



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Introduction: Charting New Ground in the Study of Ottoman Foreign Relations

Alloul, H.; Martykánová, D.

DOI

[10.1080/07075332.2021.1914706](https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1914706)

Publication date

2021

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

The International History Review

License

CC BY-NC-ND

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Alloul, H., & Martykánová, D. (2021). Introduction: Charting New Ground in the Study of Ottoman Foreign Relations. *The International History Review*, 43(5), 1018-1040. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1914706>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Introduction: Charting New Ground in the Study of Ottoman Foreign Relations

Houssine Alloul^a and Darina Martykánová^b

^aHistory Department, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands; ^bModern History Department, Autonomous University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain

ABSTRACT

This essay proposes a revisionist historiography of Late Ottoman foreign relations and (para)diplomacy and examines previously overlooked forms, venues, geographies, and levels of Ottoman engagements with the international. The article first draws out a historical sketch of Ottoman diplomatic practices and demonstrates how the empire participated in, and influenced the ways in which the (Western, colonial) ‘diplomatic system’ developed throughout the long nineteenth century. It then offers a critical reading of the rich, but uneven historiography of Ottoman foreign affairs, long caught up in ‘modernisationist’ and ‘westernisation’ paradigms. We elucidate the relation of this body of scholarship to some of its precursors in older, pre-1923 strands of literature that centred on the pervasive trope of the ‘Eastern question’ and mystified Ottoman agency. We overturn the main teleological and Eurocentric axioms of this literature by giving voice to some of its contemporary Ottoman critics. Turning to comparative history and postcolonial critiques of IR, we juxtapose the Ottoman Empire with other often ignored ‘peripheral’ polities in Latin America to suggest new pathways for writing more inclusive kinds of international history that do not conform to conventional hierarchizations of the world between a European centre and its supposed global peripheries.

KEYWORDS

Ottoman diplomacy; postcolonial critique; Ottoman Empire; concert of Europe; imperialism

In one of his last articles, titled ‘Ottoman Diplomacy and its Legacy,’ Roderic H. Davison argued that during the long nineteenth century diplomacy had perhaps become more important than ever for the Ottomans. He elaborated:

Although the preservation of its independence and integrity is basic to the foreign policy of every state, the principle was peculiarly important to the Ottoman Empire. Almost every question that foreign powers raised with the Sublime Porte concerned some portion of the Ottoman Empire itself. [...] [T]he major questions on which the Porte negotiated with other powers bore such names as Bosnia, Crete, Lebanon, Egypt, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Serbia, Moldavia, Wallachia, and Albania. [...] In a sense, Ottoman foreign policy was domestic policy. For a great state this was humiliating. Ottoman diplomacy had to be almost entirely simply a defense of the empire’s integrity.¹

If Davison’s application of Ottoman diplomacy was rather narrowly constricted to ‘high diplomacy’,² he aptly captured the central significance that the empire’s ruling class came to attach

CONTACT Houssine Alloul  h.alloul@uva.nl

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

to diplomacy in the face of recurring foreign threats to its survival as an independent state. In the article Davison equally reminded his readers of the Ottoman Empire's status as a major power, yet was careful to recognize some of the contradictions that beset this position ('for a great state this was humiliating'). These contradictions became more pronounced as the century progressed and European (and later American) military and economic dominance was projected on a truly global scale. One of the few non-Western polities not to be directly colonized by 1900, the utterly indebted empire was nonetheless forced to give up much of its economic and fiscal autonomy. And yet, despite important territorial losses and increasing financial and technological dependency on Europe, throughout the long nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire remained a military and regional power to be contended with. Its territories stretched over three continents and in outposts such as Libya and Arabia its borders were even extended. If the 1878 Berlin Congress stripped 'the polyethnic empire of its legitimacy as a state and authorized foreign intervention inside the empire on behalf of ethnonational causes'³ and greatly limited its initiative with regard to foreign affairs, this does not mean the Ottomans were diplomatically incapacitated either. Indeed, as Davison also pointed out, the empire gradually built a vast overseas network of consuls and diplomats. Istanbul embarked on this project before other old empires such as China, Japan and Persia, that had equally entertained diplomatic contacts with European countries since the early modern period, and before or in parallel with the new Latin American republics and the Empire of Brazil. Hence, whereas decline is the unfortunate trope that continues to shape visions of the empire in both the popular imagination and non-specialist scholarship, more accurate portrayals capture the empire's perdurable presence and significance, as well as the skilful maneuvering of its diplomats abroad in the ever-volatile international order of the time.

Davison's article, however, also exemplifies some of the longstanding pitfalls in historical narratives of Ottoman 'international' relations in the modern era.⁴ Restricting analyses to statesmen, professional diplomats, conferences, and formal questions of international law, imposes preconceived understandings of the diplomatic (high diplomacy) onto a historical socio-political world that was much more layered and composed of a plenitude of state and non-state agents who performed diplomatic roles dictated by widely divergent logics not restricted to any alleged *raison d'État*. Davison's attention to the so-called Great Powers, their plotting against Ottoman interests and their mutual rivalries is warranted in an era of 'New Imperialisms' and gunboat diplomacy that could barely conceal the duplicity of these states' speech about global 'liberal' order and 'free' trade. But it ignores Ottoman ambitions in realms where the power of these polities was far from evident or of little to no significance. These include Ottoman relations with a range of hitherto neglected small to middling powers or activities in areas far beyond the 'stage' of the Mediterranean. The Ottoman Empire was, in fact, a node connecting different worlds, in the Indian Ocean, Arabia, and more distant geographies. For Ottoman policymakers, 'Europe', even if extremely powerful, was but one among several other spatial foci of attention. Davison's stress on the Great Powers can therefore not be disconnected from older European epistemologies and meta-narratives about the 'Eastern question' that discarded the Ottoman Empire as a mere problem in a Europe-centred world order. Such narratives played a great role in his study and we will return to them later.

This introductory essay, and the other articles in this themed section, propose a revisionist historiography of Late Ottoman foreign relations and (para)diplomacy which re-examines previously overlooked forms, venues, geographies, and levels of the empire's engagements with the international. The articles collected here use different methodologies and a variety of case studies and together resonate with (but are also distinct from) a larger body of work on the Ottomans' connections to the outside world that has appeared since Davison published his contribution.⁵ Linking Ottoman studies and novel approaches in global history, this literature has done much (if not always explicitly) to revise previous understandings of Ottoman foreign relations, the actors involved, the geographies concerned, and the stakes at play. The Ottomans

come out as more proactive and less on the defensive than usually presumed. In spite of these advances, however, the larger history of Late Ottoman diplomacy remains to be written. Still very little is known, for instance, about the extensive imperial apparatus of diplomats and consuls, for whom basic biographical information is not readily available, nor about how Istanbul's foreign policy related to and reflected increasing dependence on Western credit. This essay can therefore also be read as a clarion call for new research into Ottoman international history.

In what follows, we offer a brief historical overview of Ottoman diplomatic practices and (in)formal engagements with foreign administrations and their subjects, before attempting a critical reading of the rich, but uneven historiography of Late(r) Ottoman foreign affairs. We situate this historiography within the larger field of Ottoman studies and then trace some of its precursors back to older strands of literature that centred on the (trope of the) 'Eastern question'; or, *La question d'Orient*, in the international lingua franca of the time. The Eastern question literature represents a formidable historiographical tradition on its own, dating back to at least the early nineteenth century, in which the Ottomans mostly appear as objects of, rather than agents in international negotiation. In fact, this scholarship, as we highlight below, has rarely interrogated the teleological and Eurocentric axioms that lie at its origin. We then go on to question the Ottomans' absence in the literature on international history, as well as in some more historically-minded IR studies and demonstrate that the Ottomans were more important to 'international society' (or, more accurately, in 'Western-colonial international society'),⁶ than previously assumed. Following the path traced by influential historians such as Selim Deringil,⁷ we suggest ways to 'reinststate the Ottomans'⁸ in this scholarship by turning to postcolonial critiques of IR and comparative history. We juxtapose the Ottoman Empire with all too often ignored 'peripheral' polities such as the Latin American republics and argue that comparative exercises such as these offer new pathways for thinking about Ottoman agency in international relations in an era of European imperialism and capitalist globalization.

1. The Ottomans and the diplomatic arena

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottomans built a sizeable network of permanent overseas missions. Long before, however, Ottoman emissaries had regularly traveled to foreign courts in extraordinary embassies. Diplomacy had, in fact, always been key to strategies of imperial expansion and consolidation in frontier provinces in both the classic and early modern periods.⁹ It was during the reigns of sultans Selim III and Mahmud II, however, that Istanbul felt the need to incorporate the empire more firmly into Europe's 'diplomatic system'.¹⁰ An amalgam of interstate arrangements that allegedly originated in Renaissance Italy and then spread to the rest of Western Europe, this system sought to give a more permanent character to diplomatic contact between courts through the reciprocal exchange of resident envoys, and was later formalized by the representatives of the anti-revolutionary coalition at the Congress of Vienna (1814–5) through the codification of rules to solve formal disagreements regarding rank and precedence.¹¹ Under the autocratic rule of Mahmud II, significant institutional rearrangements would accompany Ottoman efforts in this regard, with conventional milestones being the foundation of a Translation Office within the Sublime Porte (*Bab-ı 'âli tercüme odası*, est. 1821) and the post of Foreign Minister (*Hariciye nâzırı*, est. 1836).¹² In 1832, Mahmud II opened his first legation in Vienna. Not much later, embassies were opened in London and Paris. By 1867, Sultan Abdülaziz was represented in thirteen cities.¹³ On the eve of the First World War, the Ottoman flag and 'coat of arms' adorned the buildings of Ottoman missions in seventeen capitals.¹⁴ The Ottoman consular presence was even more global in reach: from Buenos Aires to Boston, Johannesburg to Baku, Gibraltar to Harar, and from Bombay to Manila, Ottoman consuls (often non-nationals) represented the interests of the empire and its expatriate subjects.¹⁵ The intensification and institutionalization of Ottoman diplomatic contacts with other governments had to do both with the

growing presence of foreigners in the Ottoman domains and the global mobility of Ottoman subjects. These imperial émigrés (soldiers, students, merchants and refugees) often kept ties with their country of origin.¹⁶ These non-state actors actively, though indirectly, shaped diplomatic and consular practices, as well as the production of international law.

