

**Capitalism and the post-Ottoman states system: theoretical lessons from the history of modern state formation in the Middle East**

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*“The Ottoman state thus entered the age of political modernization. It could not survive the process of transformation, since empires by their nature can seldom withstand pressure and adapt to the complex conditions necessitated by structural and political changes”.*<sup>1</sup>

*Kemal H. Karpat*

*“A world-empire expands to the socio-technical limits of effective political control of the redistributive process, and then either shrinks or disintegrates”.*<sup>2</sup>

*Immanuel Wallerstein*

*“Experience – bitter experience – has shown that contrary to the dreams of Mazzini and President Woodrow Wilson national self-determination is a principal of disorder, not of order, in international life.”*

*Elie Kedourie*

### **Introduction: How *modern* is the nation-state system?**<sup>3</sup>

The term ‘modern *nation-state*’ is used in most International Relations (IR) literature in a seemingly unreflected manner. The use of ‘nation’ appears to be synonymous with ‘modern’, indicating the underlying Wilsonian principle of ethno-linguistic self-determination as the organising principle of the Westphalian international order “which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent”.<sup>4</sup> However, raising the problematique of the interchangeable use of terms like *nation*, *state* and *society* does not merely have the purpose of clarifying a long-standing semantic inaccuracy. Bringing the ‘nation’ back into the ‘international’ should concern sociologists, historians and ultimately IR theorists also on methodological grounds: According to the Wilsonian narrative, an underlying cultural, ethnic and racial diversity supplies the main benchmark for the inside/outside distinctions in the creation of these typically *modern* societies when the pre-modern political units have been defined by and as a dynast’s or a feudal lord’s personal property, thereby constituting what Perry Anderson called ‘parcellized sovereignties’.<sup>5</sup> According to the conventional IR narrative it is the peace treaties of 1648 after the devastations of the Thirty Years War which have brought about “the arrogation of the means of violence by multiple sovereigns and the

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<sup>1</sup> Karpat, Kemal H. (1972), p 281

<sup>2</sup> Wallerstein, Immanuel (1979), p 390

<sup>3</sup> This paper was first presented at the Research in Progress seminar series at the University of Sussex in February 2007. The participants of this seminar have helped to develop and sharpen some of my arguments during a fruitful and challenging debate. In particular I’m indebted to my discussant, Justin Rosenberg for his thorough and useful comments on this paper. I would also like to thank Benno Teschke, Jeppe Strandsbjerg, Kamran Matin, Zdenek Kavan, Sam Knafo, and Kees van der Pijl for their critical and encouraging comments.

<sup>4</sup> Gellner, E (1983): *Nations and Nationalisms*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1

<sup>5</sup> The term parcellized sovereignty originates from Perry Anderson’s *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 1979, London: Verso; see also: Walker, Rob (1993): *Inside/outside : international relations as political theory* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

concomitant establishment of bounded territoriality; the field of politics was formally differentiated into distinct domestic and international spheres, based on internal political hierarchy and external geopolitical anarchy”.<sup>6</sup> Modernity and the Enlightenment then brought, according to this liberal history of the state-system, the process of self-realisation. The latter, however, is only possible within the community, or rather a multiplicity of communities – and, more specifically, the ‘national’ community. It could be argued that this is a transhistorical reality of human social life, for as Kedourie put it with reference to Fichte and Kant, “man attains a determinate position in the scheme of things and fixity in nature only because he is in a particular association”.<sup>7</sup> National self-determination, according to most theories of Nationalism<sup>8</sup>, constitutes a distinctly modern condition since this process is only required because of a preceding process of alienation of the individual in modern society which necessitates a self-realisation beyond a mere subsistence-economy level. Thus, the Enlightenment and Nationalism are thought to provide the foundation for a development which started to define polities by their political constitution based on a ‘popular will’. The expression of the latter is thought to take place within established pre-state ethno-linguistic communities, It is, therefore only “with the spread of nationalism, [that] natural frontiers came to mean the frontiers of a nation as determined by a linguistic map”.<sup>9</sup>

Wherever we locate the strict territorial delimitation of political rule historically then, debates within the literature on International Historical Sociology have shown that the methodologically tight separation of social relations *within* from those *with the outside* constitutes a historically peculiar and relatively instable form of international order, thereby challenging the core Realist assumption about the timeless and transhistorical validity of this distinction. What International Relations theory is commonly less concerned with, however, is the “importance of drawing a distinction between *territorial* sovereignty and *national* sovereignty as the distinctively *modern* way of ordering the ‘international’.”<sup>10</sup> Territorial/national fragmentation of rule is, in this context either accepted as a sort of ‘national naturalisation’ of the spatial relations of domination or relegated to an epiphenomenon or by-product of the modernisation and centralisation of rule.<sup>11</sup> Thus, even

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<sup>6</sup> Benno Teschke criticises what he calls the Westphalian ‘Myth’ in international relations history: Teschke, Benno (2003): *The Myth of 1648*, London: Verso, 3

<sup>7</sup> Kedourie, Elie (1993): *Nationalism, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.*, Oxford: Blackwell, p 32

<sup>8</sup> Discussed below

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 117

<sup>10</sup> Rodney Bruce Hall (1999): *National collective identity: social constructs and international relations*, New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, p 4; emphasis mine

<sup>11</sup> See more detailed discussion below

for critical scholars of international relations, “one aspect of this transformation was the tendency for the borders of the state and the boundaries of nations to become more congruent, whether through movements of national secession or unification”.<sup>12</sup> As far as the naturalisation of the nation goes, the fragmentation of so-called ‘multinational’ Empires is seen as an integral part to this overall trajectory into what can be called a ‘geopolitical modernity’. This transition from the (Ottoman) ‘Empire’ to (the post-Ottoman) nation-states is referred to in much of the literature on both state-formation as well as on imperial decline as an outcome of a process of ‘nationalisation’ of sovereignty, hence, as an integral part of the process of modernisation.

The social engine of this transformation, equating in a not unfamiliar fashion, ‘modernity’ and ‘capitalism’ is, at least to many orthodox historical materialist as well as liberal historiographies, uneven capitalist development. Capitalism is understood here as the historically specific mode of social re-production of modernity whereby economic activity is depoliticised and mediated through the relations of exchange in an abstract de-personalised market. This transformation is indicated by the shift from the appropriation of surpluses by a ruling class through extra-economic means of coercion to a ‘globalised’ market economy where all factors of production, most importantly waged labour, are commodified and freely available. Surplus appropriation, therefore, takes no longer place by disposing means of violence, but through the coercive imperatives of the market. This transformation includes the shift from a fused political and economic power to a separation of the two and the depersonalisation of political rule in the modern state. This then, is seen as the nascent moment of the abstract state and *raison d'état*. Social interaction and with it International Relations become, as Justin Rosenberg put it, a socio-economic system within which “any aspects of social life which are mediated by relations of exchange in principle no longer receive a political definition”.<sup>13</sup> So, ‘the Age of Capital’ does not, within its own ‘logic’, depend on the physical control of territory for its own re-production anymore, thereby establishing the institutional separation of the economic from the political on the one hand, and the public from the private on the other. However, once political affairs are de-personalised, “the individual (...), with the help of self-discovered, self-imposed norms, determines himself as a free and moral-being”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the process of de-personalisation of

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<sup>12</sup> Lacher, Hannes (2006): *Beyond Globalization – Capitalism, territoriality and the international relations of modernity*, London: Routledge/RIPE, p 131

<sup>13</sup> Rosenberg, Justin (1994): *Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations*, London: Verso, p 129

<sup>14</sup> Kedourie, 1993, 17

social relations and political rule in modern societies triggers a process of alienation within the modern political subject, which can only be overcome by supporting the latter with a framework of reference capable of establishing reality and, consequently, social cohesion within the modern nation. Yet, the formation of an abstract, depersonalised capitalist state has also implications for international relations: The fact that surplus-extraction is no longer carried out through direct coercion by politically constituted, extra-economic means of violence means that the whole process of economic reproduction and an increase in income dependent is no longer dependent on territorial expansion. According to Justin Rosenberg, it was this transition from pre-modern ‘Imperial’/‘Feudal’ IR to modern ‘national’ IR which institutionalized the functional similarity, or billiard ball character, of internally hierarchically organised modern states whose external interactions naturally re-produce the balance of power under the conditions of anarchy structural realism describes.<sup>15</sup>

This notion of modern capitalist IR, if applied to the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, however, leaves us with a seemingly paradoxical situation in which the arrival of non-territorial forms of economic reproduction, i.e. capitalism, occurs within a phase of protracted geopolitical competition, i.e. a contest over territory. Political rule starts being ‘containerised’ within a period of increasing territorial fragmentation during a series of national Revolutions. If there is such a thing as a spatial ‘logic’ of early capitalism, i.e. a totalising drive towards a political infrastructure for the regulatory needs of a *globalising* political economy, what could have been expected politically would have been a global state. However, what was observable instead was the disintegration of supposedly ‘national’ polities, compartmentalizing the already existing unified and therefore more promising market of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, what was observable historically was an increase in the fragmentation of political rule simultaneous with a quantitative growth in ‘global’ exchange relations. The paradox, therefore, presents itself in the way Hannes Lacher put it: “If the relations of exploitation under capitalism are inherently global(ising), then why are the capitalist relations of domination not corresponding to their spatial extension, to the capitalist world market and global social relations?”<sup>16</sup> Put differently: Why does the Middle East

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<sup>15</sup> Rosenberg (1994), Chapter 5

<sup>16</sup> Lacher, Hannes Peter (2000): *Historicising the Global: Capitalism, Territoriality, and the International Relations of Modernity*, London: PhD Thesis, University of London (LSE), p 251; more recently: Lacher, H (2003): Putting the State in its Place: the critique of state-centrism and its limits, in: *Review of International Studies*, 29, 521 – 541; Lacher, H (2005): International transformation and the persistence of territoriality: toward a new political geography of capitalism, in: *Review of International Political Economy*, 12:1, 26-52; Teschke, Benno (2006): Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe – A Rejoinder, in: *International Politics*, 43, 531 – 573

experience the disappearance of the incomparably larger internal market of the Ottoman Empire which had already initiated a process of radical political modernisation? This conundrum is especially (if not only) a problem for Marxist International Relations theory, for if the bourgeoisie “creates a world after its own image”,<sup>17</sup> why do the *transnational* market and the *national* state not only not correspond to each other but even surface in a contradicting manner out of the same historical conjuncture?

