

Ali Yaycioğlu: “Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions.”

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Among many texts that have been published recently which explore the long history of the Ottoman Empire, Stanford professor Ali Yaycioğlu's *Partners of Empire* stands out as an extraordinary work re-evaluating upheavals in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Revolution. This particular moment in Ottoman history drew the attention of the author due to the gap in the field; since the Age of Revolution is generally associated with the West, and particularly with the French and American Revolutions. In the interim, the 18th and 19th centuries are vital for full comprehension of the emergence of modernism and western values of democracy in the region that stretches from the Balkans, through Turkey, to the Arab world. In this regard, Yaycioğlu draws the outline of his book as “to explain the transformation of Ottoman institutions, regional formations, and the global context as an integrated phenomenon” (x). Most significantly, *Partners of Empire* analyzes what the long-term effects of this long period of upheavals can tell us about contemporary Turkey and the Middle East's turbulent political landscape and puts this transitional era of the Ottoman case into a global context.

In the introduction, the author points out that there was a distinction between European and Ottoman experiences of revolution and rejects the older historiog-

raphy of previous scholars that the narrative of failed Westernization attempts helps us to understand the evolution of the Ottoman Empire during the Age of Revolution (1760-1820). Instead, the author argues that there was not a major revolution such as the French Revolution in the empire, yet rather a number of reforms and transitions related to the globalized context of revolutions and modernization across the world which showed itself as “series of shakeups, political crises, popular insurrections and different attempts at settlements” (1). For the Ottoman case, the author prefers to use revolution in a contextual terminology which can be interpreted as “a diverse repertoire of reform agendas, institutional restructuring, political discourse, and shifting coalitions” throughout the book (1). The multiplicity of actors-individuals, house-holds, and collective actors with their own agendas, calculations and capacities with the agenda of changing the status quo, participated in the Ottoman transformation. The battle was not between the old and new, state and people, elites and the crowd, centre and periphery, or Muslim and non-Muslims as monolithic blocks. Rather, in many battles coalitions were formed between various groups and interests in a messy political landscape (x). The following chapters

successfully specify these unique Ottoman patterns of political action, the making and unmaking of coalitions, forms of building and losing power, expression of public opinion, and how order was maintained and agreements were reached (x-xi).

The first chapter, with a genuine effort to review the existing literature on the subject, also conveys a discussion about the nature of the late 18th century reorganization of the Ottoman Empire, particularly of the general characteristics of the state and the reforms under Selim III. These reforms were called *Nizām-ı Cedīd* (New Order), which included a new fiscal administration and the formation of a new army in accordance with the European military technology as concerns about the role of the Janissaries and their threatening influence in the administration intensified, especially after a series of territorial defeats against Russia and the Habsburg Empire. It can be argued this was the moment for the empire signalling the beginning of power struggles that would lead to the establishment of many organic partnerships and/or oppositions among the provincial elites and the Ottoman polity.

Chapter 2 discusses the nature of the relationship between the provincial elite and the empire by featuring the emergence of a new class of provincial notables organized as family dynasties called *hanedans*. The new provincial elites developed a new kind of relationship with the empire and acted as “administrative, fiscal, and military entrepreneurs” (67), trying to expand their local powers. The development of such dynastic claims to rule in the provinces conflicted with the traditional Ottoman state ideology, yet it was inevitable for the empire to form such partnerships to survive domestic and foreign pressure. At this point, the author successfully presents several characteristic family networks and their chiefs, such as Ali Pasha of Egypt, Ali Pasha of Tepelene in Albania, and the Çapanoğlu Dynasty of Anatolia and Mustafa Bayraktar, a provincial notable from the town of Ruse on the Danube who maintains a special attention throughout the book. Yaycıoğlu describes the interaction of local notables in the provinces, the central state, and the district populations, especially in reference to tax collection by detailing the so-called apportionment system, common in the central provinces of the Balkans and Anatolia. Archival materials used in this section are of crucial importance and notably new to the field.

In Chapter 3, the author turns his attention to the local communities of the empire and argues that an institutional consolidation of several bottom-up collective practices in public administration and finance in the central provinces of the empire dominated the Ottoman polity. The ruling elite delegated important aspects of governance to provincial people, and these “great magnets” acted as administrative and military entrepreneurs in highly unstable and competitive imperial (both central and peripheral) sectors, without securing guarantees for their wealth, status and even their lives (240). As a central example of this, he chooses the Danubian city of Ruse (Rusçuk) and details the relationship between governance and fiscal policy as well as the petitions from local communities, electoral practices and district politics. Yaycıoğlu proposes stimulating interpretations of the process of selection of the *ayans*, the local notables in charge of diverse aspects of local governance. In spite of “procedural ambiguity,” “messy political contests,” and the fact that they “occasionally included violence” or factional rivalries, these processes were, for the author, the manifestation of the existence of a local form of political decision-making (140).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the crisis of 1806 and its consequences, including the Janissary revolution of 1807 and the following coup d'état: "backed by a few reformist bureaucrats, a petty *ayan* in the small Balkan city of Hazergard launched a coup, deposed the sultan and enthroned a new one, in short order becoming grand vizier with extraordinary powers" (189). The author challenges the existing historiography of the chain of events by focusing on the popular opposition to the New Order led by janissaries, shifting coalitions between provincial and imperial elites, growing politicization of Ottoman communities and the *interimperial* story of the Napoleonic wars and wartime diplomacy. The course of 1806 events are beautifully illustrated through the lens of new primary sources from the Ottoman Archives (BOA) in Istanbul and the *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères* (AMEA) in Paris, which are mainly used for evidentiary purposes.

