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CHAPTER ONE

# Recycling Empire

WHAT COMES AFTER EMPIRE? As the world in the early 2020s watches the American withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, the rise of a new Afghan emirate, and the prolonged conflicts in ex-Soviet countries, this becomes a pressing question. But it is a question for which history supplies no single clear-cut answer. After the fall of the Roman Empire we encounter city-communities, tribal Christian monarchies, and remote monastic settlements, and we can observe the rise of Byzantium. The first Muslims conquered both Byzantine and Persian territories, but their universal empire soon disintegrated into an array of small caliphates, emirates, and sultanates. In nineteenth-century India, British companies and armies transformed the Mughal Empire and small monarchies into an assemblage of colonies, provinces, and princely states variously subordinated to British rule. And, following the First World War, nation-states emerged from the wreckage of empires.[1]

Or did they? Historians and sociologists have increasingly challenged the commonplace assumption that the world after 1919 was a world of nation-states. Indeed, at a quick glance, we encounter quite a variety of political regimes—kingdoms, emirates, federations, mercantile city-states, domains controlled by warlords, and old and new imperial projects.[2] The scorched continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe after the First World War was a world profoundly shaped by the imperial order that preceded it. And just as empire is rarely a secular affair, so what came after empire in the 1920s was still defined by religious, dynastic, and, of course, ethnonationalist principles.[3]

The suggestion about the postwar relevance of empire shouldn't be surprising given that empires ruled the world until 1919 and imperial formations remain today.[4] Among historians, to speak of the 1920s as a


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period of "imperial internationalism" under the League of Nations is now a commonplace.[5] But new imperial history also threatens to reproduce the categories of empire. If we are to understand the twentieth century and our complex present, we should then pose the question, "What comes after empire?" in more precise terms. If history did not proceed conveniently from empires to nation-states, then what was new and what was old in the twentieth century? And exactly *how* was empire the origin of successor political orders after the victory of Allied Powers? What does empire as an analytical category mean for political theory? If the concept of nationhood has not been the exclusive guiding principle in the construction of new political orders, then what kind of orders are these?

*Modern Arab Kingship* seeks to address these questions with regard to the new Arab governments born after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. I should make clear that this book is not a narrative history of the surprisingly slow Ottoman dissolution.[6] Building on primary sources and previous scholarship, I instead tell stories of Arab projects in the 1920s which do not fit in the empire-to-nation-state framework.[7] My argument is of two parts.

First, I suggest that in the 1920s the territories of the defeated Central Powers underwent a process that might be termed a "recycling of empire." This operation, I argue, saw the enforced repurposing of political, legal, economic, and ecological resources into new configurations. In terms of politics, this meant the recycling of modern Ottoman imperial institutions into local ones, similar to the transformation of imperial institutions in post-Habsburg polities.[8] Instead of characterizing the political order in such polities as *colonial* or *national*, I prefer to characterize it as *local*, so as to convey the locally-inflected use of multiple sources of authority (dynastic, genealogical, religious, and ethnic-national) left over from the previous imperial order. Hence, I call the governments in the post-Ottoman Arab regions "local states," except in Palestine. In sum, I suggest that recycling empire produced local states and new imperial projects among defeated peoples in the 1920s.[9]

Using and interrogating the term "local" enables us to historicize the uses of identity-based claims such as religion and ethnicity in postwar statemaking. It helps to situate the monarchical institution and other old forms of politics in the 1920s as transformed continuities of previous imperial institutions and practices. By using the term "local" especially in the Arab regions we can explain how the renewed French and British imperial projects continued a layered, vertical relationship to occupied, mandated, and treaty governments among the defeated peoples. Finally, the term "local"

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usefully conveys the often associative, modular logic of state-making, such as ideas and practices regarding associations, federations, and monarchical personal-unions.

The second half of the argument concerns the nature of Allied control in the occupied Arab regions. This control amounted to a new form of empire. The novelty consisted of legal sovereignty being incorporated into the techniques of domination because of the new norms at the League of Nations. In the 1920s, successor local polities were to be sovereign but subordinated to distant metropoles through contracts and military occupations. Similarly to the US in its occupation of 1920s Haiti (a sovereign polity in the League), the victorious British and French governments modified previous legal tools in order to rule over local Arab governments, whose sovereignty followed both from the Covenant of the League of Nations and from imperial recognition.[10] This modification of imperial rule has long been overlooked, I suggest, because the normative connection between sovereignty and the nation-state has occluded our vision. In historical scholarship, there has been a rhetorical inflation of the term "sovereignty," borrowed from law and political science.

