Chapter 1

Empire and Transformation: The Politics of Difference

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Empires on the Mind of the Mid-20th Century

In a charged political moment in French Africa in the mid-1950s, one of French Africa's leading politicians, Mamadou Dia of Senegal, asserted, "It is necessary in the final analysis that the imperialist conception of the nation-state give way to the modern conception of the multinational state."[1] His insistence—perhaps counterintuitive—on the "nation-state" as an imperialist construct that should be replaced by "the modern conception of the multi-national state" draws attention to the problematic connection of "modern" to a particular form of the state. Conventional narratives put the "nation-state" at the core of the modern; history is presented as a grand sweep of transformation from "pre-modern empires" to 19th century colonization by western Europeans to 20th century decolonizations and the generalization of the nation-state. But in the mid-20th century, Dia was saying something different: he did not see the nation-state as progressive or inevitable. His goal was to turn empire into a complex form of sovereignty, in which some state functions would be exercised by individual African territories, others by an African feder-

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1 "Il faut qu'en définitive, la conception impérialiste d'État-Nation fasse place à la conception moderne d'État-multi-national." *La Condition Humaine* (August 29, 1955).

ation, uniting French-speaking African territories, and still others by a Franco-African community, in which France and all its former colonies would participate as equals.[2]

Layered and interlaced sovereignty is often associated with "pre-modern" empires. But the idea of a multinational and composite polity was not only available in 1955, it was considered "modern" and desirable by Dia. To understand his position, which was widely shared at the time, we must cease to think of history as a series of epochs each characterized by its kind of state. In the 19th century, the most powerful states were European empires with overseas colonies. But these colonial powers—Great Britain, France, and the latecomer German empire— vied for space, people, and resources with much longer-lived empires on Europe's edges (the empires of the Ottomans, Romanovs, and Haps-burgs). In Asia, Europeans, Americans and Russians competed with the empires of the Qing and the Meiji. In the 20th century, some of these empires were disassembled, but some were put back together again, and new empires emerged. Decolonization, like colonization, took place in a world where the most powerful actors were empires, whose contesta-tions were crucial to shifts in power and sovereignty.

It was not just "modern" empires that had the capacity to reshape connections, ideas, and power around the globe. Empires have been agents of transformation of the world's history for over two millennia. Compared to the long lives of empires, the nation-state is a short-term political phenomenon—a concept of recent origin and uncertain future. At the beginning of the 21st century, empire has not given way to a world comprised of nation-states alone. Other kinds of polities and other ideas of sovereignty are in play. Dia's idea of the "modern multi-national state" has taken on many forms, all of them inflected by the practices and contestations of empires.

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2 On the political imaginaries and processes of reconfiguration of the French Union in Africa from 1946 through the 1950s, see Frederick Cooper, "From Imperial Inclusion to Republican Exclusion? France's Ambiguous Post-War Trajectory," in Charles Tshimanga, Didier Gondola, and Peter J. Bloom, eds., *Frenchness and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 91–119.

In this article, I address four subjects. First, I propose reasons for why empires hold such significance for changes in the world order, both in the last two centuries and over the last two millennia. I next consider the different strategies that empires have employed to rule their populations, what Frederick Cooper and I have called "the politics of difference," before turning to the imperial context of political action and imagination in the 19th and 20th centuries. I conclude with a discussion of the dis-aggregation, destruction, creation, reconstruction, and transformation of imperial and other states in the second half of the 20th century.[3]

Empires as Agents of Transformation

Over a very long time, the practices and interactions of empire have configured the contexts in which people acted and thought. The study of empires helps us to think about what made possible particular connections across space and time, and what prevented other connections from happening. Empires were assertive shapers of production, communication, and culture in the world, but they had to deal with their own limitations, especially with the challenge of exercising power at a distance and over diverse populations, usually in the presence of other empires.