In the late eighteenth, but especially early nineteenth century, diplomacy in some ways also became a school for high-ranking Ottoman government officials. As the knowledge of European politics, technologies and cultures acquired vital importance for an efficient management not only of imperial foreign policy, but also of internal affairs in times of growing European influence and intervention in the sultan's 'well protected dominions' (*memalik-i mahruse*), men with diplomatic experience were sought out to occupy key posts in the Ottoman government and administration. Some of the most important statesmen during the Tanzimat were former diplomats, including Mustafa Reşid Pasha, Mehmed Emîn Âlî Pasha, Fuad Pasha, Kıbrıslı Mehmed Emîn Pasha, and Halil Şerif Pasha. It is tempting to interpret the fact that late nineteenth-century Turkish-to-Turkish and Turkish-to-English dictionaries translated the word *siyaset* both in the sense of diplomacy and politics (and, more broadly, political administration and government) as an indication of the central importance given to foreign policy in Ottoman high politics.¹⁷

The Ottomans, however, have received scant or superficial treatment in textbook narratives of diplomacy and international relations, which tend to represent Ottoman participation as anomalous and inconsequential.¹⁸ Late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Ottoman efforts to expand foreign representation were traditionally described in terms of 'Westernization'. The opening of the first permanent (as opposed to temporary) embassies, were pointed to as alleged signs of modernity.¹⁹ Implied in such accounts is the idea that the Ottomans had earlier been unfamiliar with, or a strangers to, this supposed European diplomatic practice.²⁰ Such a framing is highly misleading and echoes 'modernisation theory' that was popular in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. It implicitly adheres to a simplistic centre-periphery model in which historical change emanates outward from Western Europe to the rest of the world, a vision mirrored in terminologies such as the 'Western diplomatic system'.²¹ 'The West' was not the untouchable *Deus ex machina* moving nineteenth-century diplomatic arrangements at its whim. Acknowledging that European diplomatic traditions set the tone and European powers had more effective and symbolical power in shaping the transforming and globally expanding system of diplomatic rules and practices should not blind us to the fact that many norms and practices were forged in interaction with non-European actors who often integrated traces of their own diplomatic and legal traditions. The long and intricate history of alliance making by Native American polities and federations with colonial powers such as Spain, France, Britain, and the U.S.A. comes to mind here. For instance, diplomacy was key to Comanche power in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²² Some of these differentiated practices evolved in Ottoman contexts and were transferable to other sites. As Adam Watson argued, 'the rules and institutions which the Europeans spread out to China, Persia and Morocco in the nineteenth century were those which they had evolved with the Ottomans, inducing capitulations and consulates with jurisdiction over their nationals, rather than those in use within Europe itself such as free movement and residence virtually without passports'.²³

In a similar vein, the Ottomans were pivotal for the international legal language that came to define European diplomacy in this period. As Umut Özsu put it: 'it is hard to deny that it was to a great degree in relation to the Ottoman Empire that minority protection, humanitarian intervention, and coordinated population transfer came to be conceptualized in international legal terms during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.²⁴ He also reminds us that '[f]or a structurally fragile state, international law offered a vital medium and instrument of statecraft, with abstract principles of formal equality and reciprocity promising to provide something of a buffer against encroachment and internal partition'.²⁵ The same could be said about performative strategies to increase a state's formal presence overseas through the establishment of embassies, legations, and consulates.²⁶ Moreover, the Ottomans participated in some of the

brand new multilateral initiatives of the nineteenth century from the start, such as the international conferences on preventing and controlling the cholera epidemics, those aimed to tackle anarchist movements in the 1890s, as well as the remarkable but little studied 1911 'Universal Races Congress' in London.²⁷ In addition, the imperial capital of Istanbul had been an important hub for European diplomacy since early modern times, a position that only became more pronounced in the nineteenth century.²⁸ According to G. R. Berridge, moreover, early modern Constantinople as a locus for resident ambassadors might have been of crucial importance for the development of a 'diplomatic corps in the European states system' with its own 'corporate identity'.²⁹ We should be careful then, to whom we ascribe agency.

It is important to note that these transitions in the diplomatic system took place in an era that partially overlaps with the global expansion of European (and American) financial capital, a spike in formal and informal colonization, and increased rivalry among imperialist powers. These processes, as Marxian theorists of imperialism have long argued, were dialectically related to the contradictions of capitalism's development.³⁰ This was also the era of fierce rivalry for colonial territories and markets, with a growing list of competitors. These included the old powers of France and Britain, as well as 'newcomer' Russia, whose imperial expansion was mostly based on conquering and incorporating contiguous territories, yet mobilized its consuls and diplomats in such a way that it was able to compete with Britain in particular. From the 1880s and 1890s on, ascending industrial(izing) polities like Japan, Germany, the U.S.A., and Italy joined the club of global powers.

While vast swathes of the world were gradually integrated into the capitalist global world order, either through direct colonization or informal empire (and by means of large-scale financialization of local economies, privatization of communal lands, and commercialization of agriculture and mineral wealth extraction), most, if not all, non-Western polities lost a great deal of their economic and political sovereignty.³¹ Indeed, the most contentious issue for Ottoman decision makers were repeated territorial setbacks. Unlike during the past centuries, its causes no longer lied solely in foreign wars but in internal rebellions too. These were often encouraged and supported by agents sponsored by foreign administrations or, as in the case of the Greek War of Independence, funded and staffed *via* public campaigns in Europe and the Americas.³² This kind of interventionism by state and non-state actors was framed in terms of Christian solidarity and humanitarian spirit, an unsurprisingly self-flattering understanding that has found its way into the historiography.³³

An exceptional episode stands out in Ottoman international history: the Crimean War (1853–6).³⁴ While there was the precedent of the Ottoman participation in the Second Coalition against revolutionary France,³⁵ it was incomparable to the favorable public attention the Ottoman Empire received in Europe during and after the Crimean War when Britain and France (and later the Kingdom of Sardinia) allied with Istanbul. Even though it only lasted briefly, the war enhanced the Ottomans' reputation abroad considerably. In terms of international law, the empire became admitted to the 'Concert of Europe,' although the relevant wording of the Paris Treaty was deliberately left vague.³⁶ The empire gained immediate material benefits as well, as Britain and France backed the bonds issued by their Ottoman ally and granted it access to global financial markets, a step that was often interpreted in Europe as a sign of belonging to the exclusive club of trustworthy, civilized countries. The Ottomans, in their turn, used European loans, however toxic they proved to be in the mid-run, to further their own agendas.³⁷ Overall, the Crimean War leaps out as an important turning point in the empire's integration into the international community as it was being articulated at the time, meaning much closer ties to European state and non-state actors, but also an increasingly subordinated position.

2. From Ottoman diplomatic to international history

Late Ottoman historiography, fighting since at least the 1970s against deeply entrenched notions of the 'decline paradigm' in both popular and scholarly audiences, has probably given its best

fruits in the fields of economic and labor history, the history of political thought and, more recently, cultural history, areas in which Ottomanists have been particularly successful in establishing an international dialogue with other historians.³⁸ It seemed that there was little time left to consider Ottoman foreign relations. And yet, Ottoman diplomatic history, encompassing the entirety of the empire's existence, is among the oldest subfields of Ottoman historiography. After all, diplomacy, in different guises that were time- and place-specific, had always been important for an empire that shared so many frontiers with so many dissimilar polities.³⁹ It is unsurprising then, that the study, translation and critical edition of diplomatic treaties, capitulations (*ahdnâmes*) and related documents, negotiated between the Ottomans, their vassals and competitors is a time-honored genre in Ottoman studies.⁴⁰ For the modern period, such document (and state-centered) studies have long been dominated by European historians – *vide* the Eastern question literature we discuss below. But Late Ottoman and, later, Turkish critics have always challenged this scholarship. The works by Davison and F. A. K. Yasamee were among the first to provide survey studies in English of Istanbul's foreign relations based on original Ottoman sources.⁴¹ In the last decade, several studies exploring specific bilateral relations, the Ottoman diplomatic class, or the activities of individual Ottoman diplomats have further enriched the field.⁴² The work by long-time editor-scholar Sinan Kuneralp has been especially valuable. While his own research has done much to give voice to those Ottoman diplomatic envoys previously anonymized or silenced in European scholarship,⁴³ he has also been influential through publishing multiple serialized source editions of Ottoman diplomatic documents on various international crises.⁴⁴

Moreover, in recent years interdisciplinary collaboration between Europeanists, Slavists, and Ottomanists has brought the field far beyond high diplomacy, resulting in exemplary studies on the disruptive and violent local consequences of international power politics, as well as their complicated legacies today.⁴⁵ And while many blind spots remain, not least regarding the role of gender, a glaring omission characteristic of diplomatic history at large,⁴⁶ recent years have witnessed the publication of new and imaginative studies, founded on Ottoman sources, that have extended the thematic and geographical scope of what constitutes the diplomatic; so much so that we would do better to speak of Ottoman 'international history'. These studies explore subjects as varied as the politics of 'anti-Westernism', corpse traffic, border management or merchandising, ultimately revealing the Ottoman radius to be truly global, from North America to Afghanistan, and from Japan to the Indian Ocean.⁴⁷ What is equally becoming clear is how the Ottoman diplomatic world was made up of a wide array of non-official, foreign Muslim, and itinerant actors, which defy neat categorization and force us to be careful with our delineations of what the official and diplomatic can and should encompass. The Hadhramis, whose interoceanic lives played out between Istanbul, the Arabian Peninsula, and British occupied India and who also performed important paradiplomatic roles (see Ismail Hakkı Kadı's piece in this issue), are a case in point.⁴⁸

The historiography of early modern Ottoman interstate interactions has perhaps always been far more sensitive to Ottoman agency and its multidirectional nature, a trend that has been further strengthened in the last decades.⁴⁹ Scholars have begun writing broader histories that challenge traditional chronological divides between the 'premodern' and the 'modern'.⁵⁰ Contrary to the picture that might emerge from the specialized 'period'-bracketed literature, the eras of ad hoc and permanent diplomatic representation can also be understood as interconnected and therefore better treated together. Indeed, rather than seeing the 1790s and 1830s as heralding a new era for Ottoman diplomacy, it is the continuities and linkages, however fraught, with earlier periods that require attention. As Ethan Menchinger points out for the period antedating Selim's reign: 'Although they clung to the pretense of unilateralism, eighteenth-century Ottoman elites, conscious of their diminished military power, increasingly resorted to bi- or multilateral diplomacy and sent extraordinary embassies in ever larger numbers'.⁵¹

There has also been a major reconsideration of the deeply-rooted notion of Ottoman exceptionalism, not only in the sense of an attitude attributed to early modern imperial elites but of an analytical stance still common among some Turkish historians of the early modern period. To illustrate their point, the latter customarily refer to certain supposed unique attributes of the empire: its tri-continental reach, rule by a single dynasty, and religious heterogeneity among subject populations.⁵² Yet, some of these traits also characterized other empires, including Portugal, Spain, Mughal India, Romanov Russia, and Qing China.⁵³ Endorsing the notion of Ottoman exceptionalism has sometimes led to a paradoxical consensus between historians who interpret it in implicitly admiring terms and more critical Republican-nationalist historians who have often slated the early modern Ottomans' sense of superiority that allegedly impeded more interest in European political and cultural developments, preparing the ground for geopolitical decline.