What we today mean by "sovereignty" is often "independence" and "freedom," especially freedom from intervention; political scientists call this norm "Westphalian sovereignty."[11] For interwar French and British imperial advisors, however, sovereignty had a more narrowly technical meaning. It referred to the legal quality of domestic authority. It meant a government's right to issue title deeds for land ownership and its right to the adjudication of its subjects. Contrary to their actions in pre-1914 colonial situations, the British and French empires now conceded that there were some sovereign entities in the occupied Ottoman territories—but they at the same time intended their domination over these entities to be permanent.[12] By recognizing this bureaucratic sovereignty, therefore, the European administrators and jurists were not granting the occupied Ottoman territories freedom, but rather were embarking on a new strategy of domination. Governing without sovereignty, through administrative means and outsourced faculties of economy, was at the root of this new strategy. This was not the informal imperialism through trade and debt familiar from the nineteenth century.[13] The post-1919 formal framework was filled instead with new, yet-to-be-crystallized legal norms and practices, which connected newly designated regions through political, military, and economic contracts to old metropoles.[14] It is this sort of situation that I mean when I apply the apparently self-contradictory term "subordinated sovereign government" to the successor polities. These were sovereign local states.[15]

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The title of this book is *Modern Arab Kingship* and some readers may expect a historical anthropology of transcendental authority in the twentieth century. They will be disappointed. Islamic law does not prescribe any particular form of political regime, and there is nothing inherently sacred in the institution of the Sunni imamate. In the 1920s, Sheikh Muhammad Bakhit al-Muti'i, the most respected Muslim jurist of post-Ottoman Egypt, argued that it does not matter whether the name of this office *caliph, imam, sultan*, or *king*, because "the meaning is important and not the titles."[16] When it came to establishing post-Ottoman Muslim polities, monarchy was only one among the available options. My story is about how, in the Arab world, Islam and monarchy became gradually reattached after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Religion as a constituting element in the political order is an imperial feature. Sultan Abdülhamid II. (r. 1876–1909) had integrated the descendants of the Prophet (sing. *sharif*, pl. *ashraf*) and provincial patricians into the modern Ottoman political order between the 1870s and 1908. It was this Ottoman enhancement of Muslim Arab genealogical authority that attracted the attention of British and, to some extent, French, imperial planners. After a spate of short-lived though influential republican theorizing—largely the work of Indian Muslim thinkers and groups of young Arab bureaucrats—most Muslim Arab scholars of religion had by the mid-1920s reached the conclusion that dynastic rule alone could preserve Islam in the face of a purging of religious institutions such as they saw happening in the new Republic of Turkey and the USSR. As a result of meetings between European imperial planners and local activists, the new Arab local polities became somewhat counterrevolutionary, "Hamidian" regimes, without an actual ideology of kingship. Although historians often suppose a British preference for monarchies as opposed to a French preference for republics, we shall see that even French administrators considered the making of a monarchy in the new State of Syria until 1939. This is the story of modern Arab kingship.

## *A Theory of Transformation*

To suggest that the "political cultural legacy" of empire is the origin of successor political orders is to state the obvious.[17] It is less obvious what the imperial political order in the early twentieth century consisted of and by what kind of alchemy defeated peoples adapted their former ways of life to the new League norms in a still imperial world.

*Modern Arab Kingship* is not about "governance," a concept that historians use to describe practices of government and domination (management

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of peripheries, negotiated tax-collection, military conscription, legal categories of subjecthood, infrastructures, alliances among notables, and so on).[18] My focus is, rather, on the "political order," the conceptual realm behind political institutions. This we can analyze through the study of constituent events (moments when groups impose the constitutional form of a new political society) and historical practices in legal institutions. I take it for granted that the "political order" and the "legal order" are connected at the deep constitutional level. This book is consequently one historian's contribution to the political theory of empire in the age of steam and oil.

Historians and political scientists agree that an empire is a large economic, legal, and political organization with expansionist aims ("or with memories of an expansionist past"), which manages diversity and reproduces differentiation and inequality among people.[19] Imperial officials have often used ideas about racial and cultural superiority for legitimizing expansion in the eyes of the metropolitan public. We must consider empire as an analytical category instead of a rhetorical one. I begin with this crucial aspect.

