

PARAMETERS OF A POSTCOLONIAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

The traditional postcolonial focus on the modern and the European, and pre-modern and non-European empires has marginalized the study of empires like the Ottoman Empire whose temporal reign traversed the modern and pre-modern eras, and its geographical land mass covered parts of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Asia Minor, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. Here, I first place the three postcolonial corollaries of the prioritization of contemporary inequality, the determination of its historical origins, and the target of its eventual elimination in conversation with the Ottoman Empire. I then discuss and articulate the two ensuing criticisms concerning the role of Islam and the fluidity of identities in states and societies. I argue that epistemologically, postcolonial studies criticize the European representations of Islam, but do not take the next step of generating alternate knowledge by engaging in empirical studies of Islamic empires like the Ottoman Empire. Ontologically, postcolonial studies draw strict official and unofficial lines between the European colonizer and the non-European colonized, yet such

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a clear-cut divide does not hold in the case of the Ottoman Empire where the lines were much more nuanced and identities much more fluid. Still, I argue that contemporary studies on the Ottoman Empire productively intersect with the postcolonial approach in three research areas: the exploration of the agency of imperial subjects; the deconstruction of the imperial center; and the articulation of bases of imperial domination other than the conventional European “rule of colonial difference” strictly predicated on race. I conclude with a call for an analysis of Ottoman postcoloniality in comparison to others such as the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Persian, Chinese, Mughal, and Japanese that negotiated modernity in a similar manner with the explicit intent to generate knowledge not influenced by the Western European historical experience.

Due to the traditional postcolonial focus on the modern and the European, pre-modern and non-European empires have been much less studied. And the Ottoman Empire is one such empire: its temporal reign traversed the modern and pre-modern eras, and its geographical land mass covered parts of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Asia Minor, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. In this article, I approach the Ottoman Empire through the vantage point of postcolonial studies. I first place the three corollaries of postcolonial studies, namely the prioritization of contemporary inequality, the determination of its historical origins, and the target of its eventual elimination in conversation with the Ottoman Empire. I then discuss and articulate the two criticisms that ensue from taking a postcolonial sociological approach to the Ottoman Empire; these concern the role of Islam and the fluidity of identities in states and societies. I argue that epistemologically, postcolonial studies criticize the European representations of Islam, but do not take the next step of generating alternate knowledge by engaging in empirical studies of Islamic empires like the Ottoman Empire. Ontologically, postcolonial studies draw strict official and unofficial lines between the European colonizer and the non-European colonized, yet such a clear-cut divide does not hold in the case of the Ottoman Empire where the lines were much more nuanced and identities much more fluid. Still, I argue that contemporary studies on the Ottoman Empire productively intersect with the postcolonial approach in three research areas, namely, the exploration of the agency of imperial subjects; the deconstruction of the imperial center; and the articulation of bases of

imperial domination other than the conventional European “rule of colonial difference” strictly predicated on race. I conclude with a call for undertaking the postcolonial analysis of the Ottoman Empire in comparison to others such as the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Persian, Chinese, Mughal, and Japanese that negotiated modernity in a similar manner; such a comparison, I contend, would generate knowledge not influenced by the Western European historical experience.

THREE COROLLARIES OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Scholars who cannot often agree on the theoretical lineage of postcolonial studies nevertheless concur on how it is practiced. A postcolonial researcher takes an interdisciplinary approach to critically analyze the connection between power and knowledge, focuses primarily on the adverse impact of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western European transformation on the rest of the world, and employs often a cultural lens to destabilize the power-knowledge connection with the political intent to establish a more just and equitable world. As such, I think that the approach of the postcolonial scholar as well as those following in their footsteps reveal what can be termed “the three corollaries of postcolonial studies.” These are specifically the following: (i) the prioritization of contemporary inequality: the research focus is on the intersection of power with knowledge that empowers the subject while enfeebling the object; (ii) the determination of its historical origins: the roots of such contemporary empowerment are often traced spatially to Western Europe, temporally to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and culturally to the Enlightenment; and (iii) the elimination of contemporary inequality: the persisting empowerment needs to be eliminated in order to create a common humanity predicated on equality, justice, and world peace. The ensuing discussion of these three corollaries in relation to the Ottoman Empire provides three novel insights. First, the Ottoman Empire has been marginalized due to its demise during the rise of the West; second, the Ottoman Empire’s temporal and spatial location traversing the Enlightenment period and the geographical boundaries of Europe provides the perfect vantage point from which to productively question the often unbearable weight of Western domination. And third, the empirical analysis of the Ottoman Empire would help promote the postcolonial vision of eliminating contemporary inequality by

destabilizing the Western colonization of knowledge on the one side and the production of an alternate approach on the other.

Prioritization of Contemporary Inequality

The specific focus of postcolonial scholars in approaching contemporary inequality varies significantly. Some deconstruct the subject/scholar in order to destabilize its hegemony over power, others instead concentrate on the object/the studied with the intent to empower the silenced object (Nandy, 1983), while still others undertake both endeavors simultaneously (Magubane, 2004). What unites all postcolonial scholars is their subjectivity: all have either lived in or worked on more than one culture, or have been marginalized in one cultural context due to their religion, ethnicity, race, sexuality, or research topic. Their experiences therefore facilitate the acquisition of a certain critical reflexivity that in turn enables them to better identify, articulate, and analyze the relationship between power and knowledge.

Temporally, many focus on contemporary inequality, but eventually step back into history in tracing its origins to the early modern period and spatially to states and societies that do not starkly signal the connection of power to knowledge on the one side and to the critical analysis of variations within Western European Enlightenment on the other (Mehta, 1999; Muthu, 2003; Washbrook, 2009). As such, recent postcolonial analyses of the early modern Iberian empires of Spain and Portugal, Italian city-states, as well as contemporaneous settlements, colonies, and states in the Americas, Africa, and South-East Asia have all helped alleviate the epistemological stronghold especially Great Britain and India had over the field (Ballantyne, 2003; Pagden, 1995; Subrahmanyam, 2006).

Yet the analysis of the Ottoman Empire still remains in the margins of the field. In discussing the contemporaneous inequality embedded within the Empire, scholars often focus not on internal processes but instead on the empire's escalating interaction with the Western world. The temporal intersection of the loss of Ottoman imperial power with the rise of Western European empires turns into an explanation in and of itself, thereby escaping thorough empirical analysis. And the same faulty logic applies to the German, Austro-Hungarian, Persian, Mughal, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese empires and others that also "lost" during the escalating Western world domination. I would contend, however, that one needs to analyze such "marginalized" cases in order to recover the nature of their resistance

to or negotiation with the West on the one side and the dynamics of the local processes independent of the West on the other.