As the title suggests, the last chapter of the book, "The Settlement" offers a synthesis of the end of a period of crisis and conflicts in the form of a "negotiated resolution" which led to the idea of the rise of popular sovereignty. The 1808 Deed of Alliance (*Sened-i İttifâk*) prepared the Ottoman political elite both in the centre

and peripheries for a road test to practice negotiating a coalition, settling disputes, ending a crisis, and building a new polity (238). In theory, the Deed aimed to stabilize the empire by shaping an alliance between imperial reformists, who held power, and provincial power holders, who had regional control but lacked influence in the central government. This new alliance would have been based on shared resources, collective responsibility, security and mutual trust. The provincial nobles claimed that they were partners of the empire, shareholders in the larger picture. The state, however, continued to think of them as servants. For Yaycıoğlu, the Deed was a short-lived attempt to make the empire more inclusive by involving regional leaders. Yet, rather than bringing the empire closer through partnership and cooperation, the Deed was not universally accepted and its failure led to further divisions, leading to the empire's eventual dissolution after World War I. The most outstanding value of this chapter is the author's close reading and the discussion of the document which allows us to evaluate the document's reception in modern history and its place among other constitutional texts from the Age of Revolution.

The author shows that one response of the Ottoman elites to crisis was partnership,

and this helped the empire overcome challenges to its survival while precluding dismemberment. In this regard, the Deed carried a new conception of the state as a "collective enterprise" of provincial notables and the dynasty (234-36). As a result, the Ottoman polity experienced a turn from a vertical empire to a horizontal and participatory one (2), and three alternative modes of reform developed. Yaycıoğlu defines these modes as "the order of the empire", "the order of the notables", and "the order of communities" (240). These three modes can be summarized as the top to bottom reforms which led to various partnership of the magnets and the public participation to a certain extent. More importantly, "the legacy of actors who played a transformative role in the Age of Revolution continued to shape Ottoman political culture" (2-3) until the end of the Empire after the First World War, briefly explained in the conclusion. The manuscript, rather than a theoretical debate on the concept of revolution, encourages more discussion and research on how the Ottoman world entered the 19th century of modernization and globalization. Carefully researched and accessibly written, it is an excellent addition to the growing literature on Middle Eastern history as a part of a transnational, multidisciplinary and comparative turn in the field.

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received her B.A. from Bilkent University with degrees in English Language and Literature and Political Science in 2000. She completed her M.A. at the History Department of the same institution with a degree in European Political History. She received her Ph.D. in History at Istanbul University, Turkey in 2013. She has been studying on war, memory, commemoration and nationalism with a comparative approach. Currently, she is working as a post-doctoral fellow at Glasgow Caledonian University. Her recent research agenda examines the social and cultural history of First World War in the Middle East, transnational history of war, memory and commemoration in relation to political instrumentation and religion. Her specific contribution focuses on stories and experiences at of war that have been less frequently told and the cultural and social legacy of World War I in the Middle East and how this affected current situation in the region.

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The transnational and local archival materials utilized for each section alone make this book a substantial reference volume as well. The author utilizes multiple archives across Turkey, the Balkans, Austria, France, Russia and England, and the main arguments of each chapter are backed by thorough analysis of primary documents written in Ottoman-Turkish, Arabic, French and Greek. The chapters are exemplary at demonstrating how various actors help to shape and were in turn shaped during the empire's revolutionary and conflicting cycles. As a reader, an afterword that explains the period after the First World War, particularly an analysis of the similarity between the National Oath of 1920 (*Misak-i Milli*) and the Deed of Alliance (1808), would have been beneficial and would have fed the reader's curiosity. Due to the fact that the First World War created a new nation descended from the old Empire, similar problems remained for a long time. As noted by the author in the conclusion, the continued tension of actors undermining the new state's sovereignty (on their own or with other transnational actors) on the one hand, while on the other seeking out, using, and mobilizing various state resources and being reinforced by the newly formed Turkish state, demands attention which would presum-

ably be met by the author in a future manuscript. Overall, the book has a timely value for scholars of the period and the region and will prove useful to be assigned in a graduate course.

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