking place in these “local” contexts were eminently consequential to the very development of the state system, bureaucracy, and socio-economic patterns we associate today with Modernity. What makes this intervention unique in contemporary historiography is that it proposes that the consequences of these interactions—which in complicated ways, actually laid down the *Foundations* for much of what today some want us to believe are the roots of Modernity—may never have been intended to have such a direct impact on the larger world.

And this is the essential point: Modernity’s teleological meta-narrative would have us believe that the modern world as we know it today existed in some nascent yet still programmatic and articulable form over the course of the long nineteenth century; all that was necessary—and certainly irresistible—in this telling was an incubation period of brute force and coercion during which already languishing, “backwards” societies would be brought up to the speed of civilized “Europe.” This narrative, however, does not hold up under scrutiny. In fact, a rigorous vetting of the documentary evidence (one that does not commence with the presupposition of an inevitably ascendant Modernity) shows that the administrative projects aimed to control human contingencies, known today as governmental formulas levied by the “Great Powers” and the Ottoman Empire, were far from mediated by a coherent, systematic project intended to enact a “modern” world. It must be stressed that constant adjustment to contingencies “on the ground,” taking the form of appeasement and conciliation to local power-holders, and recalibrated as administrative policy, were the requirements demanded of these states in an effort to stake even modest claims in “peripheral” areas like the Western Balkans and Arabia.

In the final analysis—if that analysis is freed from the straitjacket of Modernity’s tropes—the social, economic, and political acumen of these indigenous, peripheral “subalterns” often dictated the terms by which the Ottoman statesmen and their European equivalents played the geo-political game. Accepting this premise, the “foundational myths” of Modernity, as purportedly materializing during the long nineteenth century, may be effectively “re-mapped” as having completely different—and often counter-intuitive—cardinal points than we are conditioned to perceive today.¹¹ In other words, this book offers a methodological intervention meant to

challenge conventional studies of the modern era that are flattened out by the general study of an empire or an assumed range of interests based on class, sectarian, or ethno-national associations.¹²

Expressed in these terms, this book differs from other comparative empire studies in that it treats the events in the vast and diverse Ottoman Empire as the origin of much of the modern world's transformations, as opposed to being a mere reflection of them. This reassessment reveals that local exigencies shaped and changed the absolutist agency of the imperial state, an insight that requires a trans-regional, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach. At the core of the arguments made here is thus an understanding of the *reciprocal* relationship between state institutions and subject populations. This builds, in principle, on recent reappraisals of postcolonial theories of the modern world by emphasizing the "collaborative" dynamic of imperialism.

This constitutes what anthropologist Tsing phrased the effects of "friction."¹³ The periods of "friction" or exchange between still balanced stakeholders in indigenous societies and those representing private finance all created "zones of awkward engagement" where capitalist interests increasingly reshaped the landscape of the "traditional" world (which included huge swaths of rural and urban "Europe" and North America, by the way) not so much by program and the force of "progress," but by constant conflict, struggle, and negotiation with locals.¹⁴ The rich terrain in which these interactions (causing productive "friction") took place constantly reanimated both the local and the many external forces involved. The results of such exchanges, I suggest, would be variables of the "modern" state that, through trial-and-error and different types of applications of "governmentality," became some of the *Foundations* post-Ottoman propagandists would claim. It is along these "zones of awkward engagement" that I suggest we ultimately need to analyze a world prior to the possibility of Modernity.

A central methodological task is reconfiguring how we understand the practical consequences of peoples' complicated experiences of being uprooted by various social, natural, and political forces. At the forefront of this repositioning of, for instance, the refugee as an agent of the past, are the communities in which refugees settle. Taking the perspective of the local host community, the villagers and their extended network of trading, cultural, and bureaucratic partners distributed in the immediate area, it is clear that they are directly impacted by the influx of destitute refugees. This is not a simple story however, as it constitutes a dynamic fraught with tensions that are virtually ignored in the scholarship that seems to not see any ill-will generated by refugees.¹⁵

In this attempt to excavate other *Foundations* from our multiple pasts, the study undermines the putative roles certain "types" of peoples are destined to play, especially when they are put in assumed "conditions" that in their very nature position them—rural poor, slaves or "refugees"—outside historical

agency. In this respect, if we theorize those much invoked “objects of history” like the refugee who are rarely treated as agents themselves, it may then be possible to recognize a prominent role for human beings otherwise trapped in the hierarchical dynamics of eurocentric and subaltern orientated studies.¹⁶