Determination of the Historical Origins of Contemporary Inequality

The European Enlightenment privileged science, rationality, and progress to eventually establish and legitimate Western hegemony over the rest of the world. Such hegemony started to be critically examined initially in the aftermath of World War II, and in earnest at the end of the Cold War. Significant in this examination was the analysis of the intersection of power and knowledge in the construction and practice of the social sciences that came into being during the Enlightenment (Dubois, 2006; Eze, 1997; Linebaugh & Rediker, 2000; Muthu, 2003; Swanson, 2004). Such criticism also entailed a re-examination of the concept of difference through which the Enlightenment marginalized the rest of the world; the nature of the origins and use of the categories of race, ethnicity, tradition, and religion were re-assessed as a consequence (Dubois, 2005; Stoler, 1992). Yet, such an orientation had inherently privileged the eighteenth to the twentieth century temporally and the histories of Western European societies over the rest of humankind epistemologically; some scholars therefore questioned the application of the postcolonial framework to earlier centuries (Seidman, 2005). Others wondered if such an application did not end up reproducing the Western hegemony that postcolonial studies aimed to destabilize and deconstruct (Cooper, 2005b; Dirlik, 2002), or serving as a mere excuse to keep bashing the West (Bayart, 2011).

Spatially, some scholars analyzed the empowered, namely world empires and nation-states with imperial ambitions (Burton, 2003), while others focused on the enfeebled and the colonized (Nandy, 1983). It was in this context that the mission, content, and boundaries of postcolonial studies generated the most debate.¹ While some argued against connecting the disparate strands of postcolonial studies into a single entity lest it turned into a hegemonic tool (Dutton, Gandhi, & Seth, 1999), others defined it as “the academic, intellectual, ideological and ideational scaffolding of the condition of decolonization, [that is], the period following political independence for nations and cultures in Africa, Asia and South America (Nayar, 2010, p. 1).”² Such spatial orientation in turn dichotomously privileged past and present states and societies that either wielded visible power or were subjugated by such power. The imperial colonizing Western European states (especially Great Britain and France) and the United States

on the one side, and the colonized India and South America on the other emerged as the prominent political actors of postcolonial analysis.

Studying the Ottoman Empire would positively contribute to settling such debates over the temporal, spatial, and epistemological boundaries of postcolonial studies. The Ottoman Empire's temporal and spatial existence destabilizes the inherent privileging of Western hegemony. Temporally, the Ottoman Empire existed from the thirteenth to the twentieth century thereby covering the pre-Enlightenment, Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment periods. Spatially, Ottoman rule extended from the Middle East to the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the West, to the Caucasus in the East, to the Crimea in the North and the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa in the South. Such temporal and spatial location thus provides the perfect counterpoint to productively question the often unbearable weight of Western domination in postcolonial studies.

Elimination of Contemporary Inequality

Postcolonial analysis has a political mission in that it endeavors to establish a future where all humans exist on equal terms, where everyone respects difference instead of employing and exploiting it with the intent to establish dominance over others. Hence, such an orientation ethically moves the liberation of all humankind to the forefront (Bayly, 2006; Hasseler & Krebs, 2003, p. 96). Yet, how to proceed in actualizing such a project remains unclear: should one first deconstruct the current Western hegemony or focus on constructing an entirely new approach instead from scratch, one not 'tainted' by the West?

Analyses of empires such as the Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Ottoman ones that do not fully fit the standard object of postcolonial studies become significant in this context because they enable scholars to engage in both endeavors simultaneously. The non-Western context challenges the inherent Western hegemony over knowledge, and empirical research of local processes enables the construction of a novel approach (Brower & Lazzerini, 1997; Makdisi, 2002c). Of these two endeavors, however, the former is much easier to undertake. It is therefore not surprising that not many scholars have engaged in such activity in the context of postcolonial studies, let alone the Ottoman Empire. The most significant recent work in this context is Raewyn Connell's ambitious book entitled *Southern Theory* (2007).³ After acknowledging the existing power of the global "Northern theory" constructed by the colonizing West, Connell turns to the colonized local

south – specifically to Australia, Africa, Iran, India, and Latin America – with the intent to generate a “Southern theory” out of local texts negotiating Western colonization. Connell specifically attempts to overcome the Western colonization of knowledge by focusing on the works of southern scholars like Ali Shariati of the Middle East, Raul Prebisch of Latin America, Paulin Hountondji of Africa, and Ranajit Guha of India. Connell provides a productive start, yet one that needs to be built upon for decades if not centuries to come. Another significant venue for expanding the boundaries of knowledge beyond its Western colonization is advocated by Walter Mignolo (2009a, 2009b, 2010) who calls for “epistemic disobedience” to generate a de-colonial cosmopolitanism of multiple trajectories. Mignolo engages in such activities with the explicit intent to imagine and build democratic, just, and non-imperial/colonial societies.⁴ As such, the empirical analysis of the Ottoman Empire could help challenge the Western colonization of knowledge on the one side and the construction of an alternate approach on the other, thereby promoting the postcolonial project of ultimately eliminating contemporary inequality.

Given the advantages of empirically analyzing the Ottoman Empire in order to advance the three corollaries of postcolonial studies, it is necessary to map out the framework of a postcolonial sociology of the Ottoman Empire. Drawing such a framework provides two insights: first, contemporary practices of postcolonial studies do not adequately take into account the role of religion or the fluidity of identities. Second, contemporary work of scholars in the field of Ottoman studies actually promotes a postcolonial approach in relation to exploring the agency of imperial subjects, deconstructing the hegemony of the imperial center, and articulating the ethnic, religious, and cultural bases of imperial domination and thereby destabilizing the conventional European “rule of colonial difference” strictly predicated on race.

TOWARD A POSTCOLONIAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Like the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire was geographically contiguous but never fully a part of what was culturally considered to be the boundaries of Europe; the relations of either empire with the spatially adjacent regions they conquered were not easily definable as colonial. Like the Iberian empires of Spain and Portugal, the temporal span of

the Ottoman Empire traversed both the early modern and modern eras, but unlike the former, it did not acquire overseas colonies at any time. What differentiated the Ottoman Empire from all empires of European origin and akin to the Mughal, Chinese, and Japanese empires was that Ottoman rule was predicated on a non-Christian religion, specifically – like the Mughal – on Islam. The Ottoman Empire ruled for more than 600 years (1299–1922) over significant parts of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Asia Minor, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa only to fragment into a multiplicity of nation-states during the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As such, the Ottoman Empire presents an ideal case not only to test the Eurocentrism of existing sociological theory and practice, but also to provide additional insight into the parameters of postcolonial sociology.

Two Emerging Criticisms

Recent analyses of the Ottoman Empire focusing specifically on inequalities across time and space are much more widespread within the field of history than sociology. Temporally, they tend to gravitate toward two periods in Ottoman history, the early modern period up to the end of the seventeenth century, and the late modern period from the nineteenth to early twentieth century. Spatially, those working on the central Anatolian lands of the empire tend to naturalize the connection between power and knowledge while those concentrating on the peripheral provinces in the Balkans, Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa polarize the same connection instead. While the specific vantage point of scholars thus impacts the nature of their analysis, they do not yet critically reflect upon their particular interpretations. This limitation is further compounded by the scholars' subjectivities: younger generations of scholars are more willing to challenge and replace existing analyses at all costs, while older generations continue to practice history without at all taking the postcolonial approach into account. Still, I concur with [Steven Seidman \(2005\)](#) that the Ottoman Empire continues to provide a significant empirical context for the development of postcolonial studies.⁵ The review of recent works on the Ottoman Empire generates two insightful criticisms of postcolonial studies that concern the role of Islam on the one side and the fluidity of imperial identities on the other.