What gave empires their world-shaping force? For one thing, empires have been a durable form of polity. Large political units, expansionist or with a memory of expansion, empires maintain distinctions and hierarchy among people even as they incorporate them, forcefully or otherwise. The fiction of the nation-state is homogeneity—one people, one territory, one government—while empires recognize and have to manage diversity among their subjects. Empires govern different people differently. The multiple governing strategies used by empires gave them adaptability and the possibility to control resources over long distances and times.

As long as political leaders have ambitions to extend their control and as long as people live in distinct social and cultural arrangements,

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3 For a development of my argument and for sources and citations, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

the temptation to make empire or expand it is present. But since empires maintain differences among people, their component parts can potentially break away. This tension explains why the empire form of state is so common in history, but also why empires are subject to fission, reconfiguration, and collapse. The empire form was contagious. People can imagine many forms of the state, but as long as empires are in the neighborhood—with their command over human and material resources beyond any single territory or "people"—putting political ideas into practice requires thinking about empires and possibly making one.

The concept of "trajectory" can help us analyze change over time, as empires modified their strategies of rule and competed with other empires. Empires' capacity for adjustment gave them the flexibility essential to maintaining their power. Clashes, competitions, rivalries *among* empires pushed them in different directions, stimulated technological and ideological invention, created new conditions and redefined ideas, even of what constituted the known "world."

Let us take a dramatic example of how empires and their competitions remade the world history. What is often called the "expansion of Europe," starting in the 15th century, was not the product of an aggrandizing instinct intrinsic to European peoples, but rather one effect of a particular conjuncture. In the 15th century, wealth created in the powerful Chinese empire and south east Asia offered tempting incentives to distant merchants, but at the time the Ottoman empire—bigger, stronger, and more securely ruled than the fragmented political units of western Europe—stood in between Europe and China. The kings of Spain and Portugal sought overseas connections to the east as a way around the Ottomans and their own dependence on local magnates. An unexpected outcome of these ventures was connecting people on two sides of the Atlantic, after Columbus sailed west to Asia and ran into what would become America.[4]

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4 On the Ottoman empire, European empires, and the Americas, see J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492–1763* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

Another critical conjuncture in world history looks different when seen in terms of relations among empires: the European and American revolutions of the 18th and early 19th centuries. The revolutions in French Saint Domingue, British North America, and Spanish South America were conflicts within empire—over the relative powers of home governments, overseas settlers, and subordinates—before they became efforts to get out of empire.[5]

The trajectories of empires have shaped today's most powerful states. Take China. China's eclipse from the early 19th to the late 20th centuries by then more dynamic imperial powers turns out to have been only the latest of several interregna, shorter than others in the more than 2000 years of Chinese imperial dynasties. During the Republican and Communist periods, aspirants for power took for granted the borders established earlier, by the Yuan (13th to 14th centuries) and Qing (17th to 20th centuries). The leaders of China today evoke these dynasties and their imperial traditions. After major disasters and adroit adjustments of its economic policies, China has turned the tables on the West, exporting industrial goods in addition to silks and porcelain, running an enormous trade balance, becoming the creditor of the United States and Europe. The desires of Tibetans for independence and secessionist politics in the largely Muslim region of Xinjiang pose classic problems for Chinese empire. As earlier, China's rulers must control economic barons and monitor diverse populations, but the polity can draw on its accumulated imperial statecraft to meet these challenges as it resumes a prominent place in a shifting geography of power.

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5 On these revolutions and their imperial contexts, see Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Eliga Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Daniel J. Hulsebosch, *Constituting Empire: New York and the Transformation of Constitutionalism in the Atlantic World, 1664–1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

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The Politics of Difference

All empires faced some common problems: how to govern different groups of people, how to govern at a distance, how to control dispersed subordinates. Still, there was no single way to run an empire: empires operated with different repertoires of power.