The First World War was a long, global clash between two groups of empires, the Allied Powers (Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and later the US) and the Central Powers (the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Bulgarian governments) between 1914 and about 1923.[20]

The prewar imperial political order, as I explain in Chapter Two in more detail, was comprised of religious, ethnic-national, and dynastic (occasionally presidential) sources of authority. Religion is important. Empire accommodated plural temporal regimes, including religion-based calendars, despite its bureaucratic preference for scientific time as appropriate to the age of steam. The modern Ottoman government, for example, operated through such an arrangement, embodied in its bifurcated legal system that encompassed both *qadi* (*shari'a*) and administrative, often called "civil" (*nizamiye*), courts which used the Muslim calendar and the imperial fiscal calendar, respectively, at the turn of the century. Scholars argue that religious coexistence, as a body of thought and as reflected in the practice of government, was "the ecumenical frame" of the Ottoman Empire. From a political-legal point of view, this frame was made possible by a modern form of imperial Muslim authority.[21]

What were the maneuvers through which, after defeat, imperial authority became local? The revolutionary, total eradication of the past is an exception in history. Far more common are constrained, negotiated, often externally enforced transformations. To analyze these transformations, we need to take a genealogical approach to temporal change. We

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need to understand that the birth of the present happens through the recasting of the past.[22]

Art historians understand such operations of recasting well as a result of their familiarity with what they term *spolia*. This Latin word means "spoils" (sing. *spolium*) as in "spoils of war." The term denotes materials and artifacts reused in buildings and art works and thus given "a form of new life" after some sort of dissolution and without reference to the original context. Spoliation is a transformation which ultimately diminishes anything original and authentic; "*spolia* are the survivors of violence."[23] Art historian Richard Brilliant has introduced the useful distinction between *spolia in se* (reuse of material) and *spolia in re* (reuse of form). He has suggested by this distinction that in addition to the reuse of materials, spoliation can be also virtual, "in style," for instance when motives and aesthetic energies are revived in new environments.[24]

Historians of technology and infrastructure also appreciate "repurposing" as an important operation, for instance when old machine parts are put to new uses.[25] In political theory, Eric Hobsbawm came close to describing this type of aesthetic action in politics when he coined the concept "invented tradition."[26] Philosophers would perhaps identify these genealogical operations with the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*, which expresses the change of something into a new quality through the reuse and synthesis of previous elements. Even anthropologists recognize the value of "imperial debris" as an analytical category.[27]

Since the 1990s, sociologists have employed the terms "bricolage" and "reworking" to characterize the rearrangement and repurposing of formerly Soviet political and economic institutions. They trace "paths of extrication" from the previous political-economic order to explain the advent of new institutions in post-Socialist polities.[28] Recent work on post-Habsburg polities similarly focuses on the social history of "local level transitions," fragmentation, imperial to Socialist internationalism, city-states, and deglobalization.[29] These studies about the remaking of previous orders all rely on a historical-genealogical approach to temporal change instead of postulating radical revolutionary breaks and the wholesale replacement of life-worlds.

Thus, at the center of this study lies the notion of the "successor society" and its hybrid political order. Successor societies and foreign powers often create local states in which the new political order contains recycled elements of the previous order, often without reference to or in explicit denial of their source. By focusing on instances of recasting and repurposing, we can translate fundamental questions whose vocabulary usually derives

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from normative international law and political science into the analytical terminology of empire and successor societies. In the case of the post-Ottoman polities, for instance, instead of asking "Is religion compatible with the nation-state and democracy?" we can ask "How did previously imperial institutions and practices of religion function in non-imperial polities?" and "How did practices of unelected and elected representation in empire change when faced with elected institutional forms of representation in successor societies?" Instead of seeing Islam as an authentic expression of an unchanging essence, we can ask "How did Muslim utopianism acquire a Western vocabulary in the 1920s and 1930s?"[30] Instead of taking nationalism at face value, we can ask, "What are the differences and similarities between race-talk in empire and in local states?"—especially when the subject is the interwar period of unprecedented white male domination. Such questions help us to redefine the landscapes of power, to find similarities and differences in state-making practices, to delaminate European and local agency in the political architecture of post-Ottoman polities, and to understand the programs which aimed at preserving the imperial management of diversity and inequality (what Burbank and Cooper call "the politics of difference") in new ways in the age of the League of Nations.[31] These questions help us to historicize transformations and map the logic of counterrevolutionary change; ultimately they lead us towards an empire-based theory of modernity.

## *The Social Birth of Local States in Global Legal History*

The history of the modern Middle East is usually told very differently in scholarship. Instead of a transition from imperial to local authority, the conventional narrative starts with a revolution, led by a *sharif*. In 1916, Sharif al-Husayn, the Ottoman Emir of Mecca, led the Arabs, or at least some Arabs, against the "Turkish yoke" and received promises from the British government of a giant Arab state. But this "Arab revolt"—often portrayed as a nationalist movement—did not achieve its goals. The attempt by al-Husyan's son Faysal to create an independent Arab kingdom in Damascus ended with the French army's invasion in 1920. Due to infamous wartime agreements (Sykes-Picot and other lesser-known diplomatic deals) the British government did not help Faysal against the French—thus the story at this point often becomes a tale of British (and, in general, Western) betrayal.[32] Thereafter, so the master narrative goes, the League of Nations ostensibly gave mandates to the British and