In the following I will attempt to investigate this problem by looking at the relationship between capitalism, nationalism and modern sovereignty in the Middle East in the long Nineteenth century. The political unit I will look at used to be, legalistically speaking, one ‘nation’ and is now more than twenty with the numbers increasing to this day: The Ottoman Empire. This empire provides for a valuable case study because conventional wisdom tends to disqualify Ottoman rule as an ‘Eastern’, static and backward society, as depicted not least in Marx’s concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production.<sup>18</sup> This kind of thinking has, as post-Colonial writers have repeatedly pointed out, a long tradition in Western European thought. These Orientalist narratives were, however, not only created out of a need to project the West’s power on to the East, but served, more importantly, as a reference point of the ‘despotic other’ in the light of which the enlightened West was able to project its own progress as described by European Renaissance writers.<sup>19</sup> The post-Ottoman territorial multitude is therefore often understood as the natural outcome of a process of ‘international socialisation’<sup>20</sup> whereby the international system coerced (either through military means, socialisation through norms or market and middle class pressure) the so-called multiethnic empires of the Ottomans and Habsburgs to disintegrate into their purportedly constituent parts. As Abou-El-Haj notes: “In order to become truly modern, it [the Ottoman Empire] was perceived to having to transform necessarily into a nation-state, or rather a variety of nation-states”<sup>21</sup>. This reading of Ottoman and even more so post-Ottoman history perpetuates the already mentioned typical insensitivity towards the artificiality of the modern/national character of society. However, as the Balkan historian Peter F. Sugar notes: “The trouble was that the supposedly unrealistic historical claims to any place did not take into account

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<sup>17</sup> Marx, K.; Engels, F.: *Communist Manifesto*, MECW 6, 487f

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion see: Hindess and Hirst (1975): *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, Oxford: Routledge

<sup>19</sup> For an overview over the portrayal of the Ottoman polity as archaic and despotic in European writing see: Anderson (1974): 397f; for his own explanation of Ottoman decline see: Chapter 7, pp 361 – 397

<sup>20</sup> Halliday, Fred (1992): International Society as Homogeneity: Burke, Marx, Fukuyama, in: *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp 435 – 461, p 460

<sup>21</sup> Abou-El-Haj, Rifa’at Ali (1991): *Formation of the modern state: the Ottoman Empire, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries*, Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 62

demographic realities. The migrations during the Ottoman centuries had not produced homogenous ethnic areas, but rather a mosaic of hopelessly interwoven population patterns”.<sup>22</sup> Whilst this statement is derived from a study of the Ottoman European provinces, it is nonetheless, possibly even more so, true for the hitherto predominantly nomadic social formations of the Middle East, of whom the Sultan merely asked tribute and allegiance. In the light of the socially constructed character of the post-Ottoman ‘national’ sovereignties, the question is whether there is indeed an intricate connection that justifies the perceived ‘natural congruence’ between a capitalist order based on non-territorial, market driven socio-economic relations of production and the narrowing of politico-territorial relations of domination into ‘national homelands’.

The first part of this study will start by setting out the theoretical context of nation-state formation and imperial decline as a result of ‘modernisation’ within historical sociological literature. Both, World Systems Theory and Neo-Weberian geopolitical competition approaches have proposed explanations for the disintegration of the Empire that lean on the ‘disciplining’ capacity of the international system. Here, I will discuss Political Marxism’s proposed solution to the problem which dissociates the creation of nation-states and capitalist development. Having identified a distinct lack of problematising the national character of modern rule in most IR literature, I will look at theories of Nationalism and their potential for an explanation of post-Ottoman sovereignty. The historical engagement with the process of Ottoman decline will reveal that World Systems Theory and the geopolitical competition model – despite their valuable and intensive engagement with the historical development of the Ottoman Empire (this is especially true for World Systems theory) – tend to rely too heavily on the reproductive capacities of the modern international system as an explanation for nationalist movements and do not sufficiently problematize the latter’s socio-historical origins.

The empirical part on the origins of Arab and other post-Ottoman nationalisms will reveal that this strict ‘outside-in’ lens tends to discount the social power struggles between the local/regional and the centre which, to the current author, constituted the underlying social dynamic without which we cannot understand the secessionist projects. It is, however, precisely because “the geographical delimitations of the area to be investigated are not as innocuous as might be assumed at first glance”<sup>23</sup> that we have to remain methodologically open towards ‘sub-national’ levels of analysis – even and especially after processes of modernisation have already been launched. The lesson learned In terms of International

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<sup>22</sup> Sugar, 283

<sup>23</sup> Adanir and Faroqhi, p 25

Theory, then, is that the strict domestic/hierarchical – international/anarchical dichotomy needs to be thought of as being less concrete: It is a defining feature of the pre-modern state that sovereignty is parcellized and only in the initial phase of the process of consolidation. That is to say that domestic relations are always characterized by a struggle between various power centres – let them be defined ethnically, racially, linguistically or merely geographically and in that sense, do not function according to a stringent ‘hierarchical logic’ transhistorically, allowing for the black box thinking of realism. Put differently, the centrality of provincial power for the emergence of the post-Ottoman international order<sup>24</sup> also goes to show that we cannot comprehend the delimitation of the domestic as a derivative of the dynamics of the international only. Instead, it will be the central premise of my argument that we will have to treat the domestic, the international, and the ‘peripheral’ or ‘local’ as ultimately methodologically inseparable parts of a holistic notion of the ‘social’<sup>25</sup>. In the Ottoman case, Şerif Mardin provided some ground work for such an approach in the Ottoman context by emphasising the role of centre-periphery relations for the Ottoman/Turkish transition. For him, it was the ‘estrangement’ of the periphery from the centre during the period of modernisation which led to an overall demise in social relations: “A series of confrontations leading to compromises with what may be called the forces of periphery: the feudal nobility, the cities, the burghers and later, industrial labour.”<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, this, according to Mardin, does not only provide the key for explaining imperial decline, but remains prevalent within the Republican period as these elite conflicts continue to shape Turkish politics to this day. This approach then, converges with Arno Mayer’s argument about the emergence of Nationalism and Modernizing elites, more recently re-affirmed by Sandra Halperin,<sup>27</sup> about the persistence of the old regime within Western Europe to the Balkans, Turkey and the Middle East.

In the empirical part of this paper, the historical re-construction of the social dynamics of the formation of various post-Ottoman ‘national/modern’ states will show, that “the

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<sup>24</sup> On this see amongst others: Hourani, Albert (1968): Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables, in: William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds.): *Beginnings of Modernisation in the Middle East – The nineteenth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

<sup>25</sup> The emphasis on regional power structures and their relations to the centre is not to be confused with the new medievalist’s and new regionalist’s Global/Local paradigm. Their contention is that contemporary International Relations is better understood as an interplay between a ‘Global’ political economy and ‘locally’ affected actors and socio-political structures rather than along the traditional international/national fault line; see for example: Swyngedouw, E (1997): *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*, New York: Guilford; Omaha, K. (1993): The Rise of the Region State, in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 2

<sup>26</sup> Serif, Mardin (1973): Center-Periphery Relations – A Key to Turkish Politics?, in: *Daedalus*, Vol. 102, No 1

<sup>27</sup> Mayer, Arno J. (1981): *The Persistence of the Old Regime :Europe to the Great War*, London: Croom Helm; Halperin, Sandra (1997): *In the mirror of the Third World: capitalist development in modern Europe*, London/Ithaca: Cornell University Press

political organization of the modern world into a territorially divided states-system was not a [direct] function of capitalism”<sup>28</sup> or other expressions of ‘modernity’ or the ‘Enlightenment’ directly transplanted from Western Europe - creating “a world after its own image”. Despite the fact that we cannot understand the transition of the Ottoman Empire into a territorially fragmented inter-nation-state system without recourse to its shifting geopolitical relations and certain ‘intrasocietal’<sup>29</sup> dynamics, the outcome is nevertheless more than merely a reflection of a ‘socialisation’ into an inter-*national* modernity. Rather than being the result of an almost mechanical process of homogenizing rule through capitalist penetration and modern warfare, the new inter-state system that replaced the Sultan’s rule over his former domains was determined in strong measure by a multiplicity of Ottoman intra-ruling class conflicts. We can, therefore, accept Abou El-Haj’s critique of Perry Anderson’s famous explanation for the decline of the Ottoman Empire in “The House of Islam”<sup>30</sup> on the ground that “he reduces Ottoman state and society to a kind of backdrop to the unfolding drama of world history, which in his view is equated with the history of the principal European states”.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, this cannot obscure that also this conflict was determined by the shifting position of the Ottoman Empire within the international system. However, the impetus for change was not at the ‘national’ level and directly implanted by Western Enlightened ideology, but mediated through a protracted social struggle between a landed quasi-aristocracy, the central, modernising bureaucracy and the private interests of the Sultan and his court. This dialectical interplay between historically as well as socially peculiar social struggles and the geopolitically mediated impact of capitalism in the West through the international system is then best reconciled by a historical materialist argument: the emphasis on the material, yet pre-capitalist nature of the above mentioned centre-periphery conflict, the impact of capitalist Europe and the ways in which this interplay resulted in consolidated territorial/national rule provides for the theoretical opening that can accommodate the process of nation-*formation* as well as capitalist development. It does, therefore, re-construct the relation between post-Ottoman Nationalisms and capitalist development without immediately and necessarily equating them. I will finish my historical reconstruction by arguing that it is these ‘pre-modern’ socio-political conflicts between regional ruling classes and a

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<sup>28</sup> Teschke (2003), 264

<sup>29</sup> Skocpol, Theda (1973): A Critical Review of Barrington Moore’s Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, in: *Politics and Society*, Vol. 4(1)1-34

<sup>30</sup> See Anderson, Perry (1974): *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London: New Left Books: The House of Islam, pp 361-397

<sup>31</sup> El-Hab, Abou (1991): *The Formation of the Modern State*, p 4

‘modernising’ centre which led to the creation of multiple territorially defined states in the former Ottoman Empire.