The Role of Islam

The most significant dimension that emerges in the scholarly discussion of any non-Western empire is inadvertently that of difference, that centers

around not race, but culture in general and religion in particular. In the case of Islam, this emphasis on religion is often approached critically due to Edward Said's influential works on the Orientalism (1978) and cultural imperialism of Europe (1993). Utilizing Foucault's insight into the colonization of knowledge, Said articulated the manner in which Europe epistemologically colonized the Middle East by defining the parameters of local meaning production (Englund, 2008). Scholars did indeed initially start to address this criticism in their research, only to be sidelined by two recent events that once again typecast Islam. The first event in 1989 comprised Ayatollah Khomeini's issuance of a religious edict calling for the death of novelist Salman Rushdie for the latter's discussion of the prophet Muhammad in his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). This religious attack on a work of fiction combined with the unexpected success of the Iranian Revolution led to the regeneration of a predominantly anti-Islamic discourse in the West for infringing on an author's freedom of expression and thought. And the second event took place about a decade later in 2001 when the Twin Towers in New York and parts of the Pentagon were destroyed by a terrorist attack allegedly carried out in the name of Islam. These negative depictions of Islam were further fueled by a third event, namely the cartoon controversy in 2005 when a Danish newspaper printed editorial cartoons on the prophet Muhammad that led to protests by Muslim communities throughout the world.

The ensuing postcolonial criticisms of Rushdie and the fervent reaction of Muslim communities drew attention to political visions that were embedded not only in Islam, but also in the postcolonial rhetoric (Bilgrami, 1990; Brennan, 1992). Even though many postcolonial scholars agreed that cultural hegemonies inherent in religions needed to be destabilized for the liberation of all humanity, it became evident that how this was going to be actualized in the case of Islam was much more ambiguous. Since Islam had not been reformed and secularized like Christianity, the question posed in Western media was whether Islam should go through a similar secularization and, if so, under whose leadership. Posing the question in this manner once again highlighted the existing power inequality between countries with significant Christian and Muslim populations, where the former especially dominated the latter culturally. The scholarly discussion in the West then turned onto the divides within this initially monolithic representation of Islam, highlighting the divide between the reformist and fundamentalist interpretations (Benedict et al., 2007; Dubois, 2005; Erickson, 1998; Majid, 2000). While the moderate forces within Islam were not as well organized or as prone to engage in violent action as the fundamentalist ones, the Western

coverage of Islam nevertheless continued to highlight Islamic fundamentalism at the expense of Islamic reformism. The discussion of religion, specifically Islam, thus intersected not only with power, but also knowledge. Soon Western discourse moved to temporally and spatially contextualize Islam as an ideology.

The initial attempt spearheaded by Shmuel Eisenstadt (2003) and Said Arjomand (2011) to comparatively depict Islam as an “axial civilization,” and the local changes within the civilization as instances of “multiple modernity” did indeed bring the Islamic world into sociological analysis, but did so under terms that were once again inherently set by the Western European experience of modernity. This traditional sociological approach has been recently challenged by the works of two postcolonial scholars, Walter D. Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova (Mignolo, 2006; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006; Tlostanova, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011). They approach Islam from the South American (Mignolo) and Russian periphery (Tlostanova), highlighting the racial “other”ing that Islam as a religion and Muslims as believers had been subjected to as a consequence of the historical development and ensuing hegemony of the West since the Renaissance. The initial marginalization of Islam by Christian theology during the Renaissance, Mignolo argues, was reactivated and maintained by secular philosophy during and after the Enlightenment. Racially, especially the emergence and sustenance of the Black Legend by Great Britain excluded the Muslims, Jews, and the Russian Orthodox as well as the Spanish, Portuguese, and Africans as impure. In the ensuing centuries, this exclusion then legitimated the violence of capitalism and imperialism upon these “impure” peoples (Mignolo, 2006).⁶ The ensuing epistemic privilege of five countries – France, England, Germany, Italy, and the United States – in defining social theory normalized this inherent exclusion up to the present (Grosfoguel, 2010). As such, knowledge from the borders was inscribed by the three imperial languages of French, German, and English of the second Western modernity,⁷ making non-Western knowledge totally irrelevant to the social sciences except as an object of study. Hence in approaching Islam, postcolonial scholars first demonstrate how it had been “other”ed by the West through the centuries. Since such “other”ing of Islam provided insights into the production and reproduction of Western hegemony, the same scholars then started to focus on specific empirical contexts that had been able to withstand and often successfully negotiate Western hegemony.

It is in this context that postcolonial scholars turn to a detailed analysis of the Russian and Ottoman Empires⁸ in particular. Mignolo and Tlostanova depict these two empires as “subaltern, Janus-faced, empire-colonies” that

were juxtaposed between the dominant Western capitalist empires on the one side and their own colonies on the other. The Russian and Ottoman empires were infected with “secondary Eurocentrism” and with the double consciousness such Eurocentrism induced. This unique synthesis made it ontologically and empirically difficult to conceptualize them within the dominant Western hegemonic discourse. Mignolo and Tlostanova interpret this inherent difficulty with optimism, however, arguing that further postcolonial analysis of such thinking from the “borders of Europe” may generate an alternate to northern theory. Madina Tolstanova specifically locates the Caucasus within the Russian/Soviet ex-colony; by doing so, she is able to develop the parameters of border thinking not only from the periphery in Baku, but also from the standpoint of Islam (Tlostanova, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011). Tlostanova posits the in-betweenness of the Russian and Ottoman empires with Europe and Asia on the one side and Western modernity and Islam on the other. These empires were indirectly colonized by Western modernity in multiple – epistemic, political, and economic – ways. And the power relations they developed with their subjects were unlike those Western European empires: the colonizers and the colonized had a much more equal relationship in that they were not fully overpowered by the modernized colonizer.⁹

Such postcolonial analyses of Islam and the Russian and Ottoman empires do indeed highlight and nuance the past and present inequalities in the world. Yet they fail to address criticisms especially regarding their employment of history in their analyses (Cooper, 2005a, 2005b). Frederick Cooper states that postcolonial scholars doubly occlude history: they iron out differences within European history while articulating such differences in the histories of those colonized by Europe. He notes in particular that postcolonial scholars “pluck stories” that fit their argument without taking into account the larger historical context, “leapfrog legacies” to build causal arguments without fully articulating the historical process of colonization, and “flatten time” by treating European history only in terms of the negative dimensions of the Enlightenment, thereby not analyzing Europe within its own historical complexity.¹⁰ Perhaps the one postcolonial scholar that attempts to alleviate this criticism is sociologist Syed Hussain Farid Alatas (1981, 2007). Alatas draws on the works of Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) to generate an alternate historical sociology of Muslim societies, a sociology that does not focus, like Eurocentric analyses do, on what does not work, but instead employs Khaldun’s locally generated sociological tools to survey what actually transpires on the ground. Even though Alatas is thus able to demonstrate the inadequacy of Eurocentric analyses, he still has not fully

developed an alternate explanation of how Muslim societies form and transform throughout history. Still, the insights relating to the role of Islam in states and societies lead one to query the role religion played in the Western world: specifically, how did variations in the practice of Christianity structure states and societies across time and place?