Recently, however, Turkish historians of foreign relations, following the lead of an earlier generation of scholars like Deringil and Fikret Adanır, have put new emphasis on the continuity of Ottoman engagement in European affairs, while acknowledging its changing nature and the larger shifting power hierarchies in which they took place. They insist that while the Ottomans felt above and outside of the diplomatic affairs of Europe's kingdoms and empires, they did not hesitate, since the Renaissance, to intervene heavily in order to weaken their great rivals (mainly the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs) and strengthen those powers they perceived as not threatening their interests.⁵⁴ It is also useful to remember that the Ottoman Empire was not the only power that preferred informal over formal diplomatic relations with lesser and/or infidel polities because it inherently entailed acknowledging the other as equal. The Catholic Monarchy (Spain) and the Papacy adopted similar strategies. The Spanish Habsburgs, for instance, repeatedly turned to their Austrian cousins who 'humiliated themselves' by establishing an embassy in Constantinople, to negotiate the exchange of prisoners of war, instead of doing so directly. Prisoner exchange was in fact an important platform for diplomatic interaction between rivals and the Ottomans engaged in it not only with Christian powers, but also with their heterodox Persian neighbor.⁵⁵

Early modernists have also explored how the Ottomans, by their presence and (symbolic) power in Europe, shaped not only its rulers' foreign policies, but also the diplomatic and commercial practices as they emerged in the Italian states.⁵⁶ Power dynamics shifted, however, and especially after the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), the Ottomans increasingly resorted to the practice of negotiation. They also adopted and adapted the diplomatic language and practices that had until then been mainly practiced among European polities.⁵⁷ As Namık Turan points out, principles such as formal equality, reciprocity and territorial sovereignty that constituted the cornerstones of the emerging international order were rapidly endorsed by the Ottomans who creatively used them to protect their hold over their domains.⁵⁸

The latest historiography is particularly careful in stressing such long-term dynamics in Ottoman interactions with European powers, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans, with some outstanding research done recently using sources produced by both the Ottomans and the Habsburgs.⁵⁹ In so doing, it sets the period of nineteenth-century Europe's supposed hegemony over diplomatic rules and practices into a broader perspective: acknowledging the shifting balance of power, it stresses the active role the Ottomans played in shaping modern diplomacy, nuancing the claim that this set of practices was, in its roots, ever wholly European.⁶⁰

Returning to the modern period, a separate, but many-hued scholarship usually associated with (socio-)legal history needs to be mentioned as well. This ever-growing body of work deals with the 'capitulations', international law, and issues of extraterritoriality, and has debunked several myths about extraterritorial privilege and Ottoman legal backwardness, instead revealing the Ottomans as equally setting the tone in discussions on international law.⁶¹ Finally, and of great importance to Ottoman international historians too, is the expansive literature on European, Russian and, to a lesser extent, U.S. relations with the empire. If this work is rarely seen as a field

of its own, taken together it reveals not only how foreigners influenced both Istanbul's ruling elites and their diverse constituents, but also how these in turn were embraced, resisted, and hence shaped by a plurality of Ottoman agents. This scholarship, which often builds on Ottoman sources, is pushing Ottoman studies into new terrains by introducing exciting themes and reinvigorating older ones, including but not limited to the architecture of diplomacy, consular networks, revolutionary diplomacy, corporate diplomacy, colonial imageries, Orthodox clergy, and the 'bureaucracy of death'.⁶²

3. 'Eastern questions' revisited

Referencing this expanding and diverse body of work by historians of Europe and Russia inevitably calls to mind a much older and more voluminous literature on the Eastern question, as well as its ambivalent epistemic legacy in the larger scholarship on European-Ottoman relations today. Western politicians, intellectuals, military men and journalists employed this trope to refer to the perceived decline and possible imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the ensuing threat this posed to the 'balance of power' on the Continent.⁶³ Most contemporary observers of the time believed this 'question' to revolve around two undisputed strategic axioms—Ottoman 'decay' and Russian expansionism—that seemingly put the Western powers (in particular Austria) in diametrical opposition to Orthodox Russia. How to prevent the Romanov empire from acquiring control over Istanbul and the straits and keep her out of the crucial trade routes in the Mediterranean seemed the central issue that defined the Eastern question for Western European commentators. The Western 'response' to this challenge was allegedly to keep the proverbial Sick Man 'alive' for as long as possible; the only barrier left to prevent Russia's rise to omnipotence. Other key 'elements' of the *Question d'Orient* was the future 'fate' and safety of besieged Oriental Christians and, after 1878, inter-imperial competition over establishing tutelage over the newly independent Balkan states. This, in a nutshell, is how policymakers and political commentators framed the Eastern question and as such it is still presented in some Western textbooks today.⁶⁴ The Eastern question, then, appears here as multidirectional and multi-vectored. It involved (the 'question' of) multiple states and their 'destinies'.

European perceptions of Ottoman decline and its potential dreadful consequences for power struggles in Europe go back to at least the early eighteenth century. When the phrase Eastern question 'first entered the lexicon of European diplomacy' is unclear, but 'its appearance [...] in state correspondence and published sources dates back to the 1820s and 1830s'.⁶⁵ Throughout the long nineteenth century the Eastern question, which Karl Marx in his journalistic writing called that 'everlasting topic' and 'never-failing difficulty',⁶⁶ attracted increasing popular and scholarly attention in Europe and Russia. But the Eastern question (just as many other 'questions' of the era) could mean different things to different commentators, do divergent kinds of ideological work, and be redefined constantly. As Holly Case eloquently writes in her *The Age of Questions*:

The realm of questions was highly contentious and competitive: querists sought to raise the profile of their questions in order to draw attention to preferred solutions. Because querists generally worked backward from favored solutions, there were often as many different formulations and definitions of a question as there were solutions (or querists). The question: 'What was the Eastern question?' might seem a simple one, and many seemingly straightforward answers have been offered, such as that the Eastern question was the matter of how to manage the decline of the Ottoman Empire. But since the 'Eastern question' was defined by individual querists in accordance with their desired future, some defined the question/problem as the presence of Muslim Turks in Europe, for others it was Russian expansion, or Poland's right to exist, and for still others it was about the looming Apocalypse and the Second Coming of Christ.⁶⁷

The Eastern question (when related to the Ottomans) also served as an inexhaustible source for numerous satirical drawings by European cartoonists, drawings that could index different attitudes: from anti-imperialism and republican dislike of absolute monarchy, to anti-Muslim and

anti-Russian sentiments.⁶⁸ Most importantly of all, however, is that it gave rise to an enormous multilingual body of literature.⁶⁹ Indeed, Case argues that, 'measured by the sheer magnitude of attention and mania lavished upon it [...] the Eastern question was arguably the grandest of all nineteenth-century questions'.⁷⁰

Among European scholars at the time, the interest for the Eastern question, Great Power politics and the Ottomans seems to have gradually developed into a field of its own that, as Lucien Frary and Mara Kozelsky suggest, reached maturity with the 1917 publication of J.A.R. Marriot's classic *The Eastern Question: An Historical Study in European Diplomacy*.⁷¹ After the war, when the Eastern question reached its apparent 'conclusion' and popular interest abated, diplomatic historians continued to devote studies to it.⁷² And although the term itself gradually devaluated, historians still entitle their works as contributions to the Eastern question, thereby reifying instead of deconstructing it.⁷³ In fact, the genre and/or its influence remain strong today, especially in Britain and France.⁷⁴ This is arguably true for the U.S. as well, where, ever since the 1970s Oil Crisis and the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the amount of policy-driven studies have multiplied on 'the trouble with Islam' and on (imagined) ethnic and religious politics in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Arabian peninsula.⁷⁵

In Turkey, too, the term (*şark meselesi* or *doğu sorunu*) is still used in some of the scholarship, though a critical metanarrative tends to be strongly present even in the more traditional accounts. And yet, as the entry in the *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (published by the foundation linked to the Directorate of Religious Affairs of Turkey) by Kemal Beydilli shows, current interpretations still bear a striking resemblance to Late-Ottoman-era interpretations of the Eastern question as 'an attempt at kicking the Turks out of Europe'. Such a reading can be traced back to the early twentieth-century works by the famous pan-Turkist ideologue Yusuf Akçura and the Egyptian intellectual Mustafa Kâmil Pasha.⁷⁶ Indeed, Muslim thinkers reflected on and responded to this framing in publications of their own.⁷⁷ They were well aware of the Eastern question's great importance in the *Weltanschauung* of the European public. In 1920, Akçura explained in detail how the issue was addressed in French secondary schools. Muslim commentators such as him did not deny the empire's geopolitical weakness, but were ready to point out that concerns about the lamented Sick Man on the Bosphorus not only revealed the European powers' imperial appetites, but also an underlying questioning of the legitimacy of a Muslim presence in Europe, implicitly understood as a Christian domain.⁷⁸ Their work circulated widely: Mustafa Kâmil's opus was translated in an abbreviated form to Turkish in 1898, the year of its original publication in Arabic. Muslim intellectuals did not limit themselves to presenting their criticisms to local audiences. Ahmed Rıza, who had studied in Paris, published his eloquently titled *Moral Bankruptcy of the West's Eastern Policy* (1922) in French, reframing the issue as a problem of European competition for colonial expansion.⁷⁹

But for all their criticisms, they were also willing to explore some of the Eastern question's conventional core aspects, namely the concern in Western and Central Europe about the rise of Russia. Yusuf Akçura provides a good illustration of this. Born to Muslim parents in Russia, his family soon settled in the Ottoman Empire where he enrolled at a military school. After he was exiled to Libya for his engagement in the Young Turk movement, he escaped to France where he studied at the *École libre des Sciences Politiques*. After the 1905 Russian revolution, he spent time in Russia organizing Turkish and Tartar political and cultural associations. Taking into consideration that he studied politics at a prestigious Parisian school and published a thorough study on the European literature on the Eastern question, one may suppose that he was well aware of how his arguments on Russia and its minorities would be filtered and framed by his European audiences.⁸⁰

But let us now return to the genre as it developed in European scholarly circles. A number of recurrent features can be distinguished in Eastern question literature.⁸¹ They usually focus on one or more 'turning points' in the diplomatic record of European-Ottoman relations, such as Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), the Greek revolt (1820–30), the Egypto-Ottoman crisis

(1832–41), the Crimean War (1853–6), the ‘Balkan Crisis’ (1875–8) or the Armenian Massacres (1894–6). The Eastern question’s start and end dates are typically given as 1774, the year when the Ottomans signed the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty that ended the war with Russia, seen as the ‘beginning’ of imperial decline and Russia’s rise to power, and 1923, the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Eastern question studies explicitly or implicitly build on various ‘civilizational’ oppositions between Christianity versus Islam, West versus East, Occident versus Orient, Europe versus Asia, with the Balkans and Russia occupying liminal positions. Following contemporary perceptions, the Ottoman Empire is commonly perceived as posing a ‘problem’, whilst Europe had a mission: containing or solving this problem. ‘Big men’, government ministers and ambassadors, operating from Istanbul, London, Paris, St Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin, and Rome populate these narratives.