## **IR Theory and Historical Sociology: Inter-National Modernity reconsidered**

### *Geopolitical competition as agent of social change*

A strand of thought that is closely related to realist international relations theory puts more emphasis on physical, rather than material coercion: The school of Weberian Historical Sociology (WHS) which includes authors like Charles Tilly, Stephen Hobden, John M. Hobson, Michael Mann, as well as the historian Paul Kennedy sees the nation-state as a result of a selective process of state-formation. Hendrik Spruyt’s approach will serve here as a representative of this camp. The basic assumption here is that Empires<sup>32</sup> cannot ensure the viability, coherence, revenue and, by extension, military competitiveness to survive in typically ‘modern’ international relations:

“The system selected out those types of units that were, competitively speaking, less efficient. In other words, the competitive nature of the system determined the nature of the constitutive units. (...) Actors intentionally created a system of sovereign, territorial states. They preferred a system that divided the sphere of cultural and economic interaction into territorial parcels with clear hierarchical authorities”.<sup>33</sup>

This new institutional base is the most competitive one because it produces the revenue and by extension the most forceful military apparatus. This happens by solving the discrepancy between “emerging translocal markets and existing political arrangements”.<sup>34</sup> Inherent to this ‘weakness’ is also the high degree of diversity which is thought of as being identical with diverging interests and inherent inter-ethnic conflict which weakens polities in international struggles. Competitive geopolitical pressures are, therefore, causing the streamlining of domestic socio-political structures which also involves the homogenisation of the subject people:

“In one of their more self-conscious attempts to engineer state power, rulers frequently sought to homogenize their populations in the course of installing direct rule. (...) But homogeneity had many compensating advantages: within a homogeneous population, ordinary people were more likely to identify with their rulers, communication could run more efficiently, and an administrative innovation that worked in one segment was likely to work elsewhere as well. People who sensed a common origin, furthermore, were more likely to unite against external threats”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In the sense of a so-called ‘multinational territorial State’, rather than a Colonial Empire in the sense of the British Empire.

<sup>33</sup> Spruyt, Hendrik (1994a): *The Sovereign State and its competitors*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p 180

<sup>34</sup> Spruyt, Hendrik (1994b): Institutional Selection in International Relations: State Anarchy as Order, in: *International Organisation*, Vol. 48, No. 4, pp 527 - 557, p 529

<sup>35</sup> Tilly, Charles (1990): *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, Cambridge (Mass.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 106f

It was the importance of ethno-cultural homogeneity as well as fiscal-administrative efficiency which earmarked the Ottoman Empire for ‘outselection’ within this semi-Darwinistic process. The geopolitical competitions model, therefore, cannot but interpret “the last centuries of the existence [of the Ottoman Empire] unidirectionally as a history of decline.”<sup>36</sup>

*The ‘commercialisation’ model: the Ottomans’ changing place in the World Economy as the engine of social change*

Many prominent Marxist explanations in IR about the decline of the Ottoman Empire follow a similarly deterministic, linear conceptualisation of history. Deviating from realist ‘imperial overstretch’<sup>37</sup> as well as Neo-Weberian geopolitical semi-evolutionary literature, highly influential World Systems arguments are not necessarily based on the Sultan’s inability to physically control territory due to a lack of military resources which are, themselves caused by a failure to raise sufficient revenue. The unique trend in Marxist literature on Ottoman decline<sup>38</sup> is the focus on the mode of social reproduction which in pre-capitalist times, is based on the geopolitical accumulation of territory, which finally *has* to translate into a protracted demographic and socio-political crisis, which eventually predetermines an end of imperial control. This is why, amongst others, Perry Anderson sees the beginning of decline already with the end of territorial expansion the sixteenth century:

“Once territorial expansion ceased, however, a slow involution of its whole enormous structure was inevitable [as] the stoppage of extensive acquisition of lands and treasure was inevitably to lead to much more intensive forms of exploitation within the bounds of Turkish power, at the expense of the subject *rayah* (peasant) class. The history of the Ottoman Empire from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth century is thus essentially that of the disintegration of the central imperial State, the consolidation of a provincial landowning class, and the degradation of the peasantry”.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, despite originating from different historical materialist traditions, both of these approaches assert that, given its mode of social reproduction based on the accumulation of territory, which at least Anderson holds to be partly based on Islam, geopolitical defeats translated into socio-economic crisis. It thereby reconstructs a unilinear history of Ottoman decline until 1923.

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<sup>36</sup> Reinowski, Markus (2006): Das Osmanische Reich – ein antkoloniales Imperium?, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, online issue, 3 H. 1, URL: <<http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Reinkowski-1-2006>> (download: 03/08/2006), own translation

<sup>37</sup> For a classical realist account see for example: Kennedy, Paul (1989): *The rise and fall of the great powers : economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000*, London: Fontana

<sup>38</sup> This is not to equate historical materialism with World Systems Theory. However, I will remain focussed on the latter branch of Ottoman historiography as it is a very, if not the most dominant strand.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, Perry (1974): *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London: New Left Books, p 378f

One of the most influential strands within Ottoman historiography is based on Immanuel Wallerstein's work on World Systems.<sup>40</sup> The ontological focus of this literature is the changing location of the society in question within the World Economy. According to this theory Ottoman social relations are determined by their position within the World Economy, which itself consists in shifting relations of global exchange and the international division of labour. The Ottoman Empire, thus, entered into the Capitalist World Economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when "Ottoman trade with the outside...ceased to be transit trade and became increasingly less administered and increasingly more an economic process of exchange of Ottoman primary goods for manufactured European products"<sup>41</sup> – thereby shifting the Ottoman Empire into the 'periphery' of the world economy. These altering relations of exchange, then, created the conditions not only for changes in the Ottoman economy, but social change in general, as the socio-political structures are merely seen as a 'superstructural' derivative of an underlying shift towards capitalist relations of exchange:

"All our states have been creations of the modern world, even if some could make a plausible claim to cultural linkage with pre-modern political entities. And least of all, has the interstate system always been there. The interstate system is the political superstructure of the capitalist world-economy and was a deliberate invention of the modern world"<sup>42</sup>

The process of incorporation into the World Economy, therefore, causes a change in the form of political rule as well: "Incorporation into the world-economy means necessarily the insertion of the political structures into the interstate system. This means that the 'states' which already exist in these areas must either transform themselves into 'states within the interstate system' [read: nation-states] or be replaced by new political structures which take this form or be absorbed by other states already within the interstate system".<sup>43</sup>

Kasaba and Wallerstein apply this theory to the social transformation of Ottoman society, whereby "incorporation involves a restructuring of the production processes and political system of an area such that the incorporated area becomes an integrated part of the axial division of labor of the capitalist world-economy and a functioning part of the interstate

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<sup>40</sup> To name but a few: İslamoğlu and Keyder 1977, Karpat, 1972, Kasaba, 1988, Keyder, 1976, Wallerstein 1976, Wallerstein and Karpat, 1983

<sup>41</sup> Sunar, Ilkay: The Political Rationality of Ottoman Economics: Formation and Transformation, in: S. Mardin and W.I. Zartman (eds): Polity, Economy and Society in Ottoman Turkey and North Africa, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 14, quoted in: Wallerstein, Immanuel (1979): The Ottoman Empire and the Capitalist World-Economy: Some Questions for Research, *Review*, Vol. II, No. 3, Winter, 389-98, 396

<sup>42</sup> Wallerstein (1995): *Historical Capitalism, with Capitalist Civilization*. London: Verso, p 141

<sup>43</sup> Wallerstein, I (1989): *The Modern World-System III The second era of great expansion of the capitalist world-economy*, San Diego: Academic Press, 170

system”<sup>44</sup> Thus, separatist movements and territorial division are seen as outflows of the global division of labour which determines political organisation functionally as well as spatially:

“Ottoman trade during the second half of the eighteenth century was becoming diversified, both in terms of the main articles and the trade partners. An uninterrupted flow of these economic relations was to the interest of all the core powers of the world—economy. Thus large areas of the Ottoman Empire were integrated into the global division of labor during this period. At the same time, the Ottoman state was also being incorporated into the interstate system, the other important dimension of the capitalist world-economy. Thus, dissolution of the Empire does not necessarily imply a ‘decline’ in the overall Ottoman social system (as is frequently argued). Rather, a profound transformation was under way, one that involved the transformation of a world-empire into a peripheral structure of the capitalist world-economy”.<sup>45</sup>

Mehmet Karpat argues in a similar fashion that the establishment of exchange relations of certain Ottoman, mostly coastal regions has to be seen as the prelude to their eventual secession, as “these regions, due in part to the predominance of sea communications, became economically attached to France or England, while maintaining a formal but continuously weakening political tie to the Ottoman administration.”<sup>46</sup> Rather than being part of a specific historical development that requires explanation, the evolution of exchange relations within the Ottoman Empire here becomes the general explanatory device within World Systems Theory. As the following will show this unidirectional interpretation of 240 years of history from 1683 to 1923 does not allow for the adequate consideration of the historically and geographically specific developments in the vastly diverse history of the Ottoman regions.

### *Political Marxism and the historical simultaneity of the nation-state and capitalism*

“Capitalism, in some ways more than any other social form, needs politically organized and legally defined stability, regularity, and predictability”.<sup>47</sup> And those ‘goods’ are normally still provided for by the modern nation-state<sup>48</sup>. This is an established assumption about the nature of the contemporary international system which at the same time constitutes a powerful argument against assumptions about the decreasing importance of the nation-state in the ‘Age of Globalisation’.<sup>49</sup> Even though the concrete historical and geographical delimitation of that state is not explicitly referred to, it is nevertheless thought to have a ‘national’ character.

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<sup>44</sup> Kasaba and Wallerstein (1983): Incorporation into the World-Economy: Change in the Structure of the Ottoman Empire, 1750 – 1839, in: Bacqué, J. and Dumont, P: *Économie et Sociétés dans L’Empire Ottoman*, Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 336

<sup>45</sup> Kasaba and Wallerstein (1983): 352

<sup>46</sup> Karpat, Kemal H (1972): The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789 – 1908, in: *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, pp 243 – 281, 247

<sup>47</sup> Wood, Ellen (2002a): *The Origin of Capitalism – The Longer View*, London: Verso, 178

<sup>48</sup> See for example: Rosenberg, Justin 2000, 2005, Weiss, Linda 1999

<sup>49</sup> see for example: Rosenberg, Justin (2000): *The Follies of Globalisation Theory*, London: Verso

Thus, capitalism did not only prompt the transcendence from nomadic to territorially defined forms of political rule, but also induce a process of re-defining the spatial definition of relations of domination: “The emergence of capitalism was closely tied to the evolution of the modern nation-state, and that close link has shaped the development and expansion of capitalism ever since. The global economy as we know it today is still constituted by national entities”.<sup>50</sup> Deducing theory from this historical reality, the co-incidental emergence of capitalist relations of production and exchange together with nationally defined and contained polities, led, amongst other historical materialists, Ellen Wood, to assume that, instead of seeing the global polity as the ‘natural habitat’ of global capitalism, there exists a functional congruity between a multi-nation-state system as a way of organising political relations of domination and the globally constituted market relations as the realm of capitalist reproduction: “We can certainly accept that (...) capitalism developed in tandem with the process of state formation”.<sup>51</sup> Ellen Wood, does not stop, however, at a mere reaffirmation of the historical simultaneity of these transformations but seems to establish a ‘logical’ link between the two as well: “Although capitalism did not give rise to the nation state, and the nation state did not give rise to capitalism, the social transformations that brought about capitalism, with its characteristic separation of economic and political spheres, were the same ones that brought the nation state to maturity”.<sup>52</sup> For Wood, then “the universalisation of capitalism has also meant, or at least been accompanied by, the universalisation of the nation-state”.<sup>53</sup>