Empires learned some of their strategies from predecessors or rivals. The Ottoman empire, for example, managed to blend Turkic, Byzantine, Arab, Mongol, and Persian traditions. To administer their multi-confessional realm, the Ottomans counted on the elites of each religious community without trying to assimilate or destroy them.[6] The British empire over time encompassed dominions, colonies, protectorates, India governed by a separate civil service, a disguised protectorate over Egypt, and "zones of influence" where the British engaged in what has been called the "imperialism of free trade." An empire with a varied repertoire of rule could shift its tactics selectively, without having to face the problem of assimilating and governing all parts according to a single model.

We can observe some basic and contrasting patterns in empires' management of their diverse populations. The "politics of difference" in some empires meant recognizing the multiplicity of peoples and their varied customs as an ordinary fact of life; in others it meant drawing a strict boundary between insiders and "barbarian" outsiders. For rulers of the Mongol empires of the 13th and 14th centuries, difference was both normal and useful. Mongol empires sheltered Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Daoism, and Islam and fostered arts and sciences produced by Arab, Persian, and Chinese civilizations.[7] The Roman empire tended

6 On the Ottoman empire, see from a rich historiography, Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650: The Structure of Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

7 On the Mongols, see David Morgan, *The Mongols*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2007); Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

toward homogenization, based on a syncretic but identifiably Roman culture, the enticing rights of Roman citizenship, and, eventually, Christianity as a state religion.[8]

Empires developed variants on these two ideal types; some like the Ottoman and the Russian, combined them. European empires in Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries hesitated between an assimilationist tendency—motivated by their confidence in the superiority of western civilization—and a tendency to indirect rule, to govern through the elites of conquered communities. "Civilizing missions" declared by European empires in the 19th century existed in tension with theories of racial difference.[9]

No matter how imperial rulers conceived of "other" people and their cultures, conquerors could not administer empires by themselves. They needed intermediaries. Often imperial rulers used skills, knowledge, and authority of people from a conquered society—elites who could gain from cooperation or people who had earlier been marginal and saw advantages in serving the victorious power. A different kind of intermediary was a person from the homeland—a settler or a functionary. Both strategies relied upon intermediaries' own social connections to insure effective collaboration. Another tactic was just the opposite: putting slaves or other people detached from their communities of origin and dependent for their welfare and survival solely on their imperial masters in positions of authority. This strategy was used effectively by the Abbassid caliphate and later by the Ottomans, whose highest admin-

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8 On Roman cultural practices and their attractions, see Emma Dench, *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

9 On civilizing missions, see Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

istrators and commanders had been extracted from their families as boys and brought up in the sultan's household.

In theory, 19th and 20th century European empires should have replaced such personal structures of intermediation by bureaucracies, but they did so more on paper than in reality. In the vast spaces of Africa, the administrator considered himself "le roi de la brousse." The local official needed chiefs, guards, translators, all of whom were trying to find an advantage for themselves. Throughout the history of empires, intermediaries were essential but dangerous. Settlers, indigenous elites, and groups of subordinate officials might all want to run their own operations, even while profiting from the protections offered by imperial sovereigns. A focus on intermediaries reveals vertical connections between rulers, their agents, and their subjects, a political relationship that is often overlooked at present, in favor of presumed horizontal affinities of class, race, or ethnicity.

Political imagination was critical to empires' practices and impact. Imperial leaders saw their possibilities and challenges in particular situations; their imaginations were neither limited to one idea nor infinite. Local elites and other imperial subjects had their imaginations too; we need to understand them in their contexts, not ours. Monotheism, for example, was adopted by the Roman emperor Constantine and later by Mohammad: the idea of one empire, one God, and one emperor was a powerful imperial tool. But the other face of monotheism was schism, the argument that the current emperor was not the proper guardian of the true faith.

Empires tried to associate themselves with ideas of justice and morality. But critics could turn those ideas against empire's practices— think of Bartolomé de las Casas's criticism in the 16th century of Spain's treatment of indigenous people in its American domains.[10] Or of the anti-slavery movement of the British empire in the early 19th century, or of Asians and Africans who turned European assertions of a "civilizing mission" into the claim that democracy could not be quarantined inside one continent.