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French governments to administer the partitioned Arab territories. Historians transpose the terms of earlier European colonialism in Africa—or the terms of even earlier European colonization in the Americas—to the Allied attitude towards these mandated regions. British and French "colonial policy," we are told, created the "colonial state," which mediated "between the colony and the international economy." British administrators appointed puppet Arab rulers and co-opted landowners and tribal sheikhs, while the French institutionalized sectarian politics, and both the British and the French even went so far as to fashion an Arab nationalism to serve their own interests. Such interwar "methods of political organization," made "perhaps inevitable" the Arab military governments of the Cold War period.[33] A somewhat defensive version of this story uses, instead of "colonialism," the term "imperialism" and characterizes the interwar period as the "liberal age."[34]

There is a widespread conviction that "the post-Ottoman political order was European, not Ottoman."[35] In this view, the First World War completely "destroyed" the Ottoman imperial order.[36] The institution and terminology of Arab kingship were, according to scholars who hold this view, "a calque of 'king' or *roi* in the modern European meaning."[37] Some political scientists have focused on the arrival of the norm of "Westphalian sovereignty" in the "Arab world," while others investigate the relevance of empire purely as a European enterprise rather than a problem of the Ottoman past.[38] Revisionist "mandate studies" meanwhile struggle with the colonial-decolonial research framework.[39]

The agency of the Allied Powers—most often the British Empire—is best known in the popular formulation of David Fromkin. According to his "1922 settlement" thesis, acts and agreements—the distribution of the League mandates, the abolishment of the Ottoman Empire, and the British decisions—created what is known as the modern Middle East around 1922. The date had to be approximate since the British imperial conference in Cairo during which Secretary of the Colonies Winston Churchill and others settled borders and distributed the sons of al-Husayn (Faysal to Iraq, 'Abd Allah to Transjordan) occurred in fact in 1921. Fromkin concludes that this arrangement failed to ensure that the political systems they established would endure because "British policy-makers imposed a settlement upon the Middle East in 1922 in which, for the most part, they themselves no longer believed."[40]

The story I tell in *Modern Arab Kingship* covers a different range of topics through the lenses of recycling and spoliation. How does the 1920s emergence of the Arab world look if approached from within the Ottoman

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Empire? How does the social birth of new states look if approached through religion and the modular logic of state formation instead of nationalism?

First, instead of a sudden break with the Ottoman Empire, I focus on the difficult and lengthy remaking of once imperial political and legal institutions. While many scholars use the term "post-Ottoman," they do not engage with what "Ottoman" as a modern imperial political order and legal bureaucracy meant in substantial terms in the 1900s and 1910s. When talking about empire, many consider only the European and American empires. The new Arab governments indeed stressed the importance of *not* being Ottoman. But the Ottoman Empire was a silent, immense, and long-standing obstacle for both local and Allied actors attempting to design successor polities. When I write "empire" I am often reflecting on the dilemma posed by the vanquished Ottoman world. This Muslim empire was not fully obliterated like the African pre-colonial empires and the Mughals in nineteenth-century India, or self-decomposed like defeated Austria-Hungary in 1918. Neither did the Arab provinces break off from the mother empire as the South American colonies did from Spain in the early nineteenth century.[41] Instead of a revolution there was an Allied occupation of Istanbul in 1919, unlike anything that took place in Berlin, Vienna, or Budapest in that year. The Allied Powers forced this empire to dissolve—and getting rid of empire was not an easy matter. For instance, historians have demonstrated the existence of imperial, dualist Arab-Turkish visions of order well into the 1920s.[42] In this book, I explore the consequences of these persistent imperial imaginaries and practices for the construction of local states.

Second, I focus on the role of local agency—including the rise of Arab activists—in the recasting of imperial political institutions. Alongside the grand narrative of French and British decision-making, scholars have taken note of violence and resistance on the part of local actors.[43] I demonstrate that elite and ordinary Arabs created the post-Ottoman Muslim monarchy as the model for a new imperial formation (ideally a new caliphate over an association of emirs). They considered this a useful regime form for managing religious and ethnic diversity and a potential locus of elite resistance to the Allied occupations.[44] The Allied planners struggled to reduce this invention to the subordinated, small princely regimes they desired. The Arab national monarchy thus became a fragile, counterrevolutionary institution, a somewhat Orientalist and self-Orientalizing political shell without significant ideological content. But we must understand that historical actors did not think in our categories. The Arabs were not alone. From Yugoslavia to