This book also examines other important perspectives of the local and central Ottoman government activities. In this respect, the refugee in an imperial setting during the last quarter of the nineteenth century is perhaps the quintessential target for governmental management. Dispersed refugees, without home and most often without more than the clothes on their backs, would in theory have been easy targets for the modern empire eager either to “colonize” or manage such hapless “victims.” According to some interpretations of the nineteenth century state, the very fact that people were mobile and not settled was necessarily anathema to the generic “modern” state.¹⁷ This reading is entirely reasonable considering the sources. If, for example, one were to resort to reading only the secondary literature, the most likely conclusion indeed would be that refugees flooding into the Balkans in the 1870s and throughout Eastern Arabia in the 1890s were confronted by a well-tuned bureaucratic apparatus that mastered the management of human beings.

Much of the scholarship on the Ottoman reforms points out that by the 1850s there were government agencies charged with adjudicating just these kinds of situations. In fact, facing the onslaught of tens of thousands of Muslim Slavs and Chechens as a result of the constant violence along the shared Ottoman-Russian frontiers, a new program of integration, including issuing citizenship documents, had been developed.¹⁸ Following the introduction of various immigration laws, in 1859 the Ottoman state appears to have created a committee for the management of migrants—*Muhacirin Komisyonu*—to pool regional government resources to help settle peoples uprooted by the Crimean War. Scholars impressed by these bureaucracies claim that such committees would continue to function until the end of World War I, distributing resources and issuing orders for the systematic resettlement of refugees throughout the vast empire.¹⁹ The problem is, as shown throughout, the mechanisms look fine on paper, but rarely translated well on the ground.

As Chapter 3 points out, the many agencies within the state simply did not have the means to contain these mobile and desperate peoples within neatly defined administrative schemata. Rather than being malleable objects susceptible to bureaucratic manipulation or just grateful for attention, refugees proved far more difficult to “manage” and often created entirely new channels of disruption that forced a variety of administrative agencies to change the way they conducted their daily affairs. Put differently, the refugee, presumably the most vulnerable and weak historical agent, proved to be outside the capacity of the Ottoman and Great Power bureaucracies to control. While recent scholars have attempted to highlight the capacities of the Ottoman state to influence the lives of so many uprooted people via “citizenship” laws, taking a close look at the

day-to-day affairs on the ground helps one realize that this scholarship fails to explain actual implementation.²⁰

As I explored the wide range of documentation available for the period between 1800 and 1912, it became clear that refugees were not some docile aggregate under the façade of the centralized government highlighted in the literature. Much like the communities found living along new frontiers “imposed” by different forces as explored in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, rather than being a passive recipient of state largess (or oppression), the refugee co-existed with numerous other stakeholders beyond the very “political and economic calculations” deemed by Timothy Mitchell to be the primary innovation of the mid-century state.²¹ The refugee, in other words, was not entirely accessible to the state, despite the often elaborate efforts to apply what Foucault classified as “subjection” (subjectification) in order to influence the refugees’ ever-shifting associations.²² Other factors besides an amorphous state contributed to the changes retrospectively associated with Modernity.

In the period covered here, fundamental changes in the way states instituted laws and regulated commerce also reflected the integration of new forms of administering production in the larger world. This then suggests a role for private finance. The fact that so many of the issues surrounding refugee settlement in the Balkans prior to 1912 were linked to land, the dynamics of “market” forces, and the intensive investment into Balkan (and Arabian) lands for financial gain animated the story of empire and the modern state in very different ways. Here too, the kinds of “subjection” Foucault identified as crucial to the imposition of modern power were evident in the Balkans.

In much of the scholarship the appreciation of land values, coupled with the rush to “invest” in land proved to put interesting pressures on the ability of temporary communities to sustain internal cohesion in the face of the many forms of “individuation” that are synonymous with Modernity. Put differently, the fragmentation of communities as a result of conflict over values, needs, and ambitions represents the single biggest force in destroying the human community through Modernity. Indeed, as revealed in many studies, the alienation experienced by peoples around the world as they faced European finance capitalism served as the key wedge in destroying communal integrity.²³ In cases discussed at length in Chapter 5, however, capitalization of land was still not yet fully enforceable.