In all, then, focusing on the role of Islam in shaping states and societies did initially enable postcolonial scholars to criticize the Eurocentrism of existing theories. Yet, the same scholars have not yet been able to fully formulate an alternate approach because they have not yet adequately approached either Muslim empires or the Western empires that eventually dominated them empirically within their own historical complexity. So the first step in developing such an alternate approach is to analyze non-Christian empires in general and Islamic empires in particular through their own archives and processes of local knowledge production such as songs, poetry, literature, and oral traditions.

The Fluidity of Imperial Identities

Postcolonial studies distinctly separate the early modern and modern periods in terms of the emergence of a clear racial difference between the Western colonizer and the non-Western colonized. Such a depiction highlights the modern emergence of inequality with very broad brushstrokes, overlooking in the process those empires that fell in-between for long stretches of time, ones that were neither the colonizer nor the colonized as experienced in Western European history. The Ottoman Empire is one such case in point. Scholars of the Ottoman Empire carefully distinguish the “early modern period” that approximately covers the time span from the successful siege of Constantinople in 1453 to the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683, from the “transition” period encompassing 1683 to the 1839 end of the reign of the reformist sultan Mahmud II, and the “modern” period from 1839 to the dissolution of the empire in 1922. Their analyses reveal that the Ottoman imperial identity remained much more fluid throughout and was often premised on categories like ethnicity, religion, and tribal affiliation.

The intersection of religion, politics, and knowledge emerge as the central focus of scholars focusing on the early modern period (Baer, Makdisi, & Shryock, 2009; Barkey, 2005; Doumanis, 2006; Ginio, 2004; Grillo, 1998; Kunt, 1974, 2003). Two Ottoman institutions are highlighted in the analyses: *devşirme*, that is the levy of mostly Christian children of the subjects as the sultan’s slaves, and *millet*, that is the corporate communal organization of mostly Christian subjects within the empire. Metin Kunt demonstrates that

even though such a levy was executed with the intent to produce officials loyal to the sultan, the slaves often remembered and retain their ethnic, regional origin, native languages, and customs; they also remained in contact with other members of their biological families. Eventually, two prominent factions of solidarity developed among the Ottoman administrative elites, those of the Balkan origin on the one side and the Caucasian origin on the other. Still, their loyalty to the sultan preceded all other forms of social identity. The communal organizations of non-Muslim subjects of the empire were also loosely defined, enabling all subjects regardless of religion to interact with each other on a daily basis. Marc Baer, Karen Barkey, R.D. Grillo, and Nicholas Doumanis all highlight this social accommodation and tolerance between religion and politics, principles that were not at all present in the contemporaneous European imperial counterparts.¹¹ Such fluidity in identity and flexibility in social boundaries contrasts with the previous Eurocentric binary, the strict postcolonial power divide between the rulers and the ruled. It leads one to surmise that the rigid, invariable, and inviolable Western European depictions probably varied across time and place as well, and often did not distinguish rhetoric from praxis.

This fluidity of identity is indeed the major contribution of scholars employing a critical, if not a postcolonial, approach to the early modern period (Baer, 2008; Dursteler, 2006; Elouafi, 2010; Hathaway, 2003; Philliou, 2011). At the imperial capital during the seventeenth century, Marc David Baer (2008, p. 31) argues that Christians, Jews, and Muslims “interacted on a daily basis, in the tavern, on the street, during public festivals and imperial celebrations, in the Shariah court and other institutions.” Likewise, Eric Dursteler (2006, p. 20) studying the Venetians in Constantinople takes a stand against the Orientalist stand of a binary, oppositional, and conflictual relationship between Muslims and Christians, arguing instead that early modern identity was “multilayered, multivalent and composite.” Identity construction entailed a socially constructed, contingent, and relational process where even the political and religious identity boundaries of non-Muslims residing at the imperial often shifted depending on the pressures of the particular local context. Even though the idea of a nation existed, it was “notoriously imprecise,” referring to “people born in the same city or region” (2006, p. 13); as such, the primary identity among the communities of merchants and diplomats living in the Ottoman Empire was regional, spatial, and geographical. Christine Philliou (2011, p. xix) reiterates the same argument for the eighteenth century in the context of the Ottoman Balkans, stating that “family and patronage relationships helped forge projects across formal institutions and confessional divides.”

Such was the case in Ottoman North Africa as well. In studying Tunisia, Amy Aisen Elouafi (2010) notes that a combination of factors including “religion, ethno-national origin, trade or descent from a prominent family” determined elite status; African slaves were a visible component of elite society as they were incorporated into the households of the wealthy. Race and rank comprised the two components of social identity alongside kinship, occupation, and religion; as such, these differences were recognized, but not politicized. They eventually transformed into a binary relationship under European occupation. In analyzing Ottoman Egypt and Yemen, Jane Hathaway (2003, p. 5) concurs that households, that is conglomerations of patron–client ties under one person in charge, provided the main political organization in these contexts; a broad range of people of various ethnic, geographical, and occupational backgrounds including “Balkan and Anatolian mercenaries, Circassian and Georgian slaves, Bedouin or Turcoman tribesmen, peasants and artisans” coexisted within the political culture of the household where the primary factional alliance provided all household members with an overarching identity. Such depictions of fluidity of identity in early modern Ottoman Empire successfully challenge the Eurocentric, Orientalist formulations that instead reified differences and divides, anachronically mapping onto the empire binarisms introduced much later by European colonial rule.¹²

This epistemological reformulation of early modern Ottoman Empire is also accompanied by a spatial one whereby the empire is not solely analyzed in relation to its connection to Europe, but instead located within the global world, especially including its connections with the Islamic world and Asia through trade and conquest. Linda Darling (1998) challenges the conception of the Ottoman Empire as stagnant and declining, revealing that such terms of difference only became universalized during the age of imperialism with the spread of Western hegemony. It was not the decay of the east in general and the Ottoman, Mughal, and Safavid empires in particular that allowed the European to emerge into global predominance, Darling contends, but instead the development of capitalism through political violence and economic exploitation of the rest of the world. Andrew C. Hess (1970), Affan Seljuq (1980), Abbas Hamdani (1981), Thomas D. Goodrich (1987), and Salih Özbaran (1990) restore the agency of the Ottoman Empire during the early modern era by articulating the empire’s extensive trade and political relations with the Orient in general and the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago in particular. They point out the communication of the Ottoman sultan with the Portuguese king in an attempt to stay active not only in the western Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, but also to

contend for a while in the discovery of the New World. On their maps, the Ottoman officials clearly marked the New World as their administrative province of “Antilia.” The Sa’dian regime of Morocco prevented Ottoman access to the Atlantic Ocean, however, and the Ottoman engagement in wars on the European continent thwarted the Ottoman activities against the Portuguese on the Indian Ocean. As a consequence, the Ottoman Empire remained contained within its contiguous territories. This early modern Ottoman narrative recounts the age of discovery not solely from the hegemonic vantage point of Europe, but highlights and brings in the activities of non-Western empires on their own terms, thereby relativizing and provincializing the Western narrative.