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Afghanistan, monarchy was the agreed-upon counterrevolutionary regime for the political shaping of successor societies in the 1920s.[45]

Finally, instead of taking the artificial League mandate as a territorial framework, I consider a much larger Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea trans-regional space as the political playground of once-Ottoman actors. By expanding the conventional "mandate" area to fit a larger frame we can follow, for instance, the emergence of the Arab Saudi Kingdom (Saudi Arabia) as a hybrid, pan-Arab, even global enterprise, and we can observe how it served some Syrians as an act of revenge on the French mandate. In this global framework, we can also trace 1920s Indian ideas about a Muslim republic in the Hijaz region (alongside the occasional post-Ottoman constitutionalism of Hijazi merchants) and the interregional making of a Muslim republic in the new State of Syria, long before Pakistan and Iran.[46]

Recentering the modern Ottoman Empire as a key point of origin for twentieth-century Arab polities, and indeed our contemporary world, does not invalidate the master story of Allied partitions, British, French, and Italian terror, and the Zionist colonization of Palestine. It rather invites us to address a new pool of questions about the spoliation, bricolage, extrication, reworking, and repurposing of previous Ottoman and Allied imperial institutions. To understand the emergence of the Arab world, we need to understand how the Ottoman and Allied imperial projects became conjoined in the 1920s. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, in which the new Turkey also recognized the independence of new Arab polities, gave rise to an immense body of paperwork, but the making of political orders was a more complex, regional matter.[47] The distinction between material and virtual reuse, *spolia in se* and *spolia in re*, is useful in this regard for it explains the process whereby, despite the rhetoric about "the Turkish yoke," Allied rule in Arab regions continued the style of earlier Hamidian politics. For it was the very reuse of once imperial Muslim bodies—for instance, the politicized descendants of the Prophet and the *qadi* courts—that brought about the obliteration of their Ottoman uses; so that in the virtual sense, there was no need for an actual caliph or "Ottoman" sultan if monarchy and religion were to remain constituent fictions in new local orders. In order "to attend to the evasive history of empire that disappears so easily into other appellations and other, more available contemporary terms," we must study the survival and integration of imperial ruins into new political programs.[48]

To approach the post-Ottoman world as an instance of recycled empire also highlights how exceptional Palestine was. This League-mandated region became neither a sovereign government nor a colony like Italian

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Libya. The British Empire did not arrange for an ex-Ottoman dynast to reign, nor did it create an organic law for a government of Arab notables. Despite Palestine not being a colony, the League required the British government to allow Zionists to settle in this region, and this region alone, among the occupied Ottoman territories.[49] Interwar Palestine was not entirely immune from the post-Ottoman Arab federative projects, however. There were candidates for the throne of Jerusalem, but nothing came of such plans. As for the Palestinians, some hoped for spiritual subjecthood and protection from the new Arab kings, but in vain. In the midst of the 1930s Arab revolt, the poet ʻAwad, from Nablus, is said to have written a poem on his prison wall to announce his bitter disappointment: "I thought the kings would lead us."[50] And indeed Jerusalem and the mosque of al-Aqsa are to this day subject to sharifian (Jordanian) claims.

Political scientist Adom Getachew conceptualizes anticolonial nationalism in 1960s Africa and the Caribbean with reference to the term "worldmaking," by which she denotes, *inter alia*, the idea of the regional federation as an alternative to the nation state. I too was tempted to use her term, because the 1920s saw the discursive birth of several worlds—the "Arab world," the "Muslim world," federations, and the rise of Arab internationalists. Ultimately, however, I concluded that the idea of "worldmaking" is of limited value for an enquiry into the social history of 1920s postwar state-making. Setting the idea of "worldmaking" in opposition to empire avails us little in conveying the temporal dimension of transformation (the operations of recycling and recasting), and leads us to overlook the fact that the practices and logic of modular state-making belong also to the imperial world (thus federations are imperial projects, too); furthermore, it risks both obscuring the keen Arab interest in the League of Nations, and exaggerating the utopian dimension of political thought. In fact, the main concern of post-Ottoman historical actors, including activists who applied to global ethical solidarities, was about their own regions, laws, economies, and governments, and not the wider world, and they often did not even consider building egalitarian societies. To describe the state-centered interest of defeated and empire-less peoples after the Great War we thus must start instead from an analytical critique of imperial programs.[51]

My approach, which may be called global legal history, has emerged from the new legal and intellectual history of empires.[52] It is a perspective useful for the critical study of large transformative processes in the twentieth century—among them "nation-building," shifts in territorial status, regime transformation, military occupation, the mandates, and "imposed constitutionalism"—for it brings together the tools of several productive

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fields, such as international history, area studies, historical sociology, and microhistory.[53]