We can now apply this hypothesis to the Ottoman case: The separation of abstract political relations of domination and privatised relations of exploitation within an impersonalised market sphere, i.e. the emergence of modern sovereignty is conventionally associated with the Rescript of Gülhane of 1839 which inaugurated the famous Tanzimat period of the Empire. However, efforts to modernize the Ottoman Empire commenced at the latest with the enthroning of Selim III in 1789.<sup>54</sup> Others locate the beginning of the transformation even earlier: Territorial consolidation had according to Abou-El-Haj– much to the distaste of the ghazi border elements – already taken place with the signature of the

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<sup>50</sup> Wood, Ellen (2002b): *Global Capital, National States*, in: Rupert, Mark and Smith, Hazel: *Historical Materialism and Globalisation*, London: Routledge, 17

<sup>51</sup> Wood, E (2002a): p 19; for a constructivist argument see: Ruggie, J.G. (1993): *Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations*, in: *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 1. (Winter, 1993), pp. 139-174

<sup>52</sup> Wood, E (2002b): *The Origin of Capitalism – The Longer View*, London: Verso, p 171

<sup>53</sup> Wood (2002a): 25

<sup>54</sup> This suggestion is mainly based on the argument put forward by Abou El-Haj whose book, is rather tellingly titled *Formation of the Modern State – The Ottoman Empire Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

treaties of Karlowitz and Istanbul in 1699 and 1700.<sup>55</sup> Along with this territorialisation of the polity came a proliferation of modernisation programs from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. Until then Ottoman rule had always been seen as the epitome of “patrimonialism, and in the extreme case, Sultanism, [which] is a purely personal instrument of the master to broaden his arbitrary power, and in sultanism, domination operates on the basis of discretion”.<sup>56</sup> Once, however, Selim’s ‘autocratic Enlightenment’ had produced an elite capable of comprehending what was at stake, it was just this elite which developed the cosmopolitan, yet non-national concept of ‘Ottomanism’ as the basis for a modernized form of political subjectivity. It is important however, to point out at this point that these instances of “rationalization does not imply ‘modernization’ (or even homogenization)” for despite new methods of rule the Empire did not lose its character “of politically constituted property within the state and the proprietary character of the state itself”.<sup>57</sup> This form of institutional bureaucratic modernisation with a simultaneous perpetuation of a social practice of treating the state as personal property, mirrors Western forms of enlightened Absolutism. Despite these frequently underestimated similarities of Western and Eastern developmental paths, most of historical sociology literature on state-formation locates the origin of modern sovereignty in the creation of the post-Ottoman national states and its culmination with the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

### *Nationalism – marking the emergence of the abstract political?*

This is why the importance of calls for an opening of International Relations Theory towards theories of nationalism can hardly be underestimated.<sup>58</sup> Different to the more common practices of essentialising and naturalising national differentiation, theorists of Nationalism, like - prominently - Ernest Gellner, emphasise that the process of modernisation of International Relations not only implied a certain Weberian *form of rule*, but also a specific *kind of population*, i.e. a nationally homogenized people. Processes of modernisation have indeed resulted in the creation of some level of cultural homogeneity for the purpose of social cohesion. Thus, whilst capitalism according to Political Marxism is thought to define both, the modern nature of the economic, the political, i.e. their separation from each other, it remains

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<sup>55</sup> Abou-el-Haj, Rifaat A. (1969): The Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier in Europe: 1699-1703, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 89, No. 3, pp. 467-475

<sup>56</sup> İnalçık, Halil (1992): Comments on ‘Sultanism’: Max Weber’s Typification of the Ottoman Polity, in: *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1. 1992, 49-72, 49

<sup>57</sup> Lacher, Hannes (2006), p 88

<sup>58</sup> see for example Bruce-Hall, 1999

unclear in how far one can subsume the *nationalization* of the political under the same ‘logic’. For, despite the fact that the ‘national’ is seen as determining the concrete spatial expression of political (capitalist) modernity, its origins are nevertheless mostly relegated to an artificial (by)product of modernisation:

What can be called the ‘Modernist’ mainstream in the literature on Nationalism<sup>59</sup>, includes amongst others, Ernest Gellner (1983), Eric Hobsbawm (1991), Moroslav Hroch (1968), Benedict Anderson (1983) and Tom Nairn (1981, 1997). For them the rise of national societies is inextricably linked to the spread of industrial society (Ernest Gellner), print capitalism (Benedict Anderson) and uneven capitalist development (Tom Nairn). Nairn’s emphasis is on a ‘reactive’ form of nationalism as a defensive mechanism of the ‘sufferers’ of capitalist development. Nationalism, thus, appears as a project to consolidate state development territorially in the form of the nation-state:

“Capitalism, even as it spread remorselessly over the world to unify human society into one more or less connected story for the first time, also engendered a perilous and convulsive new fragmentation of that society. The socio-historical cost of this rapid implantation of capitalism into the world society was nationalism’. There was no other conceivable fashion in which the process could have occurred”<sup>60</sup>.

This, most prominently puts capitalist development at the centre stage of an explanation for the territorial/national fragmentation of the modern world. Benedict Anderson’s arguments about the consequences of the introduction of a capitalist print-media enterprise looking for, and consequently, creating, a market of literate, nationally educated “citizens” is slightly more elusive about its association with capitalist development.<sup>61</sup> Thus, it was print-capitalism which has created common vernaculars so as to create a market for its products. The profit motive and the stimulation of demand are, therefore, the central aspects of his argument. Ernest Gellner seems even less comfortable with the notion of capitalist development. He mobilises the term ‘industrial society’ instead which, to him, had required a common high culture for another reason: National culture was “no longer merely the adornment, confirmation and legitimation of a social order which was also sustained by harsher and coercive constraints; culture is now the necessary shared medium, the life-blood perhaps rather the minimal shared atmosphere, within which alone the members of the society can breathe and survive and

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<sup>59</sup> I abstain from engaging with the primordial counter-argument at this point as I uncritically accept the modernists’ fundamental premise about the artificial and historically specific character of nations.

<sup>60</sup> Nairn, Tom (1981): *The Break-up of Britain – crisis and neo-nationalism*, London: Verso, p 341, see also: Nairn, Tom (1997): *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited*, London: Verso;

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, Benedict (1983): *Imagined Communities – Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso

produce”.<sup>62</sup> For Gellner, however, it is not merely facilitating exchange and the sophistication of production which require means of communication provided for only by nationalism that make it a phenomenon so specific to the ‘industrial society’. It also fulfils a socio-psychological function. It was the ‘freeing’ of the individual that necessitated new forms of social cohesion after it left its stationary and heritable position in the pre-modern society. Dislocating the subject in an abrupt and violent exposure to the impersonal relations of the market as the environment within which it would have to reproduce itself has left individuals instantaneously vulnerable to the contradictions and existential and epistemological insecurities of the modern world. This can ultimately cause a crisis of the subject, with all its potential political, social and economic reverberations. These dangers had to be averted by the creation of a superimposed, collective social identity. This, then, was done by evoking ‘nationalist’ myths, history and language. Thus, it is not only a certain degree of cultural (if not necessarily ethnic) homogeneity that serves the functional needs of the industrial society. Society itself requires, as the state is depersonalised into an abstract bureaucratic structure, a bonding agent. Nationalism is, therefore, only a requirement for the operating ‘social’ logic of industrial capitalism insofar as we assume to be modern, abstract sovereignty to be an integral part to it. This approach moves beyond Benedict Anderson’s emphasis on nationalism as the distinctive ‘ideology’ of secular society and his reading of nationalism as a neo-religion. The end of personal dynastic relations also meant the end to the divine justification of political power. However, it was precisely the superimposition of a religious value-system, codified in the Peace of Augsburg’s *cuius regio eius religio* principle which used to provide subjects with their static space in society. The new secular source of political subjectivity of nationalism was then meant to fill the gap, the relative decline of religion as the typically dynastic ruling ideology had left open by creating new forms of collective identities.

The onset of capitalist modernity if by that we mean the emanation of Hobsbawm’s Dual Revolution as the pre-condition for the universalisation of a system of free de-personalised aterritorial market-relations and the consolidation of abstract ‘Hobbesian contender states’<sup>63</sup> through a series of revolutions from above was matched by the ‘nationalisation’ of the cultural and linguistic determination of political rule for the purpose of galvanising these societies. Nationalism, therefore, is conceptualised as the cultural backbone of socialisation programmes substantiating Gerschenkronian projects to catch-up– themselves triggered by the uneven and combined development of capitalism. Whilst this might sound like a

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<sup>62</sup> Gellner, Ernest (1983): *Nations and Nationalisms - New Perspectives on the Past*, Oxford: Blackwell, p 37

<sup>63</sup> Van der Pijl, 1998

simplification of the plurality of theories of nationalism, most of them portray capitalism and nationalism as intrinsically interlinked by their developmental path into the totality of an inevitably unfolding homogenous international modernity. Thus, whilst this discourse is indeed very helpful in order to understand the ways in which nationalist ideology is reproduced, it doesn't provide an argument about the initial historical moment of social/national differentiation. Furthermore, it remains problematic that most of these theories do not incorporate a notion of International Relations for the emergence of nationalism, nor do they problematise sufficiently the ways in which this matters to questions of political sovereignty more generally. In this way the neglect of IR theories of the nationalism literature is mirrored by the neglect of theorists of nationalism of problems of multiple state-formation and the influence of Geopolitics more generally. Neither of these approaches in and of themselves, nor their (fruitful) combination seems to be able to reveal the interconnection between capitalist, nationalist and (geo)political manifestations of Modernity. With regards to the Middle East, there is even a bigger problem, however: The advent of Nationalism in the light of an evident absence of capitalist development. Equally, a noteworthy bourgeois or Middle Class movement was either absent or had no grievance with the Ottoman administration. If anything, as Albert Hourani observes, their situation deteriorated with the spread of capitalism in Europe: "... the old merchant class lost much of its power and prosperity, with the opening of the Red Sea to steam navigation in the middle of the nineteenth century, even before the Suez Canal was made, and the growth of the large-scale trade in cotton with Europe, which was almost entirely in the hands of European Christians or Jews".<sup>64</sup> These observations lead Elie Kedourie to state that the suggestion of a causal connection between capitalism and nationalism altogether "...is a manifest absurdity, since all the evidence shows that nationalism is not a 'reflection' of the capitalist mode of production, and that it can occur in societies which have the most varied social and economic structures".<sup>65</sup>

What we have established here then is the lack of a theoretically convincing approach which is capable of reconciling the emergence of the national character of rule, its Weberian territorial form and the capitalist mode of production. This complex Modernity, therefore, defies notions of a unilinear trajectory towards a global capitalist/modernist functionally

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<sup>64</sup> Hourani (1968), p 55f

<sup>65</sup> Kedourie, 142

coherent totality.<sup>66</sup> What is required, instead, then, is the dissociation of capitalism and other forms of modernity and an investigation into their socio-historical origins within historically and geographically specific, if by no means isolated contexts. This is what I will attempt to do in the following pages by historically reconstructing Ottoman decline and the rise of Nationalism in the Middle East.