In terms of the “transition” period encompassing 1683 to the 1839 end of the reign of the reformist sultan Mahmud II, scholars often debate the nature of the transformation the Ottoman Empire started to undergo mostly in reaction to the rise of Western military and economic pressure. The majority interpret the military, fiscal, and administrative reforms in and of themselves, rather than as harbingers of an inevitable decline. By doing so, they have once again taken the first step in successfully challenging the act of reading history back from the present through a unilinear, predetermined trajectory of decline. Yet the development of a more contextually careful narrative still need to work on the differentiation of form from content: during this time period, even though the Ottoman state and society increasingly appear Westernized in form, how much this change in form also translated to the transformation of content remains unclear. Hence, the issue of how similar and different Ottoman imperial practices were from their Western European counterparts brings back the Saidian anxiety regarding the use of Western categories to explain the rest of the world. In this context, Salzmann and Tracy provide significant nuanced insights. [Ariel Salzmann \(1993\)](#) notes specifically that the modern Ottoman state structure was ushered in the early nineteenth century through two practices, fiscal privatization and administrative decentralization. James Tracy (1994) points out that Mughal and Ottoman trade continued strong during the eighteenth century, thereby putting to rest the previous argument that European powers came to dominate regional commerce right away.

The process of Ottoman imperial change during this transition period is now being carefully analyzed in its own terms, without falling into the historical determinism of escalating Western European hegemony and ensuing inevitable Ottoman decline. Virginia Aksan reflects on this process the most (2005/2006, 2007, 2008); she demonstrates that Ottoman fiscal and military reform impoverished state control over the path of change and

polarized society along religious lines. Gradually, the sense of belonging to the empire by sharing in its resources became increasingly constricted to Sunni Muslims – and later to ethnic Turks; this constriction was most evident in the composition of the reformed military. Reforming the empire along Western European lines thus started to adversely impact the fluidity of Ottoman imperial identity. It is therefore no accident that [Ussama Makdisi \(2000\)](#) discusses the significance of sectarianism in eighteenth century Lebanon since this period did indeed mark the polarization of boundaries across communal groups of the empire. Such boundaries had been closely monitored by the Ottoman state through the legal system and by the communal leaders who monitored daily practice. Yet as social groups started to increasingly fight over the distribution of resources, state and communal leaders could no longer contain the escalating violence. In the process, the social actors of modernity multiplied, with the actors ranging from Ottoman reformist officials, to non-Muslims and foreigners engaged in trade, to missionaries introducing their particular vision through the schools they founded ([Makdisi, 1997, 2002b](#)).

In all then, during the transition period, Ottoman state reforms undertaken after the Western European practices and institutions adversely impacted the fluidity of Ottoman identity. Initially, many imperial subjects located in the Ottoman social structure had belonged to intersecting communities with varying degrees of clout making their identities fluid. With the Westernizing reforms, identities became more solid and stratified, introducing publicly visible inequality and enmity among social groups. This Ottoman analysis generates a novel insight: How can one narrate the Western European transformation through the vantage point of fluid identities? Specifically, was there a process through which identities became solidified in a similar manner or had they been differently constructed all along?

INTERSECTIONS OF OTTOMAN STUDIES AND POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS: THE MODERN PERIOD

Scholarly work on the Ottoman Empire during its “modern” period from the end of the reign of the reformist sultan Mahmud II in 1839 to the dissolution of the empire in 1922 has been most influenced by postcolonial analysis because of the temporal intersection of European and Ottoman modernities. In this context, the debate among scholars once again revolves

around interpreting the nature and degree of separation of form from content: adopting Western practices brings the Ottoman Empire much closer to its European counterparts *in form*, thereby enabling many scholars to identify similarities to European colonial rule. Yet the spatial and temporal boundaries of this impact *in content* remain understudied and unclear. How practices predating Westernized ones may have stayed in play in spite of the adoption of new forms needs to be further studied in depth. Still, many scholars of the Ottoman Empire have started to converse with postcolonial studies, bringing the analysis of power inequality to front stage. The predominant scholarly focus on Ottoman formal political power certainly highlights escalating power inequalities within the Ottoman Empire. Once again, however, how these inequalities exist across time and space, that is, how they are negotiated by different imperial communities like the non-Muslims, Kurdish tribes or Chechen, and Circassian immigrants, and how this negotiation differs during the autocratic rule of sultan Abdülhamid II as opposed to the ensuing proto-nationalist rule of the Young Turks are not yet apparent.

The discussion of late Ottoman history in the context of the postcolonial debate has to commence with the scholarly intervention of [Selim Deringil \(2003\)](#). In a seminal article, Deringil argued that during the course of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman administrative elite gradually adopted the mindset of Western imperialism in interpreting their periphery, thereby inadvertently conflating the Western ideas of modernity and colonialism. This “borrowed colonialism” led Ottoman officials to depict the provincial subjects as living in “a state of nomadism and savagery.” After identifying the tension within Ottoman modernity through such “borrowed” scale of difference, Deringil extends this argument to the Ottoman state’s treatment of nomads in general and those in Tripoli, Hijaz, and Yemen in particular. His intervention builds upon Ussama Makdisi’s introduction (2002a, p. 768) of the concept of Ottoman Orientalism, that is, the emergent Ottoman mode of administration of its own Arab periphery “based on a hierarchical system of subordination along religious, class, and ethnic lines.” Through the works of Makdisi and Deringil, the postcolonial approach to the late Ottoman Empire thus starts to become articulated.

Most of the recent work employing the postcolonial approach literally focuses on the Ottoman Empire’s last three decades from the 1880s to the 1910s. This was the period of rapid land contraction during which the empire literally lost 95% of its land mass ([Paker, 2007, pp. 137–140](#)). Given this extremely high rate of social change, it is no accident that identities became increasingly polarized internally and power inequalities in

the empire escalated as a consequence. Postcolonial scholars approach this polarization in a manner that constructively overcomes the traditional emphasis on the naturalized power of the imperial center at the expense of the periphery, and on the political rhetoric of the Ottoman state instead of local empirical realities on the ground. They do so through conducting in-depth empirical analyses of especially the periphery with the intent to reveal how imperial power was negotiated across the center-periphery divide. As such, they not only reveal that power binarism did not exist in the Ottoman Empire in a manner similar to Europe, but that people at the periphery had much more agency than previously thought. Yet I would argue that the causal leap postcolonial scholars make from such polarized identities to escalating power inequalities needs to be further questioned. It is still unclear as to whether this renegotiation of power was due to the impact of Ottoman modernity espousing to adopt and apply a Western mode of imperial administration, or the simply empirical consequence of a rapidly shrinking empire, one that would have occurred regardless of the onset of modernity. Nevertheless, postcolonial scholars working on the Ottoman Empire have generated three significant insights in the analysis of inequality in Ottoman history regarding the agency of imperial subjects, the hegemony of the imperial center, and the alternate bases of imperial domination.