Although Eastern question historiographies ostensibly pose big questions and deal with important concerns – foreign intrusion in the empire represented a vexing problem for Istanbul – and often have strong empirical foundations, they perpetuate to this day a certain plot of the nineteenth century and international affairs: one that revolves around the great Christian European empires and their rivalries, but less so the Ottoman Empire, which can only figure in a dependent and hence nonessential position. Ottoman historians have therefore long debunked the Eastern question as a typical Eurocentric and Orientalist construct,⁸² and, more recently, rewritten its history with a contrapuntal sensitivity.⁸³ Edward Said never paid sustained attention to this particular discourse, in both its ‘scientific’ and literary manifestations, which has all the qualities of the Orientalist discourse he forcefully deconstructed in his ground-breaking 1978 *Orientalism*. Said, who largely focused on the Arabs to the point of neglecting the (other) Ottomans, mentioned the Eastern question only twice and only in fleeting a manner, without challenging the phrase itself.⁸⁴ As we have seen, however, the Eastern question was deeply entangled with European Orientalism and (speech about) imperial expansion; or, as Hüseyin Yılmaz has put it:

the Eastern Question was about establishing a new world order. [...] it was about envisioning Europe vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire, [...] an alien civilization still surviving on the same continent these Europeans saw as the dispenser of modern civilization, uncompromised by inferior races and cultures. The Eastern Question [...] became integral to the process of purifying Europe from cultural contamination by enlightening or driving out its Asiatic elements. It was a shared pursuit, if not a project, to create and reinvigorate a common historical memory, reclaiming lost lands and repossessing its classical and Christian heritage, a project that entailed establishing first what Europe was not, a negative definition that created oriental stereotypes [...].⁸⁵

Ottomanists have also argued that the traditional interest in Great Power high diplomacy lacks a serious engagement with the viewpoint from Istanbul.⁸⁶ This is reflected in the choice of sources, which seldom include Ottoman archival materials. The Ottomans and their empire, indiscriminately and a-historically called ‘Turks’ and ‘Turkey’, respectively,⁸⁷ rarely play an active part in this type of histories, both in their ‘original’ and modern-day iterations. In fact, for the Ottomans the Eastern question was not an ‘Eastern’ but a ‘Western question’.⁸⁸ Taking their perspective, we can clearly observe the concern of many with defending the empire against increasing European and Russian intrusion.⁸⁹ Reversing the gaze thus allows us to break down the teleology that is woven into the fabric of Eastern question narratives by design.

In view of the Ottoman collapse in 1922 and with the benefit of hindsight, diplomatic historians have long accepted ‘decline’ as the defining aspect of (late) Ottoman historical development (versus the ‘ascent’ of Europe).⁹⁰ But Ottoman decision-makers evidently did not know how later events would unfold.⁹¹ Their actions and thoughts were motivated by other contexts and objectives. And in terms of state centralization, military reform, education or infrastructural development, this period was actually one of unprecedented transformation and ‘modernization’; a striving to what the Ottomans themselves called *medeniyet*, civilization, a state and a process that needed to be constantly upheld and updated. Historians have also underscored the

Ottomans' willingness to extend their grip on their peripheries, comparing these efforts with contemporary European colonial empire building.⁹² A perhaps more obvious comparison that remains to be fully explored is that with the late eighteenth-century attempts of the French, Spanish and Portuguese crowns to increase their control over and intensify the exploitation of their (overseas) territories, often in collaboration with local elites.⁹³

Another troubling feature of Eastern question historiography is the overestimation of the actual capacity of the Great Powers to shape and influence Ottoman rule and foreign policies, which betrays a flawed belief in European exceptionality and Western-induced modernity.⁹⁴ The agency of the empire's subjects in influencing the course of Ottoman interactions with the larger world is ignored.⁹⁵ If the Ottoman social fabric and local actors are referred to at all, they are described using Orientalist categories such as Islamic fanaticism, perpetual ethnic sectarianism, Oriental despotism and ignorance. This literature also discounts the fact that an important part of European interventions was not the result of foreign government action, but comprised of the cumulative, sometimes clashing actions of non-state agents including creditors, company representatives, missionaries and even 'freedom fighters', who often had loose ties with Western administrations and were sometimes seen as a nuisance by them.⁹⁶ In addition, reproducing the self-assigned category of 'Great Power' that was introduced by and for the five major powers in 1814–5 and which, in the course of the century, acquired legal stature,⁹⁷ is not in itself unproblematic. As Barbara Bush notes, this terminology 'obscures the importance of transnational structures of global power established through capitalism'.⁹⁸

Deconstructing narratives about Great powers also requires questioning their ongoing historiographical predominance in the larger scholarship in Turkish, English, French, Russian, German and many other languages. While there are obvious reasons for this – super powers like England that were backed by advanced technologies and enormous productive capacity and imperial Russia, which had the world's largest standing army, wielded incomparable influence in international affairs – it ultimately obscures the histories of largely peaceful Ottoman diplomatic, commercial, and cultural engagements with multiple other 'secondary' states, conducted quite independently from the colonial empires of Britain, France and Germany, and the still largely agrarian land empires of Russia and Austria-Hungary. Eurocentrism plays an obvious role here. Ariel Salzmann has noted, for instance, how it can influence the timelines undergirding narratives of Later Ottoman history and delimit historians' horizons, privileging, among other things, 'research into relations with European states rather than with Muslim powers, from Morocco to Mysore'.⁹⁹

Conceiving of the non-colonized world then as an international (political and socioeconomic) space in which governments interacted with one another, we recognize it was made up of a whole range of smaller/weaker states, in terms of either military or economic capabilities or both. Indeed, this international space consisted of many other and highly important sets of bilateral relationships, not only among secondary states, but also between them and the period's major powers. Istanbul entertained (official) relations with many different Western and non-Western polities, sometimes dating back to early modern times as in the cases of Iran, Spain, the Netherlands and Sweden-Norway. Others were of fairly recent creation such as those with the U.S.A., Greece and post-1878 Balkan states. If some of these relationships were largely maintained out of mutual courtesy and did not reflect serious political or economic interests, in other cases they were dynamic and of great importance.¹⁰⁰

In a sense, foreign policy decisions of minor countries could sometimes even have momentous consequences. A case in point is the unleashing of the First Balkan War in 1912. One of the important determinants of the outbreak of World War One, it had its origins in an alliance between presumed hostile small Balkan states. In effect, size did certainly not prevent 'small states' violently forging, exploiting and sustaining large overseas colonies, as in the case of Belgium and the Netherlands. The totality of these other sets of Ottoman bilateral consociations thus occupied important nodes of the international stage. And although Great Power

configurations influenced these relations, they certainly did not wholly determine them. The histories of these seemingly 'lesser' bilateral alignments are slowly beginning to be written.¹⁰¹ To ignore them is to write out a fundamental part of the shared histories of Ottoman encounters with the outside world. Shifting the attention to less-studied states opens up unseen avenues for research, as the articles collected here demonstrate. The case studies of the Holy See (Giampaolo Conte), the Sultanate of Aceh (Ismail Hakkı Kadı), the Hanseatic Cities (Tobias Völker), the British Dominion of Canada (Faiz Ahmed) and middling powers (Italy and the U.S.) reveal how much leeway existed for these polities to pursue their own agendas vis-à-vis Istanbul. Together, then, these articles provide powerful examples of how small state-major power relations were always marked by their own undercurrent, which was quite distinct from what characterized interstate rapports conditioned by semi-colonial hierarchies.

Raising these criticisms of Eastern question narratives is not, of course, to discredit the relevance of their subject, nor to downplay their obvious empirical and sometimes analytical value. Indeed, many of these studies were/are often grounded in solid multi-archival based research,¹⁰² something that Ottomanists have occasionally pointed out.¹⁰³ Their value ultimately lies in their acknowledgement of the central significance of the Ottoman Empire in international politics. This assessment stands in sharp contrast to the general absence or superficial treatment of the Ottoman Empire in survey histories of global politics in the era concerned by both historians and IR scholars alike. With a few critical exceptions associated with the English School,¹⁰⁴ the major textbooks, old and new, either ignore the Ottoman Empire or merely allude to it as an 'odd' object of European foreign politics; the empire as a real or metaphorical battlefield for the purportedly more significant struggles between the European powers and Russia, or as an 'intermediary state' whose sole role appears to have been to both stabilize and destabilize the European states system.¹⁰⁵

4. Provincializing diplomatic historiography

This continuing 'historiographical absence' of the Ottomans has something to do with the fact that diplomatic history, one of the 'oldest' subfields of the historical profession with strong national traditions in many countries, developed in tandem with Western imperialist and colonialist domination and exploitation. While European diplomatic historians have yet to produce an integrated critique of the colonial structures that enmesh their discipline, such a critique has long been underway in the Anglo-dominated political science subdiscipline of International Relations.¹⁰⁶ Critics have emphasized the essential role of 'peripheral' polities in the emergence, consolidation, as well as disappearance of diplomatic practices in the international arena. That their work is crucial for diplomatic historians is obvious. The perceptive critic Robbie Shilliam, for one, asks 'why is it that the non-Western world has been a defining presence for IR scholarship and yet said scholarship has consistently balked at placing non-Western thought at the heart of its debates?'¹⁰⁷ 'Thought' could well be accompanied by 'practice(s)' here: why have historians paid so little attention to the Ottoman conduct of foreign relations?