### **Ottoman decline and the emergence of modern national sovereignties**

#### *'Unity of the Diverse': the Ottoman polity as the proto-cosmopolitan state*

In order to understand the emergence of regional power centres in a state conventionally characterized by its high level of centralisation, I will first briefly outline the original provincial order of the Empire and its mode of 'soft' conquest. This is also important, for if so many explanations focus on the ethno-linguistic variety of the 'Sick Man of Europe' as *the* reason for his decline, it is important to look at the social origins of this diversity. The following section will, therefore, provide an overview over the Ottoman social formation and its mode of reproduction. This will reveal that, contrary to the view of the 'despotic other' or the big anomaly illegitimately superimposing an 'Asiatic Mode of Production' on to naturally 'dynamic' societies, the late Ottoman Empire was a social formation which had many similarities to European development. Whilst Perry Anderson is right to state that there was no formal institution of feudalism, we can observe the development of locally and regionally increasingly autonomous power-centres at least from the sixteenth century onwards. This leads me to believe that Chris Wickham's 'theory of Global feudalism' provides some fertile ground to develop a less Orientalist reading of Ottoman decline and nation-state formation which actually provides for more similarities than dissimilarities.<sup>67</sup>

Generally speaking, the Ottoman polity was structured according to a binary model<sup>68</sup> the central organs of which were the so-called *timars* which were small landholdings and the *sanjaks* as administrative districts with a local governor, a so-called *bey*, as their head. The *Re'aya* (direct producers) were not tied to the land in the same way they were in Europe as "it was, in fine, the Sultan's will alone that decided a man's status in society".<sup>69</sup> Equally, all

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<sup>66</sup> For a discussion see: Wood, Ellen (1997): Modernity, postmodernity or capitalism?, in: [Review of International Political Economy](#), Volume 4, Issue 3, pages 539 – 560, see also Lacher (2006), Chapter 6

<sup>67</sup> Wickham, Chris (1985): "The Uniqueness of the East," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 12:2, 3, pp. 186-87.

<sup>68</sup> For a good overview see Inalcik 1954 and 1964

<sup>69</sup> Inalcik, Halil (1964): The Nature of Traditional Society – Turkey, in: Ward, Robert E. and Rustow, Dankwart A.: *Political Modernisation in Japan and Turkey*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 44

ownership of land lay with the sultan and land-use was, consequently, granted at most for the lifetime to the quasi-lord, the *timariot*. On top of the rent payable in kind, the timar-holder had to provide military service to the Sultan. “As a rule *sipâhis* (cavalrymen) who composed the main force of the Ottoman army were given timars in the villages throughout the newly conquered country”.<sup>70</sup> Property could neither be accumulated (other than by the Sultan himself) nor inherited which ensured the unchallenged power-base of the Sultan. The maintenance of this power base was the main responsibility of the local *bey* administrators, who were only answerable to the Sultan directly. They had to control and enforce a strictly regulated tax regime which tightly fixed the level of surplus-extraction from the peasants. The ideological base of this land-regime could be found in Islamic law. Thus, even though there were several categories of land-ownership, which also provided the *ulema* (the clergy, consisting of medrese teachers, kadi judges and imams) with holdings, like waqf land, the Sultan retained a divine, not only political, but also economic authority onto which the whole socio-political fabric was based and which eventually also provided the foundation for the defence of his empire. The beys tried to maintain a delicate local balance of power: “As part of Istanbul’s effort to prevent the growth of autonomous structures in the provinces, [the governor] sought to create more effective checks and balances among local notables, Janissary garrisons, Bedouins, and tribes”.<sup>71</sup> This policy of keeping the periphery relatively powerless by implementing a system of checks and balances had ensured the maintenance of a tight control on taxation and income throughout the periphery whilst at the same time upholding a precarious balance of power between direct producers and (temporary) overlords. It provided social as well as fiscal stability and the *sipâhi* cavalry who, together with the infamous Janissary slave soldiers, provided the backbone of Ottoman military might. This socio-economic structure prevented the constitution of a hereditary semi-feudal local ruling class with a power-base independent of the centre, as “the ‘*askeri* [ruling class] were not an aristocratic class with historically established rights, but membership of it was contingent upon the will of the sultan”<sup>72</sup>. This is why the conventionally held assumption about the absence of feudalism in Ottoman lands was established.

However, *timars* were not just the formal means through which geopolitical accumulation took place. They could also be obtained by newly conquered local rulers, subject to appropriate bribes to Ottoman officials: “The Ottomans preserved to a great extent the land-holding rights of these [conquered] people in the form of timar or bashtina. Thus, the great

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<sup>70</sup> Inalcik, Halil (1954): Ottoman Methods of Conquest, in: *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 2, 107

<sup>71</sup> Quartaet, Donald (2000): *The Ottoman Empire, 1700 – 1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 104

<sup>72</sup> Inalcik 1954, 112

families of the Balkans, for example, (seigneurs, voyvods) frequently retained the greater part of their patrimonies as great Ottoman timar-holders, and when they adopted Islam they took the title of *bey* and were eligible for attaining the highest administrative posts”.<sup>73</sup> Thus, Ottoman rule in the conquered, culturally ‘different’ parts left the social structures, if not untouched, at least in tact: “While they introduced their own administrative system they continued to work mainly through existing leaders”.<sup>74</sup> For these local leaders, on the other hand, “the *timar* system did not necessarily mean a revolutionary change in the former social and economic order [of the newly acquired territories]. It was in fact a conservative reconciliation of local conditions and classes with Ottoman institutions which aimed at gradual assimilation”.<sup>75</sup> The rationale behind this form of soft conquest was, of course, not only to extract bribes in exchange for new positions as an additional source of revenue. Merging the Ottoman land-regime with existing social hierarchies provided the Ottomans with a very efficient and cost-effective system of governance in the periphery. Surprisingly, even the newly co-opted landlords could benefit from their own defeat in this way: This “slow process of integration of the different elements in the conquered lands by one unified centralist administration under an absolute ruler”,<sup>76</sup> also provided the existing Balkan landlords with many advantages over the insecurities of feudal overlapping and continuously contested sovereignty or Arab nomadic territorial instability that had preceded the arrival of the Ottomans: “Seeing that their position and lands were effectively guaranteed by the strong Ottoman administration, the majority of these Christian soldiers might not have been averse to the change”.<sup>77</sup> The Ottoman social formation, far from constituting the famously discussed Oriental Despotism,<sup>78</sup> provided for a comparatively laissez-faire regime of ‘soft’ and gradual assimilation after the outright physical occupation which allowed for a harmonious cohabitation of culturally diverse people. Stavrianos sums up the sophistication of the Ottoman land regime: “Indeed, its outstanding feature was strict control of the sipahis so that they could neither exploit the re’ayas [primary producers] nor defy the state. During the early years of Ottoman rule, when this timar system was in its prime, the re’ayas enjoyed security and justice. But by the end of the sixteenth century the system began to break down...”<sup>79</sup> It is

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<sup>73</sup> Inalcik 1954, 115

<sup>74</sup> Sugar, Peter F. (1977): *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354 – 1804*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 237

<sup>75</sup> Inalcik 1954, 103

<sup>76</sup> Inalcik 1954, 122

<sup>77</sup> Inalcik 1954, 115

<sup>78</sup> See: Wittfogel, Karl (1954): *Oriental despotism : a comparative study of total power*, Yale: Yale University Press

<sup>79</sup> Stavrianos, L. S. (1953): *The Balkans since 1453*, Austin: Holt, 139

this break down of order, its causes and its consequences in the sixteenth century that will have central implications for the transition into national polities. This we will turn to now.

*Ottoman Decline, Secessions and Modernisation: historical conjuncture in the eighteenth century*

The limitation of its territorial expansion after the famously failed second siege of Vienna in 1683 is, as we have seen, frequently described as the ‘death sentence’ of the Empire. Indeed it was followed by a period of internal crises and external challenges. It saw “population growth, the spread of handguns, the influx of foreign silver, and the aggressive trading practices of European merchants all combined, in varying degrees (the exact part each of these factors played in the history of decline is still hotly debated)”.<sup>80</sup> As there was no professional fiscal or budgetary policy which could have reacted with a currency-devaluation<sup>81</sup> or similarly informed measures, this crisis culminated in a stagnation of imperial income due to the end of territorial enlargement combined with demographic growth. The Empire further went from a position of territorial stagnation to one of retreat. The first territorial losses on the Balkans were internationally sanctioned in the Peace treaties of Karlowitz with Austria in 1699 and later at Passarowitz with Austria and Venice in 1718. The greatest geopolitical challenge throughout the Empire’s history remained Russia though. From the late seventeenth century onwards, the hostilities between the Ottomans and the Tzar were almost uninterrupted until the Empire’s surrender by the end of the First World War. During this period of intensified geopolitical pressure from Russia as well as from Austria “the obsolescence of the Ottoman military apparatus became apparent”.<sup>82</sup> Due to this desperate situation in matters of defence, the old forms of Ottoman rule in the periphery started to become equally dysfunctional and the need to reform the old system became increasingly evident:

“At the same time that the central state was losing its ability to reward retainers with land, it underwent a long decline in its ability to maintain revenue levels (...) To solve this problem, the state turned to tax farming which ultimately resulted in the quasiprivatization of imperial land”.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, in order to meet the short-term rise in demand for soldiers as a result of military defeats, the Porte could no longer solely rely on the cavalry of the *timar*-holders, the standing army of Janissaries (which were concentrated in and around Istanbul and which were personal slaves

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<sup>80</sup> Abou-El-Haj, Rifa’at ’Ali, 21; it is worth noting at this point that all of these factors constitute an influence from wider world-political changes.