The corrupting influence of hindsight has convinced many scholars—both conservative and progressive—of the inevitability of the Ottoman Empire’s fate vis-à-vis a generic “West.” A deeper inspection into the entire nineteenth century, however, suggests the need for more nuance to situate what impacted the interactions between “failed empires” like the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman and ascendant global powers of the first-half of the twentieth century. The underlying conclusion drawn from this study is that modern imperialism was not yet a refined machine imposing unchallenged dictates upon

8 *Foundations of Modernity*

the rest of the world.²⁴ As described in Chapters 1 and 2, the very modern institutions, methods of diplomacy, and territorial abstractions synonymous to European hegemony, are actually by-products of local processes that took decades to play out. Moreover, within certain local contexts, these evolving methods of modern state rule offered a range of possible directions for an ever-shifting set of constituencies that only complicated the ambitions of, among other components of modern power, global finance. In the end, the modern principles of law, territoriality, and social rights within the parameters of a neatly defined state may just be the markings of long-standing resistance to imperial rule, contingencies created by the most humble of actors.²⁵ Put differently, the often subjugated, enslaved, terrorized, and objectified natives prove far more central to the modern world than even the most sympathetic historian of the “subaltern” is willing ideologically to concede.²⁶

Not prepared to write histories under the shadow of what is nothing more than a scholarly trope concocted *after* World War II, I will reconstruct multiple, often disjointed, parallel pasts of indigenous agents long assumed to exist on the periphery of the modern world in order to complicate our thinking of the “Foundations” of Modernity. In the end, such an exercise will expose Modernity as nothing but another tendentious ontological assertion about the “West” by those who see themselves of the “West.”²⁷ As such, this totalizing myth proves to be completely irrelevant to *reading* events in periods and places long assumed directly transformed by Modernity. In the process of interrogating Modernity by presenting the Ottoman Empire and the incumbent themes usually associated with “it”—Islam, ethno-nationalism and capitalism—this study aspires to initiate new ways to talk about the world’s multiplicity, beyond (before) the frame of Modernity.²⁸

As is the case with most revisionist work, it is acknowledged that in order to accomplish a sensitive reformulation of the kinds of change associated with hegemonic epistemologies, like Modernity, one must step beyond the literature of “the field” (in this case Middle Eastern, Balkan, or Ottoman studies) and consult as much research as possible that has represented the past in entirely different terms. In this inherently interdisciplinary mode, one can find a different set of possibilities for many of the human beings involved in this experience of empire and the purported “rise” of the modern world.²⁹ Unfortunately, these complex interactions are often framed in terms of disaggregation (and conflict) from what are conceded to be distinctive forms of socio-political organization. As a consequence, much scholarship continues to rely on misrepresentations that perpetuate the idea of there being something particularly distinct about Europe as an essential source of change.

Writing beyond the scope of Modernity itself, (again, a post-WWII operating logic) the events described throughout this book are meant to suggest a similar detachment from a Eurocentric epistemology. Charting a series of events involving many different people living in completely different corners of the world, we need to reconsider how one can observe processes that ultimately laid the *Foundations* for the institutional, epistemological,

and political economic transformations later interpreted as Modernity.³⁰ Asserting that these events have no meaningful relation to our very contemporary world, hence cutting analytical links distorting and disruptive post-WWII “Western” epistemologies make, may enhance our ability to actually engage the past.³¹ The purpose of this exercise, in other words, is to disaggregate, disentangle, and free the past from our present and future in order to explore alternative sets of explanations for the foundations of our modern world.

In surveying the literature on the period from 1750 to 1914, one is struck by how little European domination, reduced to fit within the categories of Modernity, is ever questioned. To historians both sympathetic to the paradigm of European ascendancy and those concerned with the consequences, a full understanding of the numerous social, economic, and political pathologies of our human condition is often limited to a study of the effects of European imperialism as understood since WWII.³² Endless accounts have been written concerning the overriding influence (both negative and positive) of the steam engine, the advancement in European weaponry and military strategy, transport technology, and accounting techniques. These studies imply in some rather troubling ways that such “progressions” constitute direct links along a linear track between our realities and the past. No matter what it is we want to study in the past, in other words, we ultimately surrender to periodizations that affirm our present/future (framed in terms of Modernity) as well as end up situating, somewhere in the story, the monolithic *White Man*, whose omnipresence in “history” influences both our ability to write a narrative of resistance or question the very source of “western” knowledge.³³