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10 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, trans. and ed. Andrée Collard (New York: Harper, 1971).

Empires and the Dynamics of Change in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Political Imagination in 19th Century Europe

Much of the recent burst of interest in empires has focused on a particular part of the imperial spectrum: the colonial empires of western European powers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Colonial studies and post-colonial theories have brought attention to fundamental aspects of recent history that narratives of global progress had obscured. But if we take a longer perspective on imperial power, we face a paradox: the empires with apparently the greatest technological advantage over other societies and imbued with a strong sense of their cultural superiority were among the shortest lived in history. Compare 70–80 years of British or French domination over Africa to the centuries-long histories of Russian, Habsburg, or Ottoman empires, or even the last of the succession of Chinese dynasties (Qing, 1644–1911).

A conventional explanation for decolonization was teleological: all empires were doomed to give way to the nation-state. However, as we have seen, Africans like Dia and others involved in politics in the mid-20th did not see the future as predetermined, nor the nation-state as their goal. The idea of nation, nonetheless, had a much older history, in most places tangled up with the ambitions of empires to control multiple groups. Empires needed knowledge of populations they claimed to manage; nations emerged into view as empires encountered, surveyed, and exploited various peoples. Efforts by leaders of ethnic groups to prey upon, join, or rebel against imperial rulers were frequent features of world history. From the late 18th century, political claims in the name of "the people," "the nation," and "popular sovereignty" led to both debates and warfare over which people—at home, in contiguous territory, or overseas—would belong within empires and on what terms. These questions were posed in the 18th century; they were not resolved in the 20th, or so far in the 21st.

The American, Haitian, and Latin American revolutions took place in a world configured by empires and their internal and external politics. The "freeborn Englishman" in North America claimed his English rights against the English parliament and sought to create an "Empire of Lib-

erty." Indians and slaves were not to have a place in the new polity. Recognition of living in a world of empires pushed American rebels to unite the former colonies into a single federated polity.[11] Britain's "decolonisation" in the 18th century did not destroy its empire, and may have made it more manageable. After 1783, Britain could still exercise its imperial might in its other settlement and plantation colonies, in Company-ruled India, and through economic and commercial hegemony.

During the French and Haitian revolutions of 1789–1804, the boundaries of the rights of man and of the citizen were contested: a national vision of citizenship was set against an imperial one. After 1789, in Saint Domingue first colonists, then free people of color, then slaves claimed citizenship. Faced with royalist reaction, the invasion of other empires, and slave revolt, the revolutionary government in Paris was driven by pragmatism and principle first to extend citizenship to free people of color, and then to emancipate and make citizens of slaves in the Carribean territories.[12]

The revolutions in Spanish America began in the shadow of Napoleon's conquests in European Spain and grew out of creole elites' efforts to be part of a monarchical order on both sides of the Atlantic. The inclusive vision of a Spanish polity fell victim to struggles over the distribution of power, representation, and commercial rights and to anxieties over the place of creole elites, Indian peasants, and African slaves in the political order. The nationalism of Latin American republics was the consequence rather than the cause of the breakup of empire, and none of the

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11 See Armitage, *The Ideological Origins*; Hulsebosch, *Constituting Empire*; David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Maria E. Montoya, *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

12 C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938, reprint New York: Vintage, 1963); Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*.

new states was ethnically homogeneous. Brazil, where the Portuguese emperor had moved his capital after Napoleon's invasion, declared itself an empire in 1822.[13]

Inside Europe itself, the 18th century revolutions did not produce a divide between a layered and composite empires and nationally bounded states. Napoleon's empire was a differentiated polity: parts incorporated into a core structure, others ruled by his relatives, by old dynasties cooperating with the regime, by direct military authority, or by systems of alliances. Napoleonic armies, like those of earlier empires, were in their majority made up not of "French" citizens, but of foreigners recruited during expansion. Napoleon conferred titles of nobility on generals and allies. He was both an emperor—crowned as such—and a restorationist, most literally by restoring slavery, abolished by the revolutionary government, in French colonies in 1802.[14]