<sup>81</sup> The influx of foreign silver was mostly due to discoveries in the Americas; for a discussion of the relevance of this event see: Pamuk, Sevket (2001): *The Price Revolution in the Ottoman Empire reconsidered*, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33: 69-89

<sup>82</sup> Kasaba, Reşat (1988): *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy – The Nineteenth Century*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 15f

<sup>83</sup> Wallerstein, I. (1989), 172

of the Sultan) and “ordered the provincial administrators to form mercenary units equipped with firearms”<sup>84</sup>, so-called *sekban* troops. As the maintenance of these *sekban* troops was merely the responsibility of the local elites, they were able to raise the level of taxation from the *re’aya* class of direct producers the restrictions to which had been lifted by the Sultan. This led to the emergence of what Sadat calls “the most significant innovations of the late eighteenth century, (...) the rise to power of a group of urban notables known as *Âyân*”.<sup>85</sup> These novel landlords enjoyed unprecedented independence compared to their *timariot* predecessors as they were able to accumulate property freely, set levels of taxation themselves and establish trade links independently of the central administration - all as a reward for their increased military services. Thus, “by the time this war had ended, the Ottomans lacked the power to displace local leaders, particularly those who had supported the Sultan during the war”.<sup>86</sup> This loss of central authority facilitated the creation of large land-holdings, so-called *çiftlik*s which did not only differ in terms of size, but more importantly in terms of autonomy in matters of taxation and trade. *Ciftlik*s were, from a strict shari’a point of view, illegal forms of factually private property. State land (*miri*) was appropriated by the *Âyân*, which – amongst other things – involved a “shift from taxation in kind to taxation in cash”<sup>87</sup>. The ability to raise the levels of surplus-extraction from the peasants without the Sultan’s endorsement was, in part also thought to be caused by the big gains to be had from ‘production for the world market’. As well as making these landholdings at least unofficially hereditary this put this rising landed class into a very powerful position, not least economically:

“The continuous increase in the prices of agricultural commodities, pushed upward by Western prices, made possible great profits in foodstuffs. In search of these profits, the farmers-general extracted as much as possible by means of fraudulent administration and excessive exploitation of the peasants. Their success gave birth to a class of *nouveaux riches*, of obscure origin and aspirations, oriented toward the countryside”.<sup>88</sup>

If we perceive these new, market-oriented landed classes to constitute something like an incipient bourgeoisie, also more orthodox historical materialist arguments about the origins of domestic social change seem to win in explanatory potential.

The creation of large, hereditary estates and the quasi-privatisation of *miri* (state) land, left the central government in a dilemmatic position between the increasingly challenging power

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<sup>84</sup> Kasaba and Wallerstein (1983), 344

<sup>85</sup> Sadat, Deena R. (1972): Rumeli Ayanlari: The Eighteenth Century, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 346-363, 346

<sup>86</sup> Sugar, 237

<sup>87</sup> Abou-El-Haj, 15

<sup>88</sup> Barkan, Ömer Lütfi (1975): The Price Revolution of the Sixteenth Century, in: *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 6, p 26

from within and the need to defend the Empire from external enemies. Thus, “while the central bureaucrats could keep their representatives under some semblance of control though frequent rotation and by playing different officials against each other, there was little they could do to curb the expanding power and influence of the Âyân”.<sup>89</sup> In other words, geo-political competition has caused, what some scholars call the re-feudalisation of the Ottoman Empire<sup>90</sup>, which was empowering the countryside to unprecedented levels, almost comparable to the ‘parcellised sovereignty’ of feudal Europe. As a result of these developments, the Sultanate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries found itself in a similar position towards the Âyân as Goethe’s sorcerer’s apprentice towards his broom: “*Die ich rief, die Geister, Werd ich nun nicht los*”.<sup>91</sup>

#### *Neo-Absolutist Restoration or Modernisation?*

The central government started to react under Selim III who was enthroned in the year of the French Revolution. His most important achievement was the creation of a new, modern standing army. However, “the term ‘*Nizam-i Cedid*’ (new order) is generally applied to the entire spectrum of reforms introduced during Selim III's reign (1789-1807)”.<sup>92</sup> The creation of a new army which did not rely on either the landed classes or the increasingly unruly, sect-like Jannissary slave-corps, who had also started to develop vested interests for the Sultan, was designed to restore his absolutist powers under the Shar’ia law: “Already during this period of decline, the Sultan and his bureaucracy, who sensed immediate danger to the state from outside, adopted the idea of reform, although they thought of it as a reform along traditional lines”.<sup>93</sup> Thus, despite employing military techniques borrowed from the West, Selim III, as Peter Sugar describes, “was not a ‘westernizer’ in the sense of accepting western values. (...) He realized (...) that (...) the Ottoman Empire would be unable to resist Russian and Austrian encroachment because of its relative technical, and in particular military, backwardness. This realization made the Sultan a limited technological ‘modernizer’”.<sup>94</sup> From a military point of view, this makes him a revolutionary. Not, however, from a state-philosophical point of view, as his ultimate goal was the restoration of the central, i.e. his own, power, and not ideological convictions of some kind. Consequently both, Sultan Selim

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<sup>89</sup> Kasaba (1988): 15

<sup>90</sup> On this see: Berktaş, Halil (1991): *The Other Feudalism*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Birmingham University, UK

<sup>91</sup> Spirits that I've cited/My commands ignore

<sup>92</sup> Shaw 1965: The Origins of Ottoman Military Reform: The Nizam-I Cedid Army of Sultan Selim III, in: *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 37, No. 3, p 292

<sup>93</sup> Inalcik, 1964, 45

<sup>94</sup> Sugar, 245

III (1789 – 1807) who fell victim to a coup d'état by an unsurprisingly rebellious coalition of Jannisaries and Âyâns and later Mahmut II (1808–39)<sup>95</sup> followed the agenda of restoring their personal power. In this sense, it seems as if the Sultanate's reforms didn't change anything about the personalised relations of domination, as its ultimate goal was not the renewal and implementation of a newly enlightened de-personalised form of rule or new political subjectivity, or a project, to speak with Marx, of primitive capitalist accumulation, but simply the preservation of the old regime in the centre whatever the cost or method. However, patrimonial rule was eventually compromised upon in the *hatt-i-sherif* rescript of Gülhane which inaugurated the *Tanzimat* era in 1839. This more radically modernising agenda emerges on the political scene together with a consolidated land registry in 1847, the citizenship law of 1856, which turned the Sultan's subjects into Ottoman citizens, and finally the new land code in 1858 which for the first time legally (if not always factually) institutionalised private property. These laws, whilst rightly described as being a product of Western diplomatic lobbying and political pressure, were nevertheless designed by the members of a Western educated 'modern' native Ottoman bureaucracy, who were at the time the local agents of social change – from above!

Thus, we don't have to wait for territorial fragmentation and national secession to occur, therefore to be able to describe these reforms as a "pre-emptive state formation in a pro-Western fashion".<sup>96</sup> The Ottoman reaction is, therefore, best understood as what Hans-Ulrich Wehler describes as projects of 'defensive modernisation'<sup>97</sup> rather than the emergence of a truly 'enlightened' leader<sup>98</sup>. Defensive in this case, however does not only imply the rather obvious geopolitical dimension but also internal power-contenders who have intensified their conflict with the Sultanate in the light of increasing (especially fiscal) centralisation efforts. This assertion can be supported by the fact that the most far-reaching reforms were, whilst always executed by an increasingly professional Western-educated

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<sup>95</sup> Mustafa IV (1807–08) had been brought in after a coup d'état by a coalition of dissenting Jannisaries and âyâns as an interim-solution but was later replaced by the equally reform-oriented Mahmut II.

<sup>96</sup> Bromley, Simon (1994): *Rethinking Middle East Politics*, London: Verso, p 104

<sup>97</sup> This term stems from the Bielefeld school historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler, who used it to describe the formation and subsequent modernisation of the Prusso-German Empire: Wehler, H.U. (1985): *The German Empire 1871 - 1918*, Leamington Sap/Dover, New Hampshire: Berg. According to his argument, the aristocratic, semi-feudal elites maintain the atavistic social structure, i.e. their own social power by allowing economic development to a degree that satisfies the bourgeoisie in a way that makes it compromising on their liberal political agenda. "Defensive Modernisation", thus describes the channelling of rising class-power, most importantly the bourgeoisie but later also the proletariat is junior partners in the modernisation project under the auspices of the aristocratic ruling class. Despite 'defending' the atavistic structures against potential internal enemies, this, however, also meant defending against an external threat. This second, external dimension is of much greater importance for the case under investigation here.

<sup>98</sup> Even though Selim's year of accession to the throne, 1789, would suggest just that

bureaucracy<sup>99</sup> carried out under the reactionary decrees of Abdülhamid II (1876 - 1909) in the late nineteenth century. However, apart from the Sultan's firm grip on power, the continuous reform efforts had also created a new class of state officials who acted increasingly independent from the Sultan. According to I.E. Petrosyan, it was the emulation of Western statecraft by this new class then that ultimately led to the subordination of the divine legitimacy of the Caliphate<sup>100</sup> under the secular legitimacy of the newly invented *Ottoman* nationalism<sup>101</sup>: "These [Tanzimat Reforms] were designed to achieve political centralization, the improvement of social and economic conditions, and the promotion of a sense of 'Ottomanism' among all the peoples of the Empire".<sup>102</sup>

Yet, do these reform efforts constitute sufficient evidence to legitimately pre-date the process of political modernisation and with it the separation of the political from the economic to the pre-nationalist/Ottomanist period? The answer must be clearly no, since regardless of the fact that private property laws were introduced, the Sultan not only retained all land rights, but used the phase of intensified modernisation to re-appropriate property rights to the above mentioned rise of semi-aristocratic local elites. Thus, what seems to be *raison d'état* remained *raison de prince* or rather *raison de sultan*. This does not however, by method of exclusion, lead to *a priori* assumptions about the modern character of post-Ottoman nation-states, as the following will show.

### *Backwardness and national secession*

As we have seen, local nobles "owed most of their wealth and influence to the fiscal and administrative anarchy that reigned in the Ottoman Empire",<sup>103</sup> their resistance against the centralising efforts of the Porte hardly surprises. "What the 'dynasties' wanted, in fact, was precisely to assure themselves of a degree of autonomy incompatible with a centralist and progressive government"<sup>104</sup> and they, for that reason, "resisted any innovation that might

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<sup>99</sup> See for a detailed study of this movement and its intellectual underpinnings: Mardin, Serif (1962): *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, Princeton, Princeton University Press

<sup>100</sup> The spiritual institution of the Caliphate can have its origin in Realpolitik even prior to the reform movement: Abdülhamid I had only started assuming the title of the Caliph to counter a provision in the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. The victorious Catherine the Great had claimed spiritual authority over all Orthodox Christian subjects within the Ottoman Empire. The title of the Caliph theoretically entailed a similar claim with regards to the Tzar's Muslim subjects.