Disaggregating the events taking place in regions that today seem to have a direct bearing on our world may result in a new appreciation for just how disjointed and ultimately disconnected Modernity is from historical experiences long presumed to be necessary extensions of the Western story. Moreover, as an ultimately ethical gesture to those who had to engage the world through the prism of an inevitable “Europe,” I argue it is possible to undermine the very structure of power which sits atop the trope of Modernity today by simply not acknowledging it historically. That is to say, I do not so much want to mount a direct attack on Modernity, but rather aim to drown out its pretensions by restoring the voices of those it has long been mobilized to silence. This goal, in the end, intends to complement the pursuit first initiated by Louis Althusser and Talal Asad, followed later by others.

IDEOLOGICAL/THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS TO STUDY

Central to this revisionist exercise is a project to build on and expand beyond the work of progressive scholars unhappy with the way we write

and talk about the world. At the heart of their critical work was the impact of classic Hegelian/Marxist historicism and the disruptions that the lingering orthodoxy caused in truly breaking from the rationalizations of Western imperialism. The work of Edward Said perhaps best articulated these concerns. Throughout his career, Said exposed the paradox of “Western” hegemony infiltrating the very critical work aimed at undermining the historicist premises of Western imperialism’s apologists.³⁴ The “West,” as ideal object of both a critical rereading of History, or the celebration of western liberal democracy, ultimately reinforced the same epistemology.³⁵ Herein lies this book’s primary challenge.

Trying to write out of the grasp of the meta-narrative of Modernity, as Edward Said and, more recently, Timothy Mitchell have demonstrated, is theoretically impossible from within the conventional paradigms of the progressive left.³⁶ For all the claims of resistance, from Frantz Fanon to Jean-Paul Sartre, the anti-Western warrior constantly resorted back to a totalizing knowledge that was trapped by a History (capital H) that centered “Europe” as the final source of both oppression and liberation.³⁷

Barely old enough to appreciate the debates that still raged in the 1980s when I was an undergraduate student, I too fell victim of fetishizing the Marxist dialectic and Sartre’s existentialism. In time, however, this changed with the realization that so much of what today we project as subversive is predicated on a limited appreciation for the problems created by loyally working from methodological frameworks—especially Marxist and Foucauldian—that are themselves entrenched in a “European” tradition.³⁸

It is possible, however, to step out of this epistemological cage. While trying to figure out how to integrate my work on “the Ottoman Empire” with the innovative strategies of Talal Asad, a chance rereading of Louis Althusser suddenly opened a new perspective to our fundamental problems.³⁹ Coupled with the recent challenges posed by Frederick Cooper to comparativists and historians of colonialism everywhere, I am convinced that it is possible to write beyond Modernity.⁴⁰ More importantly, it is possible to do so in a way that still meaningfully contributes to our continued quest to bring complexity to the modern era as well as usefully engage in an ethical manner the people of the past, many of whom so bravely stood up for what today seem like forgotten principles of common decency, love of family, and honor.⁴¹

It all starts with Louis Althusser. Althusser’s well known break with Marxist orthodoxy in the 1960s took him beyond History to begin to conceive of the past that takes place not as a single overarching narrative—the Western History—but as an intersection of “networks.”⁴² These networks, what I will call local histories for the sake of simplicity, are everywhere in the documentation. This is in itself no surprise to any decent historian. What proved to open up the potential for a new narrative beyond/prior to the hegemonic shadow of Modernity is adding

Frederick Cooper's criticism of how Modernity-as-trope contributes to confusion rather than clarity.⁴³

Entirely appreciative of the nuances of Cooper's assertions that Modernity has overwhelmed our ability to talk about complex societies beyond all the artificial coherence and embedded contradictions Modernity creates, I started to highlight what proved in the different stories scattered in Ottoman documentation to be disjointed, multiple trajectories of human experience. I soon discovered that this stress on the possibility of repeating stories about various peoples that do not have to speak to a unified, mega-History (in our case today, that is Modernity), allows me to offer a critical rereading of what are on the surface, "non-European" themes of scholarship. In the process of such a rereading of events, it may be possible to actually find new significance, and thus new historical trajectories that do not have to necessarily serve the story of Modernity. As discussed throughout, local mobilizations will prove to be animating forces in their own right, compelling neighbors and global powers alike to reconfigure policies that often lead to adjustments and counter-moves, ultimately transforming everyone and everything involved in ways difficult—but not impossible—to translate today.⁴⁴