Exploring the Agency of Imperial Subjects

Scholars who focus on Ottoman modernity trace its particular characteristics through the travel accounts and memoirs of the officials of Turkish descent serving solely in the Arab and North African provinces. Their studies reveal an increasing divide between the educated, “civilized” officials of the imperial center who attempt to study, discipline, and improve the “colonial” subjects in the periphery (Herzog & Motika, 2000; Provence, 2011). Scholars analyzing the Ottoman provinces of the Transjordan (Carroll, 2011), Yemen (Kühn, 2007), Algeria (Shuval, 2000), and the Balkans (Spiridon, 2006) also empirically substantiate this new polarization between the Ottoman-Turkish officials and their colonial subjects.¹³ All agree that the Ottoman “colonial” relationship was much more nuanced than its Western European counterpart: the local was not summarily “other”ed, denigrated, and exploited; instead, it retained its agency and negotiated relations with the Ottoman capital, Western Europeans, and their local counterparts. Yet these postcolonial scholars naturally assume

that the origin of this increased inequality was embedded in Ottoman modernity. None critically analyze and deconstruct the imperial center, especially in terms of contextualizing who these Ottoman officials appointed to the provinces were, and how, where, and why they adopted their colonial attitudes. Also lacking are comparative studies of Ottoman officials adopting a colonial attitude with those serving the empire in less peripheral parts of the empire or in capacities other than as governors. After all, the Ottoman “colonial” attitude toward the nomads or ethnic Arabs may be similar to or different from the officials’ attitudes toward the Greek Rum, Assyrian, Armenian, and Jewish minorities, Alewites, Kurds, and Circassians of the empire; the nature of this possible difference needs to be analyzed in depth.

A truly postcolonial sociology of the Ottoman Empire needs to apply the critical analysis of the intersection of power and knowledge not only to purposely selected imperial social groups like nomads and Arabs, or deliberately selected imperial provinces such as some in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Transformations in social relations in the currently excluded Caucasus, Anatolia, and the Balkans and among the various officials serving in different capacities at these imperial spaces need to be undertaken as well. Temporally, such transformations in power relations also have to be systematically compared to periods predating the last 30 years of the empire. Only after such spatial, temporal, and epistemological comparisons could postcolonial scholars of the Ottoman Empire conclude that what they observe is indeed a new colonial relationship between the Ottoman imperial center and its peripheries. After all, empires contain within them a spectrum of power relationships predicated on the type of formal political rule, where the imperial attitude toward a chieftainship or an emirate is often primarily shaped by historical legacy that widely differs from a province close to the imperial center. Postcolonial scholarship indeed explains the polarizing changes in some types of Ottoman formal political rule in some empirical contexts, but I do not think such explanations are not yet generalizable to the Ottoman Empire as a whole.

In particular, existing postcolonial analyses of late Ottoman imperial rule have generated an epistemological divide predicated on whether such scholars focus primarily on the subject (the colonizer state) or object (the colonized locals) of their analysis. Makdisi, for instance, prioritizes the imposition of a new reformist Ottoman state ideology in the provinces, thereby privileging the subject. He then argues that this central imperial ideology and practice in generated unequal local relations. Jens [Hannsen](#) (2002, 2005) instead focuses on the object; he privileges local relations,

recovering the agency of provincial Ottoman subjects in successfully negotiating their relations with the center. In his explanation, it is unequal local relations that impact and fragment the imperial center. Whether the scholar focuses on the subject of the colonizing Ottoman state or the object of the colonized populace makes a difference in the ensuing interpretation: Makdisi traces the postcolonial origins of inequality to the imperial center while Hannsen challenges the same inequality by articulating the power located in the periphery. And it seems that the latter group of scholars is gaining the upper hand in recent academic work. Indeed, [Isa Blumi \(1998, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2011\)](#)¹⁴ working on Yemen and Albania, and [Beshara Doumani \(1992\)](#) analyzing Palestine history actually employ the complexity of relations during the Ottoman era to destabilize existing dominant, naturalized, Eurocentric nationalist narratives. In doing so, they restore the power and agency of local actors, but fail to critically reflect on the two other sources of power: first, the power located at the imperial center, and second, the power embedded in the particular standpoint and ensuing empirical focus of the postcolonial scholar. While those scholars like Makdisi and Deringil gazing through the lens of the Ottoman imperial center observe and highlight the unequal relationship between the Ottoman capital and the provinces, others like Hannsen and Blumi who adopt the lens of specific provinces instead tease out the process of negotiation between the imperial capital and the province where local subjects retain their agency. In all, then, exploring the agency of the Ottoman imperial subjects articulates the significance in postcolonial studies of time, place, and meaning in interpreting existing power relations.

Deconstructing the Hegemony of the Imperial Center

It is next important to discuss the works of a group of scholars that has recently started to deconstruct the lens of the Ottoman imperial center ([Constantinou, 2000](#); [Gölbaşı, 2009, 2011](#); [Riedler, 2011](#); [Turan, 2009](#)). Costas Constantinou initially focuses on the colonization of the Western European diplomatic imagination at the Ottoman imperial capital, demonstrating how such diplomats viewed and imposed binary interpretations onto the complex process of Ottoman administrative rule.¹⁵ Building upon this initial critical insight, Ömer Turan ingeniously inverts the subject and the object by focusing instead on how the significant Ottoman thinker and statesman Ahmed Rıza criticized the Western civilizational project from the vantage point of its lack of universal morality. Edip Gölbaşı instead

approaches possible Ottoman coloniality from the imperial capital institutionally through the practice of military conscription; he reveals that local conditions dictated the Ottoman administrative decision-making as imperial officials often excluded certain communities like the Yezidis from being conscripted. Florian Riedler further challenges the uniformity of the Ottoman decision-making process at the imperial center by analyzing emergent forms of political opposition in general and conspiracies in particular. He argues that many conspiracies developed in cases where there initially was no space for a loyal opposition, thereby once more articulating the complexity of the imperial decision-making process. Hence, these scholars challenge the conceptual boundaries of late Ottoman coloniality from the vantage point of the center where such decisions were made.

In addition to contesting the hegemony of the imperial center through the analyses of particular officials and institutional practices, scholars of late Ottoman history have also started to question the nature of the impact of the Westernizing reforms. After all, while there has been agreement in the field that there has certainly been a transformation in the empire that could be labeled Ottoman modernity in form, debates continue over the exact content as well as the extent of the transformation. And it is in this context that some scholars have recently started to develop a novel approach to study the Ottoman Empire, one that prioritizes not individuals or institutions, but instead particular sites of modernity. Such sites not only challenge the hegemony of the imperial center, but also identify their often dialectical impact upon Ottoman imperial domination.