<sup>101</sup> Petrosyan, I.E. (1980): On the Motive Forces of the Reformist and Constitutionalist Movement in the Ottoman Empire, in: Bacqué-Grammont, Jean-Louis and Dumont, Paul (eds.): *Économie et Sociétés dans l'Empire Ottoman*, Paris, pp 13-23, see also: Trimberger, Ellen Kay (1978): *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru*, New Brunswick

<sup>102</sup> Inalcik 1964, 53

<sup>103</sup> Kasaba, p 85

<sup>104</sup> Inalcik 1964, 53

disturb their vested interests”.<sup>105</sup> It was not until the social power-base as well as substantial sources of income of these local groups were to be threatened by the centre’s modernising efforts that nationalist tendencies with a clear political agenda of secession emerged. As Inalcik points out: “Obviously, these regulations were well designed to offend every vested interest in the realm, and the results were predictable”.<sup>106</sup> He continues to establish the relation between the preservation of provincial power and the rise of nationalism more succinctly: “In 1812 (...) immediately after the conclusion of the peace treaty with Russia, Mahmud began to suppress the principal *Âyân* in the provinces. (...) But in 1821 Tepedelenli Ali Pasha, the most powerful among the pashas of *Âyân* origin, raised truly massive resistance. The Greek insurrection followed his revolt”.<sup>107</sup> Thus, nationalist projects seem to have emerged only in response to the Porte’s attempts of bringing this power vacuum to an end. “Thus began the next round of peripheral nationalism in the remaining Balkan provinces under central control”.<sup>108</sup> These ‘rounds of peripheral nationalism’, thus spread throughout the other provinces of the Empire, even though it is worth noting that Arab nationalism did not only come last in a line of secessions but was also the least developed altogether prior to the First World War: “The pre-war Arab movement in Syria was an opposition movement among the notables that remained a minority movement until the end of the war, when the majority, hitherto Ottomanist, converted to Arabism”.<sup>109</sup>

This explanation sounds convincing and squares neatly with Eric Hobsbawm’s argument about the need for a material underpinning of any proto-nationalist movement.<sup>110</sup> Thus, rather than providing the lynchpin for modern (Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Arab, etc.) vs. pre-modern (Ottoman) sovereignty, post-Ottoman nationalist agents were much more concerned with the preservation of their respective privileges which used to be, as has been shown, coerced and ensured by the Ottoman ‘patrimonial’ umbrella, which had now turned against them in the Ottoman modernizers’ attempt to pursue a ‘revolution from above’ from the late eighteenth century onwards.<sup>111</sup> Sandra Halperin, leaning on Arno Mayers’ *Persistence of the*

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>106</sup> Sadat, p. 359

<sup>107</sup> Inalcik 1964, pp 53-54

<sup>108</sup> Hechter, Michael (2000): *Containing Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 74

<sup>109</sup> Dawn, Ernest C. Ernest C. Dawn (1991): *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, in: Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon: *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, p 16

<sup>110</sup> Hobsbawm Eric (1990): *Nations and nationalism since 1780 : programme, myth, reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>111</sup> For a study of the later Turkish success in the project of authoritarian social transformation read: Trimberger, Elen (1978): *Revolution from Above - military bureaucrats and development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru*, Transaction Books

*Old Regime*<sup>112</sup>, argues that indeed, “nineteenth-century European nation-states (...) inaugurated the rule of the traditional nobility”.<sup>113</sup> For her, nationalism was neither a ‘liberal’ mass movement, nor the project of a rising bourgeoisie, or a professional bureaucratic state-class, but one of the old semi-feudal landed nobility as a reaction “to a growing autonomy of absolutist states and to monarchical attempts to rationalize and liberalize state structures”<sup>114</sup> as a result of externally conditioned pressures to reform. Both the extensive and failed Habsburg reform agenda under Franz Joseph, most powerfully opposed by the Magyar aristocracy, as well as the Ottoman *Tanzimat* are prominent and telling examples. What is proposed here instead is described by Michael Hechter as ‘peripheral nationalism’: “The sequence of peripheral nationalism in the Ottoman Empire follows the timing of the imposition of direct rule. Direct rule was first imposed in the western provinces and last in the eastern ones. Wherever there was sufficient cultural homogeneity to foster territorial solidarity, peripheral nationalism often followed suit”.<sup>115</sup> In the case of the Ottoman Empire it was in a seigniorial reaction whose power had emerged from the geopolitical malaise of the Empire, where nationalist agency is located. This also explains why the Balkan provinces broke away first: Rather than reflecting a higher degree of underlying cultural and linguistic difference, it was here where the Empire initially concentrated its modernisation efforts. Arab nationalism, on the other hand, followed later, even though it followed a similar logic: The greater the centralization efforts of the Young Turks and their predecessors, the stronger the reaction which meant that, according to Albert Hourani “in some ways indeed the influence of the notables was even strengthened in the first phase of the Tanzimat...” whilst equally “...it seems that the view of the new Turkish officials as innovators, almost infidels, sharpened the perception that they were Turks..” Altogether Hourani contends, “...the long tradition of leadership by the local a’yan and ‘ulama was too strong to be broken...”<sup>116</sup> by a modernising, increasingly confrontational bureaucracy.

However, as the origins and the reasons for the intensification of this ‘domestic’ centre-periphery conflict<sup>117</sup> are to be found within the wider intra-societal environment of the Ottoman Empire, namely an intensified geopolitical competition between the Sultan and his neighbours, the turn to an approach that is capable of furnishing the international and the

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<sup>112</sup> Mayer, Arno J. (1981): *The Persistence of the Old Regime :Europe to the Great War*, London: Croom Helm

<sup>113</sup> Halperin (1997), p 53

<sup>114</sup> Halperin (1997), p 53

<sup>115</sup> Hechter, Michael (2000): *Containing Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 76

<sup>116</sup> Hourani, 1968, p 62

<sup>117</sup> Serif Mardin elaborates on the centrality of this conflict for an understanding the Ottoman/Turkish transition in: Mardin, Şerif (1973): Center-Periphery Relations: A Key To Turkish Politics?, in *Daedalus*, no. 102

‘domestic’ social relations without reducing one of them to an outcome of the other, seems inevitable. Orthodox Marxist interpretations with their emphasis on economically determined social change, either in form of bourgeois revolutions, or in the form of World System functionalisms, fail to satisfy this purpose. They cannot accommodate historical and regional specificities involved in this process. Not least, by overlooking the Sultanate as a centre of ‘enlightened absolutism’ and bureaucratic reform, they “deny (...) the many opportunities available (...) for first theorizing and then evaluating the potential experiments in multiethnic and multireligious coexistence in the social organization of early modern times as alternated models of social and political organisation”<sup>118</sup> as projected by the concept of Ottomanism. In the same way Ottoman rule is misrepresented as inherently anachronistic, the subsequent nationalist state-building projects are usually taken to indicate a true modernisation of sovereignty. However, they were not the political result of liberal Enlightenment projects or popular uprisings, as Elie Kedourie reminds us, “in fact, it is these countries which most clearly show that nationalism and liberalism are far from being twins are really antagonistic principles.”<sup>119</sup>

Given the now identified social origins of nationalism, they mostly aimed at the reformulation of landed power into a form of authoritarian rule, which, instead of ‘liberating’ the respective societies from the ‘yoke of Ottoman domination’, created at least equally authoritarian and intolerant and anachronistic regimes. Nationalistic projects follow equally, if not even more so, archaic tendencies as, perceivedly, the Sultanate itself. This goes to show that “the standard evaluations of Ottoman ‘backwardness’ are exaggerated when applied to the end of the eighteenth century”<sup>120</sup> in the same measure as the novel nationalisms’ backwardness is commonly downplayed. As Kitromilides points out: “The greatest loser in this, paradoxically, was the very idea of civil liberty which had to a considerable degree originally inspired the modernising vision”.<sup>121</sup> Lastly, the rise of the new landed power, as we have seen, was only pre-determined by the shift in the geopolitical location of the Ottoman Empire in the same way the secessions could only be successful with the sanctioning or the aid of the Great Powers.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the United Kingdom remained initially very reluctant to accept the Greek’s cause for independence in the same way they saw an Arab uprising as a last resort: The geopolitical environment in form of the Great Powers, with the

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<sup>118</sup> Abou-El-Haj, Rifa’at ’Ali, 63

<sup>119</sup> Kedourie, 1993, p 104

<sup>120</sup> Sugar (1997), 282

<sup>121</sup> Kitromilides, Paschalis M. (1993): Modernization as an ideological dilemma in south-eastern Europe: from national revival to liberal reconstruction, in: *The Southeast European Yearbook 1992*, Athens: ELIAMEP

exception of Russia, prior to World War I had no desire to implement a novel territorial layout of the Middle East and had relied on the Pax Ottomanica as a way of maintaining regional 'order'. As a matter of fact, the Empire had been formally acknowledged as a European power by 1856 as after the Crimean War. This is significant insofar as it meant the formal recognition of a non-European, and, more strikingly, an 'Islamic' country to what was by definition an exclusively Christian association. Here we see the Primat der Aussenpolitik gaining significantly in importance. The Pax Ottomanica, therefore, can be seen as the Southeastern branch of the Pax Britannica. It remains difficult, therefore to assume a reproductive capacity of an international system which set out to preserve the Empire, if only as a power vacuum, as the constitutive force behind the post-Ottoman states system.