This volume thus operates within a shared perspective of what is possible outside the epistemological hegemony of something called the "West" by engaging a new kind of story from within an often problematic comparative historiography of empire. One of the clear methodo[logical] problems I wish to avoid when engaging in such an exercise is falling into the trap of seeking "alternatives" to the targeted paradigm and suspected "truth" of a European Modernity, an effort that is doomed to reinforce the credibility of Modernity as an historic agent in the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ The consequences of what Emmanuel Lévinas has called "the imperialism of theory," are the perpetuation of a form of knowledge that continues to juxtapose an ideal outsider/other with an ontological "West," an injustice to those who should be seen as legitimately operating at the radical exteriorities of our contemporary hegemonic narrative.⁴⁶ Revisiting this seemingly outdated concern with ostracizing the logic of the ethico-political subordination of "non-western" agents/actors is especially relevant as I seek to realign the functional utility of studying the Ottoman Empire with larger ethical projects that aim to preserve a space of action for "the other" vis-à-vis Modernity.⁴⁷

Of course, it has been argued that we can never fully escape from the language of ontology in the way offered by Lévinas. As Jacques Derrida suggests, the very act of writing in the voice of the idealized other in an attempt to resist the ontology of Modernity (and thus the pretensions of "the West") ultimately proves impossible because the operation of language requires at a most basic level that we integrate all the disparate voices, agents, and events we rescue from history.⁴⁸ In other words, I run the risk of simply replacing Modernity with another totalizing concept.

I am not so pessimistic, however, because it is not really my desire to write a parallel or “alternative” history to the “West” but to participate in denying the “West” to the extent that, at least for the nineteenth century, it is impossible to see a codified place we now call “Europe.”⁴⁹ “Europe” in other words, does not exist in the time/space dynamics of my historical agents. Rather, it is individual moments involving a coalition of agents whose place in the moment is not determined by retrospection that informs the direction of analysis.⁵⁰ The work of Derrida proves key to laying out what this means.

Despite his reputation, Derrida’s work complements that of Lévinas, Althusser, and others by acknowledging that the ideological prism through which my (our) language about the past, present, and future is shaped, what is known as the “West,” is not necessarily ubiquitous. Put differently, the “West” is not the dominant ideological and epistemological center of the world for most of those studied in this book, for most of the time. Peoples inhabiting the fringes of late nineteenth century empires mobilized their distinctive assets to address contingencies that lacked uniformity, thereby requiring us to remain within the local context while analyzing events. This decentering can, in theory, work to sabotage the underpinnings of Modernity-as-trope while writing about the nineteenth century.

In the end, rather than attacking the Hegelian idea of History, *per se*, by analyzing the implications of the general system from which History (in our case Modernity) operates, Derrida’s often misrepresented “nihilism” complements the more concrete suggestions offered by Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault.⁵¹ Inspired by this, the following book adopts a particularly abstract presentation of various, dispersed, and disjointed events taking place in and around what may be called the Ottoman Empire. By avoiding what still reeks of Marxist determinism while situating disparate events taking place within the Ottoman domains in the larger narrative of Modernity, I suggest there is a way to avoid reifying the totalization of History so often underlying the scholarship about imperialism generally and the “Ottoman” experiences specifically. I do not, in the end, subscribe to the need to adopt a model of narration/presentation, especially as it includes the use of chronology that gives the reader the illusion of a linear series in order to ultimately satisfy our collective questions about the foundations of Modernity.⁵² There is something called a heterogeneous temporality that I believe complicates, if not entirely eludes, all theorization of modern history as a homogeneous diachrony. At the heart of this challenge that does not acknowledge the presence of the “West,” I borrow heavily from Althusser’s complicated argument about “decentered” and multiplied temporalities constituting historical moments that resist simple ideological framing.⁵³