The Ottoman case could, in fact, be very useful for refining postcolonial criticisms leveled within the discipline of IR. The accusations of Eurocentrism it has faced in the last few decades are at the same time too generous and imprecisely focused. At the level of an academic discipline, the canon of IR tends to ignore the impressive body of French and Russian scholarship on international politics, and includes mostly works produced in US and British academia, with a nod to its German origins. At the level of historical analysis, until recently, it glossed over the School of Salamanca's contribution to international law, an omission that has only been somewhat remedied since Latin American scholars started to reach influential posts within US academia.¹⁰⁸

To counterbalance such hegemonic academic traditions, postcolonial scholarship has long attempted to reinstate subaltern agency.¹⁰⁹ The holy triad of the criteria of subalternity includes gender, class and race, though it is the last category that receives most attention in practice. The Ottomans do not represent an easy fit in this project. The elites of a powerful empire struggling to accept that the days of conquest and unquestioned domination were over are not the most palatable subjects for a scholarly discourse with an underlying moral task to recover the voice and agency of the voiceless and oppressed. In fact, the Ottomans claimed their rightful place at the Berlin Congress because, like European colonial powers, they too held possessions in Africa.¹¹⁰ This did not, however, prevent Sultan Abdülhamid II from cleverly feeding propagandistic rhetoric about 'pan-Islamic' (and hence anti-colonialist) solidarity movements, propagating his global position of caliph (*halife*) and the Guardian of the Two Sacred Mosques (*Hâdimü'l-haremeyni's-şerîfeyn*).

Notwithstanding recent scholarly attempts to construe the empire's position within the 'European Concert' as precarious due to their being perceived as non-white, the Ottomans do not fit easily within narratives of a race-based marginalization of certain states and regions either. Ömer Turan has analyzed this difficulty to situate the Ottomans in larger postcolonial debates, showing how Ottoman intellectuals engaged in complex negotiations with Orientalizing discursive frames and the European powers' colonial schemes, endorsing some of their key concepts and premises, while resisting and subverting others.¹¹¹ Postcolonial approaches did prove crucial for the Ottomanist community to decolonize itself, bringing into focus the great importance peripheral territories of the empire had in diplomatic affairs, as well as the relations Istanbul established with political units beyond Europe.¹¹²

We find the existing efforts to rewrite and provincialize the Europe-centred history of modern foreign relations extremely valuable and it is here that our themed section hopes to make an important contribution. Bringing in the Ottoman perspective and introducing untold histories of Ottoman diplomatic relations can enrich the history of nineteenth-century IR and international law. Seeing the Ottomans as co-constitutive in the forging of a new international and diplomatic order resonates with critiques of Eurocentric narratives of the origins of modernity that have sought to, in the words of Barry Buzan and George Lawson, 'emphasize the role played by inter-societal interactions in generating the global transformation' and 'global modernity' more broadly.¹¹³

IR is not necessarily the best-equipped discipline to interpret the multiple histories of Ottoman foreign policymaking and diplomatic practices. Among the reasons is not only the Realist school's limited understanding of power hierarchies within the interpretative framework of the international state system, but also the neglect, identified by Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, even within the more critical neo-Marxian scholarship, of some of the 'cultural underpinnings of imperialist [...] relations'.¹¹⁴ The tortuous integration of the Ottoman Empire into the international colonial order during the nineteenth century is a striking demonstration of the importance of such criteria. The Ottoman Empire was an early and active participant in this complex and conflict-laden process of construction of an international community based on mutual acknowledgement, a patchwork of what was increasingly recognized as 'international law', and a set of practices that were understood as civilized. Assessing what constituted civilized often depended on polities' perceived Europeanness and/or endorsement by European powers. In this sense, the Ottomans' position differed from the other old empires that were also considered as decadent and became the object of more or less successful colonial depredation, such as India and China. Ottoman diplomats had the advantage not only of being physically present (and nearly continuously so) in the European capitals from the 1790s onward, but also of managing the diplomatic codes of the Great Powers. Nonetheless, the Ottoman Empire was kept on the margins of the system in a way that is not explainable without taking into consideration cultural factors and assumptions. The Ottomans were treated as in need of close supervision and

tutelage, for being perceived not only as untrustworthy and unreliable, but also as inept. The full annexation of their domains was therefore an option that was widely discussed.

These observations gain further salience if we compare Western representations of the Ottomans with those of Spain and Latin America. Indeed, scholars who examine the image of Spain, the Balkan countries, or the Latin American states could argue that a sense of superiority constructed in cultural terms shaped the attitudes of major Western powers toward these polities as well.¹¹⁵ In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French, British, U.S. and German political writing, for instance, Spain and the Ottoman Empire were often compared in critical terms, not only as two decadent empires, but also as failed colonial overlords whose tyranny led to the degeneration of their imperial subjects. Many Latin American political thinkers insisted on this comparison as well.¹¹⁶ Yet it was hardly conceivable that the Latin American republics – some of which would later end up under a *de facto* domination by a single fruit company –, not to mention Spain itself or the new post-1878 Balkan countries, could be *de jure* colonized. Some would suggest that ‘race’ is the key factor to interpret the difference. This is a strong and legitimate argument, although no scholarly consensus exists about the extent to which ‘the Turks’ were constructed as racially distinct in nineteenth-century Europe. Even if it is observable in many cases – in his 1876 pamphlet William Gladstone famously equated the ‘Turkish race’ with ‘the one great anti-human specimen of humanity’¹¹⁷ – it is important to clearly determine who saw them as racially different and when, and whether this translated in greater propensity for excluding them. Bringing Latin America into the picture can again help us to interpret the weight of such a factor and speculate about others. Several Latin American polities had a major percentage of inhabitants who were racialized as non-white by European and U.S. observers, as well as by local elites. It was moreover not exceptional that political representatives of some of these states were not considered white by Westerners, the most outstanding example probably being the Amerindian Benito Juárez who was president of Mexico on several occasions. Yet, while culturally stigmatized, Latin American republics were unquestionable if subaltern members of the international community.

In the case of the Ottomans, however, there appear to be two factors underlying their blurred position, both inside and outside of the hierarchically-organized club of the self-perceived ‘civilized nations’. First, we should not neglect an enduring element of alterity premised on religious difference, a fundamental factor in the radical otherness of the ‘Turks’ in the early modern Mediterranean. An ethnicised understanding of religion has for long been identified as key to understanding nineteenth- and twentieth-century ‘identity politics’ in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹¹⁸ But we should not hesitate to acknowledge the possibility that it shaped Western attitudes toward Muslim and, by contrast, non-Muslim Ottomans in international politics, too. Another difference with Latin America is the institutional tradition. From the outset, Latin American republics had inherited the institutions of governance developed during Spanish and Portuguese colonial domination. They were, at the same time, the first countries in the world to massively create liberal political institutions such as constitutions, elections and national assemblies. This legal continuity and political synchronicity with domestic changes in European states may also explain the difference. For one, in times when international law was legitimized as a ‘gentle civilizer of the nations’ that nudged the indolent and the infantile to active and mature behavior and even helped them to survive, the only way of being acknowledged as civilized was to adopt legal arrangements and institutions that were familiar to, and respected by the international order’s self-appointed gatekeepers, that is, those who wielded most material or symbolic power (or both) to shape international law and determining the criteria of civilization.¹¹⁹

The key importance of alterity and its representations in establishing and legitimizing hierarchical relations within the new international order has been pointed out by many postcolonial thinkers since, at least, Said’s *Orientalism*. The Ottoman rulership was marginalized by the post-Enlightenment discourse of European superiority as representatives of a corrupt and depraved empire not only by the predatory imperialist European powers, but also by the cultural elites

and self-appointed spokesmen of some of the ethnoreligious groups that began to actively question and resist Ottoman domination. Such an image of the 'Turk' had a truly global dimension, endorsed and confirmed by revolutionary movements far beyond Europe, from black Haitian leaders to Mexican pro-independence intellectuals who fashioned themselves as brothers of the Greeks in their resistance against a corrupt imperial tyrant.¹²⁰

These images of 'Turkish' degeneration are related to the notion of decline, which in turn had deep roots in Ottoman political thought.¹²¹ Ottoman elites themselves imported elements from modern discourses on European exceptionalism and fruitfully combined it with a long autochthonous tradition of political thinking to construct, endorse and spread a narrative of decline. In so doing they tried to make sense of the empire's waning geopolitical power and grave domestic issues and suggest new government policies to remedy the situation and restore the empire's former glory. Such representations not only had the paradoxical effect of sanctioning European prejudice, but also provided a powerful source of action, including a feverish search for and creative appropriation of foreign models and recipes for administrative, military and cultural reform. In this sense, the Ottomans actively contributed to institutional isomorphism,¹²² that is, growing similarity between legal arrangements, institutions and practices in an increasingly interconnected world.

'Reinstating' the Ottomans in international history then, can generate more inclusive narratives of international relations that do not conform to conventional hierarchizations of the world between a European centre and its supposed global peripheries. Taking up different angles and tackling distinct themes, the six articles collected here chart different pathways toward the same endeavour. Together they provide new insights and empirical evidence of the heterogeneity of Ottoman activities in the international realm, framing new geographies and actors.

The first article by Faiz Ahmed explores Ottoman-British rivalries. Rearranging the scales of analysis from the Mediterranean and Europe to Northern America and British India, he sheds new light on how Ottoman consular and diplomatic executives sought to hold up Istanbul's 'stature' among Indian Muslims, as well as stake out jurisdictional claims over Ottoman émigrés in North America. In so doing, he demonstrates how the Ottomans projected extraterritorial power through strategies of 'soft diplomacy', sometimes successfully. Aviv Derri also unsettles some of the traditional geographical parameters of Ottoman international history by working outward from the provinces. She focuses on competing Ottoman and British definitions of 'foreign protection' in the context of debates around 'nationality' law and consular protection. Investigating cases of protégés in Ottoman Syria, whose foreign naturalization was questioned by both local and foreign administrators, Derri revisits notions of modern Ottoman subjecthood, illuminating the shifting political allegiances of provincial non-Muslim, specifically Jewish, mercantile elites, whose organic relations to imperial power have been underappreciated. Her study further reveals how the diplomatic and legal tactics of the Great Powers were profoundly shaped by events, practices and juridical arrangements as they occurred in non-European provincial locales.

Ismail Hakkı Kadı's contribution shifts our attention to the Ottomans' indirect encounters with Western colonialism, through a study of the little-known relations between the Sultanate of Aceh and the Sublime Porte. Challenging earlier interpretations that framed this rapprochement in strictly religious terms ('pan-Islam'), Kadı unearths the divergent logics and forces that informed Ottoman (para)diplomatic responses to Acehnese requests for aid, from *raison d'État* to colonialist sentiments, as well as the transoceanic networks of Hadhrami actors that lay behind it. Colonial expansion is also scrutinized in Mostafa Minawi's article on Ottoman sovereignty claims in Eastern Africa in an age of Western 'juridical colonialism'. Istanbul contested the British and Italian annexations of Zeila (in modern-day Somalia) and Massawa (Eritrea), territories formerly claimed by Ottoman sovereigns. Charting the debates and legal categories employed therein, Minawi reveals the empire's attempts to achieve recognition of legal parity with Western powers.