Napoleon was not defeated by a rising tide of national sentiment, but by other empires, notably Russia and Britain. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 did not produce a Europe of nations, but of a small number of empires, each a heterogeneous and differentiated polity, each with its ambitions. During the bellicose 19th century, a new empire was formed (Germany), an old empire continued to grow (Russia), an even older empire shrank but did not go away (the Ottomans), a third long-lived empire (the Habsburgs) reconfigured itself, while the dynamic western-edge empires of France and Britain used clientelism, free trade, war, and diplomacy against other powers both in Europe and overseas. Violent struggles broke out inside empires. Rebellions against Dutch, Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg sovereignty as well as attempted revolutions—three times in France alone—threatened the hold of rulers upon their polities and offered opportunities for imperial rivals to exploit.

European empires also elaborated their skills at diplomacy following the defeat of Napoleon. The Holy Alliance signaled that Europe would

13 Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution*.

14 On Napoleon's empire, see Michael Broers, *Europe under Napoleon, 1799–1815* (London: Arnold, 1996); Alan Forrest, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002); Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1991).

be a Christian place; the Quadruple Alliance morphed into the Congress System of consultation among the great powers. From the Congress of Vienna in 1815 to the Berlin conferences on the Balkans in 1878 and on Africa in 1884–85, small numbers of men conscious of themselves as a European imperial club remade borders, re-apportioned resources and people. Sovereignties were subordinated where convenient; territories were exchanged; kingdoms were merged or divvied up; inter-empire alliances formed and reformed.

Thus the story often told as "the rise of nationalism" in the 19th century is not about trajectories from one state form to another, but about the intersections of empire politics with changing ideas and practices of governance. Interest in "nations"—in the languages, histories, and cultures of distinctive national groups—was part of the political imaginary of 19th century Europe. Imperial rulers themselves sought serviceable Christian genealogies and links to a heroic past they tried to claim as their heritage. Both British and Russian empires, and later the French, saw advantages in undermining their common rival—the Ottomans—by supporting Greeks who rebelled in the 1820s. An independent "Greek" kingdom (1832) was a bi-product of imperial competition. For much of the 19th century and beyond, empires helped to make nations, usually on some other empire's territory.

Meanwhile, empires on Europe's unruly eastern edges did not hold still in archaism or sink in decline or suffer a hundred years of "crisis." Russians, Habsburgs, and Ottomans all took pains to revamp their ruling practices and their imperial economies over the century.

At the beginning of the century, Russia was the power that made other empires nervous. Alexander I, triumphant over Napoleon, saw himself as a leader of Christian Europe. It took the Crimean war to shock another Russian tsar, Alexander II, into a paroxysm of reforms—the emancipation of the enserfed peasantry; universal male military service; restructuring of the judicial system; representative institutions of local government. In the second half of the century, Russian rulers extended their empire into Central Asia and launched a major effort to expand industrial production and transportation networks. The first Trans-Siberian Railroad was completed in 1905. Oil from the Caspian region became a major export, along with grain.

Across Central Asia and Siberia, Russian rulers absorbed new populations and territories.[15]

The Ottomans, in response to threats and defeats, also transformed administrative, educational, and military institutions. Sultans opened new military and medical schools, abolished the Janissary corps, and vastly expanded both the army and the administration. Like the Russians, the Ottomans reformed their courts and drew up new legal codes. In 1869 a law declared all subjects Ottoman citizens, and in 1876, Sultan Abdulhamid II approved a constitution and convened a parliament. Although the parliament was closed when yet another war with Russia broke out, it brought Muslims, Christians, Jews, and together to discuss matters of governance.[16]