As it is often used, however, the term "global legal history" means the mere collection of geographically diverse authors in a comparative frame to "denationalize" legal history.[54] Among historians, "global" has also been an adjective describing the *object* of history-writing, such as a story about the world-wide circulation of an individual or an object, the process of a locality's integration into the world economy, or as in the "globalizing" of a commodity.[55]

I use the term "global" chiefly in a methodological sense, as an adjective describing the encompassing, universal *perspective* of the historian. It conveys attention to the connections between international, imperial, and regional-local scales.[56] In this book, this attention often takes the form of microhistories of those constituent acts and events that were crucial moments of transformation when actors, operating at various scales, converged in the creation of a new political regime. "Global" is the social historian's attention to this convergence of scales—imperial, international, regional, local—that co-produced an often unintended outcome in a relatively short period.

In a book about the social birth of new local states, this "global" method is by definition legal because international, imperial, regional, and local actors all claimed measures of constituent power. While empire retained its claim to create sovereignty in constituent acts next to the League of Nations' distributive acts of sovereignty external activists also strove to critique and shape decisions in local institutions of representative self-determination. I also consider the legal aspects of military occupation and the question of authority in the administration of justice. This book provides selected examples of constituent actions and imaginations about legal authority from below and from above in the post-Ottoman regions.

## *National Projects in Composite Frameworks*

The key Arab political schemes and practices in the period under investigation belong to the repertoire of ideas about modular and associative government. Modular (often layered) rule means that communities and regions are linked to a center through indirect means, such as contracts, administrative regulations, and, in the Ottoman case, through constitutional arrangements and symbols such as the recognition of the Ottoman sultan as imam (caliph).[57] As the European Union prompts new questions about sharing sovereignty, composite polities have been at the forefront

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of historical thinking about early modern European history.[58] European empires sought to control colonies in the form of subordinated confederacies, and activists also often imagined a better future through autonomy. We should seriously consider similar ideas about composite formations during the emergence of successor Arab polities from the Ottoman debris.

In analytical terms, the Arab paths out of the Ottoman Empire present us with two main dimensions of political thought on the subject of composite polities.[59] The first dimension is *organizational*: both Arab and Allied planners envisioned post-Ottoman federative associations in the 1910s and 1920s. The nation-state, despite the Arabs' appeal to the principle of self-determination in 1919, was not primary, let alone the sole form of imagining and making sovereign societies.[60] In the past hundred years, the pan-Arab "unity projects," first the interwar "Hashemite" and then the "radical" projects of the 1950s and 60s, have fascinated historians and political scientists.[61] Finding the first composite political ideas proposed in the late Ottoman context and in post-Ottoman constituent events helps us to rethink the question of why the practices of national homogeneity did not displace the logic of imperial organization. The post-Ottoman composite projects typically presupposed that Islam, ethnicity, dynasty, and regional economy would be the bonds connecting autonomous polities.[62]

The second stream of thought addresses the domestic *constitutional* dimension, including the regime form and the sources of authority in Arab successor societies. The preference for monarchy can be ascribed to larger concerns about the management of diverse post-Ottoman societies, anti-Bolshevik interests, and the continued relevance of Islam. European administrators, ex-Ottoman grandees, and, ultimately, Muslim activist-nationalists conceived the monarchical regime as a means of retaining diversity and inequality, and a tool of integration into the League's world. Simply put, the practical question for all of these counterrevolutionary groups was what kind of political regime would best preserve the texture of a once Muslim imperial society in a new composite polity.

The organizational and the constitutional imaginations and practices force us to reconsider the role of nationalist rhetoric in state-making. Ernest Dawn argued that the 1916 Arab revolt in Mecca was neither an instance of Arab nationalism nor a struggle for the caliphate, but was rather an internal uprising against the Ottoman government, in which "one element of the ruling class" utilized the ideology of Arabism "as an instrument of conflict with its rivals within that class."[63] Building on Dawn's old argument, we can further explore the possibility that repudiating empire was a rhetorical alibi for creating new imperial-composite projects.

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There is a debate between historians who emphasize the composite, often cosmopolitan, modes of modern state-making and those who maintain the importance of nationalism and the nation-state in the twentieth century. The latter often point out that the nation-state triumphed despite federalist and cosmopolitan "fantasies."[64] Historians of imperial programs in successor societies certainly have a methodological point, though. For instance, my suggestion of thinking in terms of the sovereign local state as opposed to the national or colonial state in successor societies retains the imperial ambience and hierarchical organization without allowing a moral or an identity-based category to hijack the descriptive force of the argument in excavating the post-imperial difficulty. In my examples this allows us to follow how religion functioned in 1920s local state-making from above and from below. We can also use the history of failed projects to unearth disagreements from which new counter-movements often originated, hidden branches of dissent that much later resurfaced in changed forms.