Speaking back, however, inevitably entailed reinforcing some of the exclusionary tenets of European international law.

The final two articles again swing the frame of reference by adopting the perspective of European actors enmeshed in Ottoman affairs. Tobias Völker's essay delves into the life and career of the Hanseatic diplomat and scholar Andreas David Mordtmann, revealing some of the inner dynamics of mid-nineteenth century Istanbul's diplomatic milieu. It also shows the social mobility that diplomacy offered to new actors such as Mordtmann, who, instead of a noble title and independent income, could rely on their (constantly renewed) credentials as regional 'experts'. Mordtmann's ambiguous oscillating between different overlapping personae and self-identifications – the Orientalist scholar, the Hanseatic republican, the diplomat, the Ottoman patriot, the imperial official, and finally the cultural critic – illustrates the porosity, but also precariousness of the elite environment he moved in, forcing us to reconsider the lineal narrative of growing institutional and identitarian rigidity often linked with modern state-building and national identity politics.

Giampaolo Conte's contribution explores the extent to which the foreign policies states pursued became increasingly related to the interests of (finance) capital as the century progressed. He unearths the intricate entanglements between the Kingdom of Italy and the Papacy that clashed domestically, but collaborated in a would-be imperial strategy vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire, where both held significant financial interests. As such, Conte offers new insights into the nature of Italian imperialism: how it was shaped by investment strategies of the many parties involved and how Italian and Papal elites were capable of overcoming their differences when they discerned a common front to protect their Ottoman investments. We are reminded here, then, how narratives of Euro-Ottoman interactions can never be abstracted from the larger dynamics of capital accumulation and imperialist expansion that propelled some European powers on the international stage to the detriment of others.

Notes

1. Roderic H. Davison, 'Ottoman Diplomacy and its Legacy' in L. Carl Brown (ed), *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 181.
2. We employ a broad understanding of 'diplomacy' that recognizes it as an important *institution* of international society. See Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005).
3. Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 17.
4. Employing the 'international' when referring to foreign relations is of course not entirely unproblematic, as it fails to capture the multiformity of the various political entities (empires, republics, (tribal) federations, (autonomous) vassals) that engaged in diplomacy as well. We use it, however, as an inclusive shorthand to refer to all types of contact between different state-like entities in the modern era.
5. This new literature is abundantly referenced in the notes that follow, in particular from no. 36 onward.
6. The term is from Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 176.
7. Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*, 2nd ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011 [1999]).
8. We borrow the expression from Isa Blumi's *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).
9. See Güneş İşık, 'Ottoman Diplomacy' in Gordon Martel (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy* (Wiley Blackwell, 2018), in particular 7–9. We offer more observations on early modern Ottoman foreign policy below.
10. For a critical rereading of this history and the Ottoman Empire's place in it, see A. Nuri Yurdusev, 'The Ottoman Attitude toward Diplomacy' in A. N. Yurdusev (ed), *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 5–35. The category 'Western diplomatic system' is from Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011). As we elaborate upon later, insisting on the ultimately 'Western' character of modern diplomacy is analytically unproductive, as it renders many

non-European polities invisible, while also leaving Russia, one of the two biggest players in prewar 'European' geopolitics, out of the picture.

11. Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration* (2nd ed.; New York: Routledge, Richard, 2011 [1995]).
12. If the broader 'modernizationist' paradigm from which Carter V. Findley then still worked is outdated, his detailed reconstruction, based on herculean archival research, is still the best study available in English on these administrative and institutional rearrangements, see 'The Foundation of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry: The Beginnings of Bureaucratic Reform under Selim III and Mahmud II', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, no. 4 (1972), 388–416.
13. Sinan Kunalalp, 'The Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic' in Zara S. Steiner (ed), *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World* (London: Times Books, 1982), 502.
14. Sinan Kunalalp, 'Ambassadors Ottomanes' in François Georgeon, Nicolas Vatin, and Gilles Veinstein (eds), *Dictionnaire de l'Empire ottoman* (Paris: Fayard, 2015), 83–4.
15. Very little is known about the Ottoman consular apparatus, as most consular archives have not yet been inventoried. For a tentative exploration, on which the preceding passage draws, see Sinan Kunalalp, 'Le service consulaire ottoman au XIXe siècle', in Jörg Ulbert (ed), *Consuls et services consulaires* (Hamburg: DOBU, 2011), 431–9.
16. On Ottoman students in Europe, see, for, example, Mustafa Gençoğlu, 'Osmanlı Devleti'nce Batı'ya Eğitim Amacıyla Gönderilenler (1830-1908). Bir Grup Biyografisi Araştırması', PhD thesis (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2008); and Adnan Şişman, *Tanzimat döneminde Fransa'ya gönderilen Osmanlı öğrencileri (1839-1876)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2004). For a recent and stimulating history of Ottoman migratory groups, see Stacy D. Fahrenthold, *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
17. James W. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon* (A. H. Boyajian: Constantinople, 1890). This double meaning seems characteristic for the nineteenth century. Of the above-mentioned concepts, the 1687 *Thesaurus* by Meninski includes only 'administratio' as one of the meanings of *siyaset*, though there was no word for diplomacy in Latin either. And *politica/res politicae* not translated either as *siyaset* in this dictionary. See Francisco a Mesgnien Meninski, *Completum Thesauri linguarum orientalium* (Vienna, 1687).
18. See Hamilton and Langhorne, *Practice of Diplomacy*. The pioneering volume by Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte (eds.), *The Diplomats' World: A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) does not contain a single contribution on non-Western diplomats.
19. J. C. Hurewitz, 'Ottoman Diplomacy and the European State System', *Middle East Journal* 15, no. 2 (1961), 141–52. Much of the early work of Davison and Findley also ascribed to this 'modernisationist' paradigm.
20. The Ottomans had, of course, always practiced diplomacy. See the observations on early Ottoman 'frontier diplomacy' in Işıksel, 'Ottoman Diplomacy,' 5.
21. From Black's otherwise bold global narrative in *History of Diplomacy*.
22. Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). See on this point also Iver B. Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 31.
23. Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1992]), 272.
24. Umüt Özsu, 'Afterword: Ottoman International Law?' in Lâle Can, Michael Christopher Low, Kent F. Schull, and Robert Zens (eds), *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 238.
25. *Ibid.*, 245.
26. See on this subject also Black, *History of Diplomacy*, 163.
27. Valeska Huber, 'The Unification of the Globe by Disease? The International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, 1851–1894', *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 2 (2006), 453–76; Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Mansour Bonakdarian, 'Negotiating Universal Values and Cultural and National Parameters at the First Universal Races Congress,' *Radical History Review*, Spring no. 92 (2005), 118–32.
28. On Istanbul as a key locale for European diplomats, see Tobias Völker's contribution in this themed issue; and Paolo Girardelli, 'Power or Leisure? Remarks on the Architecture of the European Summer Embassies on the Bosphorus Shore', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 50 (2014), 29–58.
29. Geoff R. Berridge, 'The Origins of the Diplomatic Corps: Rome to Constantinople' in P. Sharp and G. Wiseman (eds) *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 15–30.
30. For this latter point, see Radhika Desai, 'Marx and Engels' Geopolitical Economy' in Amiya Kumar Bagchi and Amita Chatterjee (eds), *Marxism: With and Beyond Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
31. The literature on this period of capitalist and imperialist expansion is vast. These observations draw heavily on an invigorating essay by Faruk Tabak, 'Imperial Rivalry and Port-Cities: A View from Above,' *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (2009), 79–94.

32. As Frederick F. Anscombe has argued, internal rebellion had less to do with national awakening as often postulated in nationalist historiographies generated in Balkan states, but more with the (in)direct interventions of foreign Christian powers. See his 2014 *State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 107–9. See also William St. Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
33. See Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dialla, 'The Balkan Crisis of 1875–78 and Russia: Between Humanitarianism and Pragmatism' in A. Heraclides and A. Dialla (eds), *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 169–96.
34. For an English language study on the Ottoman experience of the War, see Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
35. See Kahraman Şakul, 'An Ottoman Global Moment: War of Second Coalition in the Levant' (PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2009). For an account that situates this alliance in the broader geopolitical context of the Atlantic slave-based plantation economies, see Ariel Salzmänn, 'Between Saint-Domingue and the Sublime Porte: Revolution, Ottoman Realpolitik, and the Inter-hemispheric Contingencies of Modern Political Thought,' in Marinos Sariyannis (ed.), *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete IX (2015)* (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2019).
36. In reality, the 1856 Paris Treaty was far from a diplomatic success for the Ottomans, as it contained stipulations 'neutralising the Black Sea, internationalising control of the Danube and introducing European controls in Romania and Serbia [...]. The Ottoman Empire did not lose territory in the war, but its sovereignty was further breached'. Carter V. Findley, 'The Tanzimat' in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Turkey in the Modern World, vol. 4* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 16. See also Ozan Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), Chapter 12. (We thank the author for sharing a copy of his manuscript.)
37. Darina Martykánová, 'Public Debt After a Defeat: Negotiating the French Image of the Ottoman Empire as Debtor in the Aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878', *Journal of European Economic History* 48, no. 2, (2019), 57–82.
38. For a compelling historiographical reflection on Ottomanist history writing against 'narratives of decline' that 'had isolated the Middle East and the Ottoman period from without, in effect disconnecting its societies and state from world time', see Ariel Salzmänn, 'The Education of an Ottomanist: Donald Quataert and the Narrative Arc of Ottoman Historiography, 1985-2011' in Selim Karahasanoğlu and Deniz Cenk Demir (eds), *History From Below: A Tribute in Memory of Donald Quataert* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016), 75–107. The quote is on 81. For the early modern period in particular, see Christopher Markiewicz, 'Europeanist Trends and Islamic Trajectories in Early Modern Ottoman History', *Past & Present* 239, no. 1 (2018), 265–81.
39. See Işıkşel, 'Ottoman Diplomacy.'
40. A classic example is Norman Itzkowitz and Max E. Mote, *Mubadele: An Ottoman-Russian Exchange of Ambassadors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
41. For Davison's key articles on the subject, see his *Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Diplomacy and Reforms* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1999); F. A. K. Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy: Abdülhamid II and the Great Powers, 1878-1888* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1996).
42. See, among others, Naci Yorulmaz, *Arming the Sultan: German Arms Trade and Personal Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire Before World War I* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Doğan Gürpınar, *Ottoman Imperial Diplomacy: A Political, Social and Cultural History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Olivier Bouquet, 'Un Rum aux pays des Hellènes. Constantin Musurus, premier représentant permanent de la Sublime Porte à Athènes (1840-1848)' in T. Anastasiadis and N. Clayer (eds), *Society, Politics and State Formation in Southeastern Europe During the 19th Century* (Athens: Alpha Bank Historical Archives, 2011); and Susanne Schattenberg, 'Die Macht des Protokolls und die Ohnmacht der Osmanen. Zum Berliner Kongress 1878' in Hillard Von Thiesen and Christian Windler (eds), *Akteure der Aussenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010), 373–90. Studies on the (diplomatic) origins of WWI form a genre on their own; see in particular Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
43. E.g. Sinan Kunalalp, 'The Last of the Phanariotes: Gregoire d'Aristarchi Bey (1843-1914): An Ottoman Diplomat and Publicist in Search of Identity' in Paschales M. Kitromelides, Demetres D. Arvanitakes, and Alexandra Douma (eds), *The Greek World under Ottoman and Western Domination: 15th-19th Centuries* (New York: Benaki Museum, 2008).
44. Serialized source editions include *Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on the Origins of World War One* (Istanbul: The Isis Press), which currently stands at ten volumes.
45. For example M. Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett (eds), *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011); and Lucien Frary and Mara Kozelsky (eds), *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered* (Madison: University of