In laying out his argument, Althusser asserted that there is no uniform, total “ideological base time” to which all the many different temporalities happening at the “same time” can be linked. In such vast and culturally diverse territories like the Ottoman Empire, this is especially helpful

because with an ordinary “single continuous reference time” it is not possible to write of many different events without resorting to composing a totalizing narrative.⁵⁴

In other words, there were a plethora of experiences scattered throughout the Ottoman frontiers that neither reflect other events, happenings, and experiences taking place at the same time (often even within the same geographic space), nor permit absorption in the teleology of Modernity. Highlighting such experiences helps deny the inevitability of Modernity. Indeed, this “differential” account of history will help us to rethink a whole series of common notions about what has transpired in the past in relation to what we want it all to say about the present. As there can be no History of Modernity in general, only specific iterations of human action that service often contradictory purposes emerge as the primary engines of change. This in many ways returns people who never experienced Modernity back to a time when it was still not imaginable for such a totalized discursive tradition to impose the present inequalities asserted in binary form retroactively onto the past.⁵⁵

It is possible, in other words, to use these multiple perspectives to write in different narrative forms that operate on entirely different plains of abstraction. History for Althusser, and for this book, is a function of the structure of the totality arising from a multiplicity of modes of production, those that could not transcend the specific context out of which they came. In other words, Modernity’s “totality” in reality constitutes multiple “totalities” that constitute regular rupture and thus constant reorientation, reconstitution, and modified formalities. These modifications, geographically and temporally, spread across distinctive, often intersecting grids that are only retrospectively identified as the modes of production that reflect Modernity’s assertion to total Truth and History. Modernity, in other words, belongs to the post-WWII world in which we, not those resurrected in this book, live.⁵⁶

As this book progresses, I revisit these issues by highlighting in quite distinct locales and contexts the numerous and disparate actions of indigenous peoples. *Foundations* goes even further to suggest that some of these indigenous actions may have actually opened new spaces of action for external actors, who in time utilized these opportunities to assert what later became colonial regimes. That means, on some crucial intersection of time and space, what could have been entirely different inevitabilities interceded to at once lay the *Foundations* of our Modernity, actually closes the possibility for indigenous alternatives.

The many possible ways of accounting for the plethora of personal and collective ambitions and concerns that I suspect are at work in the Persian/Arab Gulf, Yemen, and the Western Balkans during the late Ottoman period can be accessed by innovative methods of representation already utilized in other genres of scholarship. For instance, it is possible to draw inspiration from the way social transformations are studied under the

rubric of “creolization” or “border identity” in other literatures.⁵⁷ These important interventions into understanding power and change in new ways may prove especially helpful in addressing a primary concern of mine here: contradicting what can be understood as the “epistemic coloniality” of power that reduces the study of the Ottoman and European world to an exercise of highlighting dichotomies enclosed by frontiers, both geographical and conceptual, as well as a particularistic understanding of “market forces” that exaggerate this binary construct of the world.⁵⁸ Within the confines of this orientation are presumed polarities in otherwise complex, heterogeneous societies. Religion, along with race and ethnicity are thus seen as natural barriers, signifiers of primordial difference that distinguish pre-modern societies from those putatively conditioned by the Enlightenment, secularism, and Liberal values.

Instead of conceding to the kind of lexicon that reifies the use of differences, by integrating the dynamics of change in terms familiar to those theorizing borderlands, we can begin to interpret transformations prior to World War I as products of local engagement with imperial states (that is, more precisely, administrative extensions of certain configurations of capitalist power) that had considerable material resources but limited human capacities to control events fully. In this manner, it is possible to offer a reading of individual and collective possibilities that are tangible forces of history operating outside the confines laid out by certain models of analysis dependent on what can be called the meta-narrative of Modernity.

For this book, the biggest challenge present when exploring such intersections of human agency is addressing the difficulties in making intelligible the multiplicity of domestic knowledges that could be applied in any number of settings outside of History, that is Modernity. At the heart of the problem is respecting the context from within institutional, social, or political settings while practically using “events” to demonstrate that there are Foundations to Modernity that may suggest a different trajectory, if just explained differently. In other words, the mutations of contingency, reflective of indigenous actions, counter-actions, and reactions, as well as complications brought to the fore in domestic/internal debates within state bureaucracies, all complicate my task. Hopefully, the reward for unsealing some of these moments of intersection or “friction” along the borderlands of empire will be to render useless our Modernity as a historical totality for peoples deserving better.

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