How can we reconcile this empire-based theory of successor state-making with the claim that nationalism was the ruling public ideology of the time? In this book I will use the term "national project" to denote the ideas and practices that nationalist ideological groups advocated in the interests of codifying norms and laws in new polities. (Hence, I also subscribe to the use of the term "nationalizing states.").[65] Former Ottoman Arab military officers and patricians used the rhetoric of nationalism in the 1910s, but in the 1920s and 30s a new generation wanted to bring these ideas to fruition. Like socialism, a national project is a utopian enterprise. Achieving authenticity was the major problem faced by national projects within the imperial frames of the interwar period.[66] The path that would make "Ottomans into Arabs" involved significant cultural engineering.[67] The interwar period saw secular-nationalist projects that purported to be "authentic," based on the "traditional" authority of native monarchs and their religious apparatus.[68] The tension was that while the monarchical form maintained the imperial politics of diversity and inequality new racial-national imaginaries tended to erase the diversity of peoples in the Arab provinces, rendering peoples of Turkic, Kurdish, Albanian, Sudanese, Armenian, and other origins invisible in new nationalizing Arab governments. In chronological terms, it was possible that a strong national project might attain an exclusive position for some time and then collapse, leaving the political order once more subject to plural sources of authority.

Importantly, when considering national projects I consider not just people's domestic activism in their own "homeland" polities, but also the transregional activities of the previously intra-imperial Ottoman activists,

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especially in the case of one Syrian grouping, the "Independence (*Istiqlal*) Party" in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Allied occupations in fact produced communities of exile *before* they took up the work of making new polities. These diasporas began their quest for polities during the war, first by lobbying at the Paris Peace Conference and later by upgrading transnational, trans-Mediterranean, trans-Atlantic cultural-economic networks to form political networks. Typically, Muslim Arab diasporas, unlike the better-connected Zionist and Maronite ones, could promote the construction of "external homelands" only indirectly, through press propaganda and petitions. The end of the Ottoman Empire resulted in both in successor polities and in what I shall call "successor diasporas" in this book.

## *The Post-Ottoman Age*

Do we still live in a post-Ottoman age? Where does the historical scope of "the post-Ottoman world" begin and end? What exact period does "post-Ottoman studies" cover?[69] Erik-Jan Zürcher argued that, far from there being a complete rupture between the Ottoman and Republican periods, the "Young Turk era" continued all the way from 1908 to 1950. In this Turkey-centered periodization, the "Young Turk era" refers to the post-war continuity of individuals and their political ideas, associated with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which dominated the Ottoman government from 1912.[70] Historians have problematized the smooth republican transition. They have uncovered cases of anti-Atatürk CUP-secret agents with changing loyalties; the Turkish recycling of Armenians as "secular dhimmis" (protected peoples in Islamic law) in the 1920s; Muslim discontent with the abolishment of the caliphal position; the Ottoman roots of republican ideological dissent; and even cite Muslims in the new Yugoslavia fighting "to define a place for an Ottoman legacy" until the 1940s.[71]

In terms of their political order, the post-Ottoman Arab polities lie in the long shadow cast by Sultan Abdülhamid II. Exactly how long this shadow extends is a complex question. Historians have coined the somewhat nostalgic concept of an "Ottoman twilight," by which they most often mean the period between 1918 and the 1940s.[72] Others focus on memories as "the ghosts of empire" in the post-Ottoman context.[73] Keith Watenpaugh's pioneering work on the (Christian) Alepine middle class follows the Turkey-centric timeline, running between 1908 and the 1940s.[74] Michael Provence has proposed a sensible chrono-social category he calls "the last Ottoman generation": those individuals from the provinces who were educated between the 1880s and 1910s in Istanbul as

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imperial civil bureaucrats and higher military officers. Provence argues that their "Ottoman experience" was just as important as the "European colonial legacy" and that both were regional "commonalities" until the 1940s.[75] Cyrus Schayegh argues that the Ottoman twilight ended, at least in Greater Syria, around 1930, when the solidification of Arab states set off a "prolonged process of decolonization."[76] Anthropologists, however, have suggested that Ottoman practices persisted in rural Turkey well into the 1970s; and Ottoman family law is still important today in both Lebanon and Israel.[77]

In this book, the post-Ottoman era comes to two endings. The first marks the end of Arab political thinking in terms of Muslim imperial authority and can be dated around 1926. The second covers the decade from the 1948 Arab war with the new Zionist state and the resultant Palestinian Nakba. It does so because the events of 1948 brought an end to what had previously been an important, though often overlooked characteristic of the interwar decades. The post-Ottoman regimes, codifications, national projects, infrastructures, interwar techno-capitalism, and all regulatory activity—including in Palestine—were about the future.[78] Imperial *spolia* were the matter, literally, of Arab futures. Several temporalities, life-worlds, and uncertainties were jammed together within a framework of military occupation and transformation. A feeling of suspension, preparation, promise, and waiting prevailed. The shattering experience of 1948 ended the future-oriented character of the post-Ottoman Arab regimes, which now suddenly found themselves in the present. Composite projects, however, continued to instruct Arab politics up to the 1970s.