- Wisconsin Press, 2014); and Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, 'Imperial Refuge: Resettlement of Muslims from Russia in the Ottoman Empire, 1860-1914', PhD thesis (Stanford: Stanford University, 2018).
46. For a recent poignant critique of gender blindness in (new) diplomatic history, see Susanna Erlandsson, 'Off the Record: Margaret van Kleffens and the Gendered History of Dutch World War II Diplomacy,' *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21, no. 1 (2019).
 47. Renée Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2014); Sabri Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Odile Moreau, 'Ottoman-Chinese Relations in the Early 20th Century' in Ş.T. Buzırınar and C. Çetinsaya (eds), *Abdülhamid II and His Legacy: Studies in Honour of F.A.K. Yasamee* (Istanbul: The Isis Press); George Gavrillis, 'The Greek-Ottoman Boundary as Institution, Locality, and Process, 1832-1882,' *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 10 (2008), 1516-37; and Julia P. Cohen, 'The East as a Career: Far Away Moses & Company in the Marketplace of Empires,' *Jewish Social Studies*, 21, no. 2 (2016), 35-77.
 48. For recent work on the Hadrhamis, see Wilson Chacko Jacob, *For God or Empire: Sayyid Fadl and the Indian Ocean World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019). For further historiographical contextualization, see Michael Christopher Low, 'Introduction: The Indian Ocean and Other Middle Easts,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 3 (2014), 549-55.
 49. See, among many others, Mehmet Alaaddin Yalçınkaya, *The First Permanent Ottoman Embassy in Europe: The Embassy of Yusuf Agha Efendi to London (1793-1797)* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2010); the special issue edited by Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić, 'Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean' for the *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, no. 2-3 (2015); and Lela Jaise Gibson, 'Changing States: Ottoman Sufism, Orientalism, and German Politics, 1770-1825', PhD thesis (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2015). For a historiographical overview, see Güneş Işıksel, 'Les méandres d'une pratique peu institutionnalisée. La diplomatie ottomane, XVe-XVIIIe siècle,' *Monde(s)* 1, no. 5 (2014), 43-55.
 50. For example, Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations, 1661-1807: Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-century Istanbul* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017); and Will Smiley, 'The Burdens of Subjecthood: The Ottoman State, Russian Fugitives, and Interimperial Law, 1774-1869,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014), 73-93. A recent special issue edited by Virginia H. Aksan, Boğaç A. Ergene, and Antonis Hadjikyriacou in the *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 7, no. 1 (2020), explores questions of periodization and possible meanings ascribed to 'Ottoman early modernity'.
 51. Ethan L. Menchinger, *The First of the Modern Ottomans: The Intellectual History of Ahmed Vasif* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 108.
 52. See, for instance, the introduction to Mehmet Yaşar Ertaş, Haşim Şahin, and Hâcer Kılıçaslan (eds), *Osmanlı 'da Siyaset ve Diplomasi* (Istanbul: Mahya Yayinlari, 2016), 11-25.
 53. The ever-growing scholarship on world empires has facilitated rigorous comparative studies. See, for instance, the work by Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
 54. Ertaş et al, *Siyaset ve Diplomasi*; and Özgür Kolçak, 'Şahinler'in Pençesinde Bir Erdel Hükümdarı: Köprülü İktidarı ve II. Görgü Rákóczi', *Güney-Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 23 (2013), 25-52.
 55. Murat Tuğluca and Ülkü Küçük: 'Osmanlı Devletinde Savaş Esirlerinin İadesi: 1736 Osmanlı-İran Anlaşmasına Göre Acem Esirlerin Teslimi Meselesi', in Ertaş et al., *Siyaset ve Diplomasi*, 57-74. See also Smiley, 'Burdens of Subjecthood.'
 56. Namık Sinan Turan, *İmparatorluk ve Diplomasi. Osmanlı Diplomasisinin İzinde* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınlari, 2014), 4.
 57. Işıksel, 'Ottoman Diplomacy,' 7-9.
 58. Turan (2014), *İmparatorluk ve Diplomasi*, 5.
 59. Ibid.; and Evrim Türkçelik, 'El Imperio otomano y la política de alianzas. Las relaciones franco-otomanas en el tránsito del siglo XVI al XVII', *Hispania* 75, no. 249 (2015), 39-68; Evrim Türkçelik, 'Meritocracy, Factionalism and Ottoman Grand Admirals in the Context of Mediterranean Politics', in Ruben González Cuerva and Alexander Koller (eds), *A Europe of Courts, a Europe of Factions: Political Groups at Early Modern Centres of Power (1550-1700)* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 88-108; Uğur Kurtaran, *Osmanlı Avusturya Diplomatik İlişkileri (1526-1791)* (Kahramanmaraş: Ukde Yayınları, 2009).
 60. See, for example, Harriet Rudolph, 'The Ottoman Empire and the Institutionalization of European Diplomacy, 1500-1700' in Marie-Luisa Frick and Andreas Th. Müller (eds), *Islam and International Law: Engaging Self-Centrism from a Plurality of Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill), 161-83.
 61. Examples include Will Hanley, 'Extraterritorial Prosecution, the Late Capitulations, and the New International Lawyers' in Housseine Alloul, Edhem Eldem, and Henk De Smaele (eds), *To Kill a Sultan: A Transnational History of the Attempt on Abdülhamid II (1905)* (London: Palgrave, 2018), 163-92; Nobuyoshi Fujinami, 'The First Ottoman History of International Law', *Turcica* 48 (2017), 245-70; and Aimee, M. Genell, 'The Well-Defended Domains: Eurocentric International Law and the Making of the Ottoman Office of Legal Counsel', *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3, no. 2 (2016), 255-75.

62. Girardelli, 'Power or Leisure?'; Ulrike Freitag, 'Helpless Representatives of the Great Powers? Western Consuls in Jeddah, 1830s to 1914,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 3 (2012), 357–81; Christian Windler, 'Representing a State in a Segmentary Society: French Consuls in Tunis from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration,' *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 2 (2001), 233–74; Pascal Firges, *French Revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire: Diplomacy, Political Culture, and the Limiting of Universal Revolution, 1792-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Malte Fuhrmann, *Der Traum vom deutschen Orient. Zwei deutsche Kolonien im Osmanischen Reich, 1851–1918* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2006); Jack Fairey, *The Great Powers and Orthodox Christendom: The Crisis Over the Eastern Church in the Era of the Crimean War* (New York: Palgrave, 2015); Shana Elizabeth Minkin, *Imperial Bodies: Empire and Death in Alexandria, Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).
63. For a discussion of how Eastern question discourses shaped exclusive conceptions of Europe throughout the long nineteenth century and continue to inform contemporary debates on the meaning of the EU and Turkey today, compare Leslie Rogne Schumacher, 'The Eastern Question as a Europe Question: Viewing the Ascent of 'Europe' through the Lens of Ottoman Decline,' *Journal of European Studies* 44, no. 1 (2014), 64–80; and Dimitris Livanios, 'The 'Sick Man' Paradox: History, Rhetoric and the 'European Character' of Turkey,' *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 8, no. 3 (2006), 299–311.
64. Textbook examples include A. L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923*, 2nd rev. ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2004 [1989]) and G. D. Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli* (London: University of London Press, 1971).
65. Fray and Kozelsky, *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands*, 7–8; and Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions Over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 156.
66. Karl Marx, *The Eastern Question: A Reprint of Letters Written 1853-1856: Dealing with the Events of the Crimean War*, in Edward B. Aveling and Eleanor Marx Aveling (eds) (London: Routledge, 1994 [1897]), 2.
67. Case, *The Age of Questions*, 4–5.
68. For examples, see John Grand-Carteret, *La Crète devant l'image. 150 reproductions de caricatures* (Paris: Société française d'Éditions d'Art, 1897); For further analysis, see Leslie Rogne Schumacher, 'Outrage and Imperialism, Confusion and Indifference: Punch and the Armenian massacres of 1894–1896' in Richard Scully and Andrekos Varnava (eds), *Comic Empires: Imperialism in Cartoons, Caricature, and Satirical Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 305–33.
69. Fray and Kozelsky, *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands*.
70. Case, *Age of Questions*, 185–6.
71. See Fray and Kozelsky's excellent introduction to *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands*.
72. Ibid. The major English-language classic of the postwar period is M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1991 [1966]).
73. Case makes a similar point about such contemporary scholarly treatment of 'questions': 'Long after many period commentators of the age of questions stopped believing in the reality of questions and, indeed, questioned the motives of querists, academics in various disciplines continued to treat them as real and assign them histories.' *Age of Questions*, 178.
74. See, for instance, Miloš Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Alexander Bitis, *Russia and the Eastern Question: Army, Government and Society, 1815-1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Jacques Frémeaux, *La Question d'Orient* (Paris: Fayard, 2014). Even a meticulously researched work as P. E. Caquet, *The Orient, the Liberal Movement, and the Eastern Crisis of 1839-41* (London: Palgrave, 2016) does not escape the typical epistemological limits that characterize Eastern question meta-narratives.
75. See Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Vintage, 1997). Another thought-provoking study of the ways academic history writing on Muslim-majority countries are shaped by contemporary political events is Yahya Sadowski, 'The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate' in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds), *Political Islam. Essays from Middle East Report* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 33–50.
76. See Kemal Beydilli, 'Şark meselesi', *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* 38 (2010), 352–57. (Online: <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/sark-meselesi>).
77. Some European studies of the Eastern question were also translated into Ottoman; see the work by the French historian Édouard Driault, *Şark Meselesi. Bidâyet-i Zuhûrundan Zamanımıza Kadar* (Istanbul: Muhtar Halid Kitabhanesi, 1912).
78. See, for example, Yusuf Akçura, *Tarih-i siyasi notları. Şark Meselesine dair* (Istanbul: Erkan-ı Harbiye Mektebi Matbaası, 1920); and Mustafa Kâmil, *El-Mes'ele-tü'-ş-Şarkıyye* (Cairo: Matbaatü'l-Âdâb, 1898).
79. Ahmed Rıza, *La faillité morale de la politique occidentale en Orient* (Paris: Picart, 1922).
80. See Hamit Z. Koşay, 'Yusuf Akçura,' *TTK Belleten* 41, no. 162 (1977), 389–400.
81. The paragraph that follows draws in great part from Fray and Kozelsky's introductory essay in *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands*.