### *Revisiting 'international determinism'*

This leads us back to the historical sociological approaches discussed above, which, overly simplified, propose just that kind of 'international determinism': Orthodox Marxist interpretations with their emphasis on economically determined social change, either in form of bourgeois revolutions, or in the form of World System functionalisms, fail to recognize the historical specificities involved in this process. They, as Theda Skocpol puts it, attempt "to treat state forms and 'strength' (e.g., centralization and bureaucratization) as simple functions of societies' class structures and positions in the world-capitalist economic division of labour."<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, assigning agency exclusively and uniformly to a supposedly all-pervasive bourgeoisie, orthodox historical materialist explanations obscure the view on the preceding rise of local power and assign agency to a sometimes even non-existing social strata. As Sugar points out, rather than being a liberation struggle against the anachronistic Turkish overlord, "most confrontations leading to civil strife result from the dissatisfaction of those who have no share in the political and economic decision-making process. (...) Those who fought each other [in the Ottoman Empire] were all members of the ruling group, with the great difference that one faction belonged to it by virtue of its position and power while the other simply claimed the right to be part of the ruling elite".<sup>123</sup>

At this point, the Ottoman case appears to be a clear win for the geopolitical competition model: increasing international military pressure eventually triggers an inevitable process of protracted imperial decline: "The Russian-Ottoman wars of 1768-74 and 1787-92, ending in defeat for the Ottomans, undermined considerably the authority of the central

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<sup>122</sup> Skocpol (1973), 31

<sup>123</sup> Sugar, p 235

government. It facilitated at the top the emergence of the *ayans* as *de facto* rulers of various areas and enabled them to contend for power”.<sup>124</sup> It seems that the re-course to geopolitical competition provides, in this case at least, for a more satisfactory account of Ottoman decline than World Systems explanations as the origins of the social transformation appear to have been of a purely geopolitical nature. However, its result was not, as Neo-Weberian historical sociology predicts, a consolidation of political power in the centre through the creation of a modern standing army on a sound fiscal basis for it. Instead of consolidating the Ottoman political fabric, geo-political competition has caused what some historians call the feudalisation of the Ottoman Empire,<sup>125</sup> empowering the countryside to an unprecedented degree, almost comparable to pre-modern Europe. The conflict between the periphery and the centre escalated as a result of the centralising efforts from Selim III onwards and culminated in the Tanzimat. It is this social struggle over the sources of revenue, unaccounted for by the Neo-Weberian literature of state formation that explains the creation of a multitude of states rather than the selective capacity of the international system. Thus, even though this is not to argue for a direct uninterrupted line of agency and vested interest from local notables to nationalist elites, one can still observe the unintended social consequences of their unmediated exercise of novel economic powers. More importantly, national revolts, whichever form they took, were specific results of geographically diversified and historically peculiar forms of social struggles over power and revenue. An emphasis on the modernising dynamic mediated through geopolitical pressures emanating from Western Europe cannot accommodate these local, regional and ‘national’ developments. As Benno Teschke points out: “While the initial impetus towards state modernization and capitalist transformation was [indeed] geopolitical, state [or pre-state, local] responses to this pressure were refracted through respective class relations in ‘national’ contexts, including class resistance”.<sup>126</sup> And it was the class relations within the ‘national’ context of the Ottoman Empire that led to the variety of territorial responses which eventually formed into ‘national’ movements.

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<sup>124</sup> Karpal (1972), p 249f

<sup>125</sup> Most prominently represented by Berktaç, Halil (1991): *The Other Feudalism*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Birmingham University

<sup>126</sup> Teschke, (2003), 266, emphasis added

**Conclusion: explaining the emergence of the ‘modern’ post-Ottoman states system: Capitalism as the ‘causa causans’ or ‘historical heritage’?**

This historical investigation has shown that post-Ottoman nationalist movements are not mere by-products of uneven capitalist development. They cannot be understood as re-territorialisation strategies within the history of capitalist development or as efforts to create a unified popular consciousness as a means of socially engineering their respective contender state societies. For the case of the Ottoman Empire, it is equally not the existence of a primordial ‘internal’ ethno-linguistic diversity per se then that is central to our understanding of the disintegration process, defying the notion that, as Ernest Gellner put it, Nationalism “determines the norm for the legitimacy of political units”.<sup>127</sup> ‘Difference’ was, as modernist theories of nationalism rightly point out, ‘imagined’ and politically willed. However, this differentiation is not as intrinsically linked to uneven capitalist development as these theories are suggesting (even though it is not entirely detached from it either). Rather, nationalism was used as a vehicle in the struggle over revenue and political power in the light of the modernising and centralising agenda of the Sultanate, who, under geopolitical pressure, tried to restore its fiscal base and overcome local power-challenges. The nineteenth century project of Ottoman nationalism, on the other hand, didn’t fail because of a lack of ‘cohesive power’ of the concept of Ottomanism (as opposed to Turkism, Greek nationalism, Arabism, etc.), but because the central government from where it originated had started re-appropriating surpluses and political power to a degree it hadn’t long before, thereby antagonising peripheral ruling strata, which eventually opted out of the social contract with the Sultanate. Nationalism can also not be seen as a liberal ideology consolidating a revolutionary ‘collective agency’ of the disenfranchised ‘sans-culottes’ (Arab/Christian) direct producer class raising against the ancient (foreign, Turkish) exploitative regime either. The social origins of nationalism, the material foundation and the means of its perpetuation are all locatable within the Ottoman ruling strata themselves, rather than an emancipatory revolutionary project ‘from below’: First in the central elite’s attempt to pursue an Ottoman form of Nationalism – and later in the seigneurial reaction in the countryside propelling a variety of counter-nationalisms. Indeed Ernest C. Dawn contends that Arab nationalism was a by-product of a purely inner-Arab conflict as well: “In my view, Arab nationalism arose as the result of intra-Arab elite conflict, specifically (in the case of the territories later included in the Syrian republic) being an opposition movement of Syrian notables directed primarily against rival Syrian notables who were satisfied with and occupied positions in the Ottoman

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<sup>127</sup> Gellner, 1983, 49

government,...”<sup>128</sup> This is reflected in the sometimes contradictory claims and objectives carried by the diverse Arab Nationalist parties, from Wahabi Islamic restoration to Christian-Lebanese liberals made it clear that, despite they were only united by the dislike of the Ottoman’s reform agenda. However, even opposition to the latter was far away from unanimous amongst the Arab groups, given the continuing spiritual authority of the Caliphate the Sultan officially exercised until 1924. Unsurprising, one might say, is therefore “the absence of a specific ideology of Arab nationalism until the end of the First World War... It was not until the 1930’s that a serious attempt was made to define the meaning of Arab nationalism and what constitutes the Arab Nation”.<sup>129</sup>

The Ottoman case doesn’t stand in isolation in this regard: John Breuilly uses the example of the first nationalist movement within the outgoing Habsburg empire: “The Magyars, especially the nobility, had a good deal of power at both local and national level, particularly in Hungary proper, and occupied a privilege position in the eastern half of the empire (...) Its impetus [of secession] came from above. It was the product of attempts at reform by the imperial government which encroached upon the privileged. Joseph II (1780-90) was the most extreme example of the attempt by a monarch to transform society and state on the base of rational principles. His efforts threatened the Magyar position, particularly that of the nobility, in a number of ways”.<sup>130</sup> Thus, a matching development between the two ‘sick men’ of Europe is observable. Coming back to the more theoretical question about the relationship of nationalism, modern sovereignty and capitalist development, it has been shown that an identification of a plurality of states with effective capitalist modernisation cannot be sustained. I concur here with Elie Kedourie who holds, that “this attempt to see nationalism as a requisite for industrialization, or a reaction to it, does not fit the chronology either of nationalism or of industrialisation”.<sup>131</sup>

Capitalism, as a way of organising economic relations, does not require or pre-suppose the ‘national’ organisation of the inter-states-system. Contrary to the view of a ‘structural’ or ‘logical’ link between capitalism and the nation-state, Hannes Lacher and Benno Teschke argue that “the inter-stateness of capitalist political space cannot be explained by reference to the nature of capitalism or the ‘laws’ or ‘logic’ of capital”. This argument seems to be

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<sup>128</sup> Dawn, Ernest C. (1991): *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, in: Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon: *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, p 12

<sup>129</sup> Haim, Sylvia (1964): Introduction to (the same; ed): *Arab Nationalism – An Anthology*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p 35

<sup>130</sup> Breuilly, John (1993): *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 125

<sup>131</sup> Kedourie (1993): 143

supported by the findings of the preceding historical enquiry. It was shown that the disintegration of a so-called multinational Empire is not owed to the appearance of a specifically capitalist way of ordering political rule along ‘national’ lines. This is why the Ottoman Empire was not the big anomaly, the ‘Islamic Alien’ in Europe, as which it is frequently portrayed. Whilst the historical, nomadic origins lie in a process of geopolitical accumulation, this remained nevertheless a historically specific strategy of reproduction which did not survive into ‘modern’ inter-state IR. Nevertheless mainstream historiography elevates the Ottoman’s Nomadism to a timeless Ottoman/Islamic attribute which was only overcome with the end of the Empire. The emergence of ‘national’ sovereignty does, therefore, not indicate the depersonalisation of political rule either. Exploitation was still carried out through extra-economic means even within the new national polities. This is not to say, however, that theories of nationalism are wrong in portraying the historical uniqueness of nationalism as a distinctively modern form of political and social organisation. It can serve as a “political project of the containerisation of social relations [whose] purpose was to supplant the imagined community of a transnational class striving to overcome the territoriality of political authority, and ultimately even statehood as such, with the imagined community of the nation”.<sup>132</sup> It cannot serve, however, as an explanation for the initial emergence of a multiplicity of nationalisms at the same time. Thus, it is the pre-modern social origins of the post-Ottoman nationalisms that is capable of illustrating that the prevailing modernist-Marxist ‘capitalist reductionism’ as an explanation for the specifically national character of state-formation needs to be reconsidered. It is important at the same time to avoid a replacement of this unreflected modernist functionalism with a primordial essentialism. As Ray Kiely put it: “Recognizing difference here should not be confused with an uncritical celebration of cultural particularism, or what often amounts to the universal indifference of difference. Rather, it is based on the recognition – denied above all by Hardt and Negri – that capitalism has not ‘created a world after its own image’.”<sup>133</sup> The roots of this ‘difference’, however is to be seen as the outcome of regionally and locally peculiar historical trajectories that enter into a dialectical relationship with the broader, macro-level and world-historical transformations:

“The destiny of man is accomplished, and his freedom realized by absorption within the state, because only through the state does he attain coherence and acquire reality. It might, then, seem logical to conclude that such a state should embrace the whole of humanity. But this would be, nonetheless, erroneous, for it would conflict with another, essential feature of this metaphysic, namely, that self-realization and absorption into the whole is not a smooth, uneventful process, but the outcome of strife and struggle”.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Lacher (2003), p 533

<sup>133</sup> Kiely, R (2005), Capitalist expansion and the imperialism – globalisation debate: contemporary Marxist explanations, in: *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 8, No. 148

<sup>134</sup> Kedourie, 1993, p 43

Territorial delimitation of rule, not only in the Middle East, thus, is continuously re-configured under a dialectical interplay of various forms of external penetration - one of them being what many people understand to be the totality of a capitalist 'Empire'<sup>135</sup> - and internal social struggles over the appropriation and control over of these developments. Friedrich Tenbruck, therefore, provides us with an important insight when he talks about the "artificiality of the sociological concept of 'society'"<sup>136</sup> itself.

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