Articulating Alternate Bases of Imperial Domination

Scholars working on the Ottoman Empire (Aral, 2004; Bektaş, 2000; Brummett, 2007; Hanssen, 2011) through the standpoint of sites of modernity are able to move beyond the limitations of time and space to capture their impact on Ottoman imperial power. So far, they have employed three cultural sites, namely technology transfer, gender relations, and human rights to reveal how the negotiation of these sites within Ottoman state and society produced complex power transformations. Yakup Bektaş analyzes the 1857–1864 construction of the Istanbul-Fao overland telegraph line that traversed the full length of the Ottoman domains in Asia, thereby uniting Britain with India. Such technological modernity both empowered, but also eventually weakened Ottoman imperial rule. The sultans initially utilized the advantage of electric communication to consolidate their control over

the empire, but eventually sultan Abdülhamid II was removed from power when the Young Turks in opposition employed the same communication channel to actualize their 1908 constitutional revolution. Focusing on the rearticulation of Ottoman gender roles and relations in cartoon space from 1876 to 1914, Palmira Brummett argues that women emerged as new, yet contradictory symbols during this time period: they embodied the empire or its pieces, but were also purposefully left at home. Such experienced contradictions of Ottoman modernity enabled the empire to articulate its exceptionalism vis-a-vis Western Europe, emphasizing four differentiating characteristics, namely its multiethnic, polyglot nature; a long history of cultural achievement; morality (especially female); and Islam. Hence, Ottoman modernity forced state and society to enunciate what made their imperial rule different from their Western European counterparts, thereby emphasizing disparities instead of similarities.

Berdal Aral moves beyond the binarism inherent in modernity in relation to comparing the West with the rest. He analyzes the idea of human rights not in terms of how it was conceived in the West to be then exported to the rest, but instead on how it evolved in the Ottoman Empire on the latter's own terms. The empire employed religious law to ascertain and protect the rights of all subjects, prioritized the benefits of collectivities rather than those of individuals, and emphasized justice rather than freedom. In addition, it did not initially seek to control the "public sphere" unless politics set in, as it did after mid-nineteenth century. Hence, Aral demonstrates that the Ottoman negotiation of human rights singled out particular concepts and practices at different junctures. Finally, in his most recent work, Jens Hanssen takes a different epistemological route by tracing the Ottoman transimperial networks that start to form with the advent of modernity. He studies the rise and fall of the Levantine Malhame family at the Ottoman imperial court by focusing on transimperial networks among Levantine society, late Ottoman bureaucracy, European diplomacy, and capitalist expansion. Through his focus on such networks, Hanssen approaches late Ottoman imperial actors on equal terms with other local and transimperial ones. In all then, studying specific cultural sites of modernity challenges the hegemony of the Ottoman imperial center by demonstrating how such sites both enhanced and undermined imperial power. And it also provides for a new venue through which to introduce Western European empires to the non-Western context, not as monist hegemonies but instead as actors that slip in through local contradictions and crises.

CONCLUSION

This extensive review of the intersections of Ottoman studies with postcolonial analysis points to the significance of the initial point of origin of the research: those scholars focusing on the imperial center interpret escalating power inequality within the empire differently than those approaching the empire from the periphery. Also significant is the unit of analysis of the research: scholars often move beyond the contours of formal structural analysis to concentrate on particular individuals, institutions, as well as cultural sites such as informal social networks, human rights, or telegraph technology. In mapping out the possible future direction of the postcolonial studies of the Ottoman Empire, I would propose focusing on social practices rather than the actions of specific social actors located at either the imperial center or the periphery. Such focus has three distinct advantages: it enables scholars to concentrate on the historical process where all actors negotiate with each other on equal terms; it eliminates the epistemological divide privileging either the subject or the object of analysis, and it restores the agency of all parties without prioritizing the standpoint of one over the others.

Such future scholarly emphasis on Ottoman social networks and social practices needs to also incorporate a comparative perspective placing Ottoman imperial history in conversation with other imperial practices. Exemplary is Sanjay Subrahmanyam's (1997, 2005, 2006a, 2006b) contextualization of the early modern Ottoman Empire through his framework of "connected histories" where he specifically compares the Mughal, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires¹⁶ with the intent to differentiate the imperial encounters from colonial ones. Even though all three empires covered vast, mostly contiguous territory, Subrahmanyam argues, none has been written into the history of modernity. That history privileged the British, Dutch, and French empires, duly dismissing the Mughal, Ottoman, and the Habsburg as "declining" empires.¹⁷ When he analyzes the latter three empires in detail, however, it becomes evident that the Habsburg Empire, based on the dual principles of settlement and economic exploitation, was the only one that was explicitly colonial from its inception. The Mughal and Ottoman empires instead controlled contiguous territories through compromise and administrative and ideological flexibility, often maintaining the local practices of the newly incorporated territories. These two empires also did not systematically exploit and draw in resources from the outlying territories, attempt to culturally homogenize them or employ

race as a cultural marker legitimating exploitation like the Habsburg Empire did; as such, they were not colonial empires. Their systematic exclusion from the history of modernity, Subrahmanyam states, silenced the global and conjunctural nature of modernity, instead giving full agency to Europe as the *sole* producer and exporter of modernity to the world at large. Such a return to the sixteenth century reveals that history was not then and still is not – and ought not be – the monopoly of the single cultural tradition of Europe.

This conception of connected histories has recently inspired many scholars to engage in theoretical and empirical comparisons of the Ottoman Empire during the modern period (Emrence, 2008; Jacoby, 2008; Khoury & Kennedy, 2007; Rogan, 1999). Dina Khoury and Dane Kennedy bring the Ottoman and British Indian empires to the same analytical space, articulating the similarities and differences between the two in relation to the global and internal crises in the nineteenth century in general and the conjunctures of global war (1780–1830), centralization (1835–1775), militant control (1875–1895), and war and nationalism (1905–1916) in particular. Tim Jacoby instead enters into a dialogue with Michael Mann’s taxonomy of imperial rule predicated on compulsory cooperation,¹⁸ arguing that the taxonomy privileging Western European empires does not fully hold in the Ottoman case. The Ottoman Empire did not only develop a more benign relationship with its peripheries, but also adopted many local practices in doing so. Cem Emrence adopts a trajectory-specific approach that further articulates the Ottoman imperial structure. During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman coast, interior and frontier, emerged spatially as distinct imperial paths with varying economic, political, and social orders. Emrence thus nuances the existing postcolonial perspective that does not properly take into account the variations of rule in the Ottoman provinces. Eugene Rogan’s work further differentiates the nature of Ottoman rule in East Anatolia (Kurdistan), the Transjordan, the Hijaz, Yemen, and Libya, arguing that each region displayed different modes of incorporation into the Ottoman state. Focusing on the Ottoman Transjordan in particular, he then argues that this particular province comprised an Ottoman “frontier,” specifically a contact zone between the Ottoman state and tribal society. In general then, such studies point to similarities and differences not only among, but also within empires and do so in a manner that treats each one on equal terms.