82. Virginia H. Aksan treats these issues in a 2007 review article of Caroline Finkel's *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923* for *H-Turk Reviews*: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13356>. See also Marc Aymes, *A Provincial History of the Ottoman Empire: Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2013), 57–91; and Case, *The Age of Questions*, 179–80.
83. Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*; and also his forthcoming 'A Priceless Grace? The Congress of Vienna of 1815, the Ottoman Empire, and Historicising the Eastern Question' in *The English Historical Review*.
84. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]), 76, 191. This apparent disinterest for the Eastern question narrative mirrors Said's broader neglect of the Ottoman historical reality. See Derek Bryce, 'The Absence of Ottoman, Islamic Europe in Edward W. Said's Orientalism', *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 1 (2013), 99–121.
85. Hüseyin Yılmaz, 'The Eastern Question and the Ottoman Empire: The Genesis of the Near and Middle East in the Nineteenth Century' in Michael Bonine, Abbas Amanat, and Michael Casper (eds.), *Is There a Middle East: The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 27. For similar arguments about the Ottomans' perceived position of liminality as *in* but not *of* Europe, see Bryce, 'Ottoman, Islamic Europe.'
86. As Aymes has forcefully shown in his timely 'provincial history' of the Ottoman Empire, such grand narratives also disregard differential scales of time and place between centre and periphery/ies. See, *Ottoman Cyprus*, 57ff.
87. For Istanbul's ruling elites, 'Turk' was, for most of the modern period, synonymous for 'rustic' or 'bumpkin'. See Brown, *Imperial Legacy*, 5. Yet, the old European practice to denote Ottoman policymakers 'Turks' persists today in reissues of such reference works like F. R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1814-1914*, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson Longman, 2005 [1980]). A more recent, if decidedly more critical and informed example is Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
88. François Georgeon, 'L'Empire ottoman et l'Europe au XIXe siècle. De la question d'Orient à la question d'Occident', *Confluences Méditerranée* 52, no. 1 (2005), 29–39. For a study of Ottoman perceptions of the Eastern question during the Tanzimat era, see Nazan Çiçek, *The Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of the Eastern Question in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010).
89. Davison, 'Ottoman Diplomacy and its Legacy,' 179.
90. See, for instance, Alan Palmer, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (London: John Murray, 1992).
91. Aymes similarly argues that these narratives construct "a programmed history controlled by a set of constraints. It is an entity which needs to be interpreted and understood as such, a game whose rules are known in advance." See *Ottoman Cyprus*, 59.
92. Consider for example Ussama Makdisi, 'Ottoman Orientalism,' *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002), 768–96; Selim Deringil, 'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003), 311–42; Thomas Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); and Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).
93. Irina Gouzévitch, Ana Cardoso de Matos and Darina Martykánová, 'La Russie, l'Espagne, le Portugal et l'Empire ottoman: deux siècles de politiques technoscientifiques à l'épreuve des approches comparatistes' in Mina Kleiche-Dray (ed), *Les ancrages nationaux de la science mondiale, XVIIIe-XXIe siècles* (Paris/Marseille: EAC/IDR, 2017), 239–86.
94. For critiques, see Davison, 'Ottoman Diplomacy and its Legacy'; and Donald Quataert, 'Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes Towards the Notion of "Decline"', *History Compass* 1, no. 1 (2003): <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-0542.038>.
95. Isa Blumi has unsettled some traditional presumptions about Western modern global hegemony in his *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
96. Some European creditors had to forcefully lobby their until then inactive governments to act on their behalf when Istanbul stopped paying its outstanding debts. See Martykánová, 'Public Debt After a Defeat'.
97. For more background, see Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, Chapter 4.
98. Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 2.
99. Salzmann, 'Between Saint-Domingue and the Sublime Porte,' 358–9.
100. Relations with Iran, the Sultanates of Oman and Zanzibar, or with the new Balkan states are a case in point.
101. See, for instance, Silvana Rachieru, 'Ottoman Representatives in Romania: Diplomatic and Consular Network of the Sultan in a Former Vassal State,' in Maria Baramova et al. (eds.) *Power and Influence in South-Eastern Europe, 16-19th Century* (Berlin: Pfl, 2013); Jan Anckaer, *Small Power Diplomacy and Commerce: Belgium and the Ottoman Empire During the Reign of Leopold I (1831-1865)* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2013); Mehmet Necati Kutlu et al. (eds.) *Imperio Otomano-América Latina (periodo inicial)* (Ankara: Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos, 2012); and Hatice Uğur, *Osmanlı Afrikası'nda bir sultanlık: Zengibar* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2005).

102. See Marian Kent (ed), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1996 [1984]).
103. Donald Quataert, 'Recent Writings in Late Ottoman History,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003), 133.
104. Adam Watson credits the Ottoman Empire as being an 'integral and major component of the European states system' throughout the early modern and modern periods. See his *International Society*; the quote is on 177. See also 269–71.
105. See Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage, 1989); J. J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014 [2001]); and Bridge and Bullen, *Great Powers*. For the contention of the Ottoman Empire as an 'intermediary state' between Great Powers, see Paul W. Schroeder's seminal *Systems, Stability, and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), Chapter 4. Even in Buzan and Lawson's, *Global Transformation*, undoubtedly one of the most ambitious textbooks available, the Ottomans do not really figure in a narrative that ultimately revolves around Great Power rivalry and competition over resources and dominance both at home and abroad.
106. For a robust critique of the Anglo-American-dominated IR discipline, its connections to Western empire and capitalism, as well as the shaky premises of 'global liberalism' and the 'national' sovereignty it is founded on, see Kees Van der Pijl, 'Historicising the International: Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy,' *Historical Materialism* 18 no. 2 (2010), 3–34.
107. Robbie Shilliam (ed.), *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.
108. For a growing acknowledgement among the consecrated authorities of IR, see Martti Koskeniemi, 'Empire and International Law: The Real Spanish Contribution,' *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 61, no. 1 (2011), 1–36.
109. Sankaran Krishna, 'The Importance of Being Ironic: A Postcolonial View on Critical International Relations theory,' *Alternatives* 18, no. 3 (1993), 385–417; L. H. M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations: Conquest and Desire Between Asia and the West* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (eds), *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class* (London: Routledge, 2013).
110. Minawi, *Ottoman Scramble*.
111. Ömer Turan, 'Öryantalizm, sömürgecilik eleştirisi ve Ahmed Rıza: Batı'nın Doğu Politikasının Ahlaken İflas'ını yeniden okumak', *Toplum ve Bilim*, 115 (2009), 6–45.
112. For reflections on the 'postcolonial turn' in Ottoman studies, see Fatma Müge Göçek, 'Postcoloniality, the Ottoman Past, and the Middle East Present,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44, no. 3 (2012), 549–63; Özgür Türesay, 'The Ottoman Empire Seen through the Lens of Postcolonial Studies: A Recent Historiographical Turn', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 60, no. 2 (2013), 127–45; and Vangelis Kechriotis, 'Postcolonial Criticism Encounters Late Ottoman Studies', *Historiein* 13 (2013), 39–46.
113. Buzan and Lawson, *Global Transformation*, 7. See also at 58–60. For another critique of Eurocentrism in histories of international relations, see Eren Düzgün, 'Against Eurocentric Anti-Eurocentrism: International Relations, Historical Sociology and Political Marxism', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23, 285–307.
114. See introduction in Chowdhry and Nair, *Postcolonialism and International Relations*.
115. Rafael Núñez Florencio, *Sol y sangre. La imagen de España en el mundo* (Madrid: Espasa, 2001); José Álvarez Junco, 'El peso del estereotipo', *Claves de Razón Práctica* 48 (1994), 2–10; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Paola Castaño, 'América Latina y la producción transnacional de sus imágenes y representaciones. Algunas perspectivas preliminares' in Daniel Mato and Alejandro Maldonado (eds), *Cultura y Transformaciones sociales en tiempos de globalización. Perspectivas latinoamericanas* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO).
116. Juan Luis Simal and Darina Martykánová, 'Ferdinand and the Sultan: The Metaphor of the Turk and the Crisis of the Spanish Monarchy in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, 10, no. 1, (2015), 1–26.
117. Quoted in Bryce, 'Ottoman, Islamic Europe', 113.
118. Erik Jan Zürcher, 'Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1938' in Kemal H. Karpat (ed), *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 150–79.
119. Martti Koskeniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). An example of this would be the interpretation of the activities of the Ottoman Bank and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration by Ali Coşkun Tunçer, *Sovereign Debt and International Financial Control: The Middle East and the Balkans, 1870-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).
120. Simal and Martykánová, 'Ferdinand and the Sultan', 19.

121. Douglas A. Howard, 'Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of "Decline" of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Journal of Asian History* 22, no. 1 (1988), 52–77.
122. P. J. DiMaggio and W. W. Powell, 'The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields', *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983), 147–60.

Acknowledgments

The editors acknowledge the support of the Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain for funding the project TRANSCAP: The Transnational Construction of Capitalism during the Long nineteenth Century. An Approach from Two Peripheral Regions – The Iberian World and the Mediterranean [PGC2018-097023-B-I00]. Houssine Alloul benefited from the support of the Fulbright Commission in Belgium, the Research Council of the University of Antwerp, and the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO). At different stages of this project, several colleagues kindly read our essay and provided perspicacious feedback. We warmly thank Maartje Abbenhuis, Marc Aymes, Samuel Coggeshall, Rubén González Cuerva, Erdal Kaynar, Meltem Kocaman, Ozan Özavcı, Juan Luis Simal, and Kenan van de Mierop. The genesis of this themed section stretches back to a symposium we organized in 2018, together with Giampaolo Conte, at the 5th World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) in Seville. We thank the panellists who joined us there and enriched the discussions: John K. Bragg, Berna Kamay, Pınar Odabaşı Taşçı, Silvana Rachieru, and D. Yavuz Tüyoğlu. Finally, many thanks is also due to the *International History Review* editor-in-chief Alan Dobson for his support throughout.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.