## *The Structure of This Book*

I am writing this study in politics as a preparation for my next research project on material histories. I accept in part that "the forms of legitimation of political authority [. . .] have always been linked to the way we use the world."[79] But in this book I can only gesture towards the effects of technological and ecological circumstance (railways, steam-shipping, airplanes, and storms, plagues, and drought) on human decisions. The only material phenomenon I treat at some length is the Ottoman Hijaz railway between Damascus and Medina, which was the infrastructural spine of sharifian imperial projects between 1916 and 1924. But even in that case, human decisions finally overwrote material conditions.

It would be hard to deny that the contemporary Middle East is the product of the largest constitutional experiment in world history. During

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and after the First World War, Arab patricians and military officers, British and French administrators, and ordinary people reconfigured the Ottoman imperial order, and they did this even before discussing exact borders (many demanded "natural" borders), resources for agriculture, and new markets. We know well the British and French maps, the Allied armies' need for oil, the Zionist settlement project, and Syria's evaluation by French merchants. We can also find economic considerations in Arab federative ideas. But the claims to authority preceded the practices. In Marxist terms, they started with the superstructure instead of the base.

This book tells a story about the rise and fall of the sharifian Arab Kingdom (by the 1920s a bloc of genealogical monarchies) and how a new idea about a Saudi-led Muslim association attempted to replace it. It was never really a rise and never a complete fall (the Kingdom of Jordan is still with us). The material avatar of the Arab Kingdom was the forgotten Kingdom of the Hijaz, a sovereign local state, and founding government of the League of Nations. By focusing on the amobatic, almost tentacular, expansion of the Arab Kingdom I also explore how the State of Syria came into being, for this region was the linchpin of the new Middle East in the 1920s. And Syrian political events were closely connected to politics in the French metropole, to British Egypt, and to the making of Transjordan and the Saudi polity in the late 1920s. I can only hope that the conceptual tools I propose will be useful to researchers studying other post-imperial regions as well.

In four sections, *Modern Arab Kingship* presents chapters that address the same question: namely, how the shift from imperial to local political order took place. This is a question of political theory that I answer by means of an empirical analysis of historical documents, employing the tools of microhistory and historical anthropology. Bringing together social history and legal theory helps us to access the disjuncture between composite practices and the norms of League-sovereignty.

In the first section, "A Theory of Sovereign Local States," I suggest a theory of the imperial political order (Chapter Two) and then describe the legal history of the new form of domination that I call "governing without sovereignty" (Chapter Three). I begin the second section, "Composite Routes Out of the Ottoman Empire," in Chapter Four, with an overview of the modern Ottoman composite order and the imperial upgrade of some Arab *ashraf* into their new roles as Ottoman grandees in the age of steam.

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In Chapter Five, I describe the phenomenon I call "utopian federalism," which in the 1900s envisioned means for changing the Ottoman Empire into a composite polity, possibly as a Muslim association of sharifian monarchies. The third section, "From Imperial to Local Muslim Authority," consists of two case studies on the difficulties encountered by attempts to transform Ottoman imperial authority under Allied occupations. Chapter Six is a micro-historical study, based on court records, of legal authority in the *qadi* and *nizamiye* courts in occupied Ottoman Damascus—the Kingdom of Syria—in the period between 1918 and 1920. Chapter Seven explores the transformation of imperial authority in Islamic legal theory in the socio-legal *shari'a* apparatus of post-Ottoman Egypt as a reaction to the new monarchical regime. The fourth section, "Paths of Extrication," provides a connected, transnational history of the late 1920s. In Chapter Eight I focus on the pan-Arab, especially Syrian, making of the Arab Saudi Kingdom (Saudi Arabia) at the intersection of inter-polity and inter-sovereign law. Chapter Nine describes the political construction (and the many monarchical visions) of the State of Syria, the latest sovereign Arab local polity and the first Muslim republic in the late 1920s. The Afterword formulates conclusions relevant to comparisons with other successor societies and to studies of the Cold War and contemporary history. There is a "Note on Sources" in the Works Cited section.

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