I end this article with a call for the comparative analysis of the Ottoman Empire in relation to all those empires that negotiate and adopt elements of Western modernity only to pass them onto their provinces. The German,

Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Persian, Chinese, Mughal, and Japanese empires all fall into this category for instance. Yet, to my knowledge, there have not yet been any sustained workshops or conferences that specifically place the scholars working on these empires in conversation with each other. Such imperial comparisons would undoubtedly highlight similarities and differences not only in how these empires negotiated modernity, but also how such negotiations impacted their subject populations. And in doing so, they would generate knowledge that is not overshadowed by the Western European historical experience.

NOTES

1. For the most recent debate in the context of postcolonialism in France, see *Public Culture* 23(1) (2011), especially the criticisms of scholars calling French scholars to acknowledge their colonial heritage and its violence on the one side (Baneth-Nouailhetas, 2011; Bertaux, 2011; Gandhi, 2011; Lazreg, 2011; Mbembe, 2011; Stoler, 2011; Young, 2011) and those resisting such acknowledgement on the other (Bayart, 2011).

2. Nayar (2010, pp. 1–4) also defines *colonialism* as “the process of [actual] settlement by Europeans in Asian, African, South American, Canadian and Australian spaces ... entailing an exploitative political or economic process as well as a cultural conquest of the native,” *colonial discourse* as “the construction in European narratives of the native usually in stereotypical ways ... upon which Europeans perceive, judge and act upon the non-European,” *imperialism* as “the [Western] ideology legitimating remote governance and control of Asian or African [or other] nations, often entailing economic, political, military domination and exploitation ... without actual settlement in the non-European spaces,” *neocolonialism* as “the actual practice of imperialism,” *postcoloniality* as “the historical and material conditions of formerly colonized Asian, African and South American nations,” and *decolonization* “as the process whereby non-white nations and ethnic groups in Asia, Africa and South America strive to secure economic, political and intellectual freedom from their European masters.” Osterhammel (1997, pp. 4, 29–38) likewise defines *colonialism* as “a system of domination established by a society that expands beyond its original habitat” to then further articulate six colonial epochs, namely (1) 1520–1570 construction of the Spanish colonial system in Mexico, (2) 1630–1680 establishment of the Caribbean plantation economy, (3) 1760–1830 onset of European territorial rule in Asia, (4) 1880–1900 with a new wave of colony formation in the old world, especially Africa, (5) 1900–1930 heyday of colonial export economies, as especially the French and British seized former Ottoman provinces, and (6) 1945–1960 period of the “second colonial occupation” of Africa. For additional discussions of postcolonialism, see Gandhi (1998) and Loomba (2005, 2008) who articulate the new humanities, identities, feminism, and nationalism, Quayson (2000) who emphasizes literature as a politically symbolic act, Young (2001) who analyzes

practices of freedom struggles, and Hiddleston (2009) who especially focuses on postcolonial ethics.

3. See also Levander and Mignolo (2011) on the global south, Alcoff (2007) in critically analyzing Mignolo, and Rumford (2006) on theorizing borders.

4. The two other significant works are undertaken by Ann Stoler (2001) who draws on her work on Dutch colonies to then compare it with the condition of Native Americans in North American history and by Bart Moore-Gilbert (2009) who critically studies the colonial activities of his own colonial ancestors in India. Such comparisons across time and space also destabilize the connection between knowledge and power.

5. Seidman traces the origins of the dichotomy of empires and nations to the Enlightenment thinkers who imagined that the early modern era dominated by empires was followed by the modern, unilinear social progress of nations. These thinkers conveniently overlooked the fact that from the sixteenth century through at least World War II empires, no nation-states provided the dominant political framework throughout the world.

6. According to this formulation, the rhetoric of Western modernity could only be sustained through its dark and constitutive side, namely the logic of coloniality (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006, p. 206).

7. The first Western modernity was that introduced to the rest of the world by the Iberian empires of Spain and Portugal from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The ensuing colonization of knowledge especially after the second Western modernity was in turn silenced by the rhetoric of the globalization of culture (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006, p. 208).

8. Also included among these empires were that of Japan (1895–1945), but it was not analyzed in as much detail as the Ottoman and Russian empires (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006, p. 209).

9. The resulting ambiguity of location leads these regions to highlight their sacred geography or geopolitics in an attempt to recover their lost identity on the one hand and to form alliances with both the North and the South on the other. For another similar analysis of Russia's imperial borderlands, see Brower and Lazzerini (1997).

10. It should be noted that Sankar Muthu (2003) does indeed address the complexity of discourse regarding the non-West within the Enlightenment discourse, but does not necessarily employ the postcolonial approach in doing so.

11. Eyal Ginio (2004) additionally analyzes the place of Gypsies (*kıpti*) in Ottoman society only to reveal that they formulated an ambiguous group that was neither Muslim nor non-Muslim.

12. For additional studies, see also Brummett (1994), Goffman (1998, 2002), and Greene (2000).

13. Lynda Carroll (2011) treats the Ottoman administrative attempts to forcefully settle nomadic tribes in the Transjordan as an indication of this new colonial mentality while Thomas Kühn (2007) nuances the “exclusionary inclusiveness” of Ottoman rule in Yemen by arguing that the locals were included in local administration, but now along sectarian lines. Tal Shuval (2000) articulates the manner in which the local janissary corps sustained their exclusionary Turkishness through recruiting Turks into the militia and marrying selectively. Monica Spiridon (2006) discusses the coexistence of two sets of local elites in the Balkans, one

retaining the traditional Turkish-style hierarchy and the other embracing the social consequences of Western-style education to challenge that hierarchy.

14. Isa Blumi employs the Ottoman experience to destabilize binary nationalist narratives in Yemen and Albania. Viewing the issue of identity formation from the standpoint of the Ottoman imperial subjects, Blumi destabilizes the narratives that assume what was proposed by the Ottoman state and interpreted by Western Europeans in the context of Albanians did not at all capture the complexities on the ground as many Albanians had very disparate views and identities, ones systematically silenced by nationalist historiography.

15. For a similar study on the Enlightenment thinkers' binary images of the Turks, see also Çırakman (2001).

16. Subrahmanyam (2006, p. 69) also mentions the Persian Safavid and the Chinese Ming and Qing empires, but does not analyze these as extensively.

17. Also overlooked in the process were the world-embracing ambitions of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires in the sixteenth century; the former was dismissed as the "Sick Man of Europe" and the latter through the "Black Legend." The Black Legend demonized the Spanish Empire and the Habsburgs that ruled over it for a while in terms of the treatment of the indigenous subjects overseas and religious minorities in Europe.

18. Michael Mann's five part taxonomy of "compulsory cooperation" comprises military pacification, the military multiplier effect, the correlation of authority with economic power, labor intensification, and the coerced diffusion of cultural norms (Jacoby, 2008, p. 268).

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