Modernizing Ottoman administrators tried to strengthen Islam against the inroads of Christian evangelicals, and at the same time to give people of many religions and ethnicities—Albanians, Macedonians, Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, Kurds, Jews, and Turks—roles in governance. In some places, like Yemen, the Ottoman empire tried to take a "colonial" stance like that of its French and British rivals, bringing unruly

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15 On Russian empire, see from a huge historiography, Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow, U.K.: Pearson Education, 2001); Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827–1905* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850–1917* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

16 On the Ottoman empire in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: Tauris, 1999); Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

tribes into a more "civilized" structure. In the Levant, Istanbul continued to make pragmatic arrangements with Arabic-speaking elites. By the early 20th century, after significant losses in the Balkans, the empire's ideology and its populations became more Islamic, but its ruling ethos was still "Ottoman," and not specifically "Turkish."[17]

As the two empires on contestable edges of Europe struggled to match the strength of western armies and navies—the better to battle each other—they confronted and engaged a powerful rhetoric of "progress" and "civilization." By their rivals, Russians and Ottomans were seen as sometimes "exotic," often "despotic," and always "backward." This rhetoric entered into the self-conceptions of discontented elites.

In these contexts, we can use the term "modern" as people at the time used the idea. Russian reformists and Ottoman ones wanted their polity to be "with the times" or "up-to-date"—*sovremennyi* in Russian. Administrators used western European strategies to restructure institutions and practices. Russian and Ottoman elites drew upon an expanding repertoire of political ideas that included liberalism, ethnic or cultural solidarity, feminism, socialism, the march of progress, anarchism, natural rights. In the second half of the 19th century, intellectuals and activists could see themselves as members of trans-imperial movements for sovereignty based on equal rights, representative government, or class power. These ideas were not inconsistent with an empire that recognized the plurality of its population, even if some of them threatened autocratic political formations.

The Habsburg empire also reminds us that political innovation in the 19th century was not limited to a trend toward the unitary nation-state. The Habsburgs, from the 18th century, had sought to bring modulated enlightenment to empire, based on an educated and centralized bureaucracy empowered to stand up to local nobilities and the cultivation of ethnic and religious minorities. The weft of Habsburg politics was the

17 On Ottoman politics, see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

imperial tradition—the ability of the royal family to recognize and rule a multiplicity of units and peoples by dynastic right. The close relationship between the Habsburgs and Catholicism did not prevent Franz Joseph from making himself visible at Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, Armenian, Greek, and Muslim ceremonies. But reaching out to people divided along class, confessional, or other lines would almost everywhere offend some of them.[18]

In 1861 and 1866, after disastrous empire wars, the Habsburg emperor established a bicameral legislature and made further constitutional changes. A single Austrian citizenship was created in 1867, guaranteeing the same civil rights to people of all religions. But the centralizing fiscal measures demanded by liberals and their insistence on German as the language of administration pushed Hungarian and Czech activists to demand more regional power. Federalism was proposed by some national elites as a better way of distributing sovereignty. In 1867, the Austrian empire was transformed into what became known as the Dual Monarchy: the dynasty presided over an empire of two unequal units, Austria and Hungary. This dual polity was administered by an emperor/king who convened two cabinets, sometimes separately, sometimes jointly.[19]

The reconfiguration of the Habsburg empires in 1867 reveals the multiple political imaginaries, tensions, and possibilities of the time. The constitutional transformations of the 1860s blended the aspirations of liberals for civil rights and representative democracy with the demands of activists in Austria's component parts for more autonomy. The compromise rewarded Germans and Hungarians, but did not satisfy other groups—Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Poles, Ukrainians, and Ruma-

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18 On Habsburg imperial politics, see Daniel L. Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848–1916* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005).

19 On politics and ethnicity in the Habsburg empire, see Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848–1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) as well as his *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontier of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

nians. Many Slavic activists were attracted to an altogether different kind of politics. A Pan-Slav movement took shape, its first congress held in Moscow in 1867. Pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic movements appeared at about the same time, led by Muslim and Turkish modernizers. Socialists in Austria-Hungary would later become theorists of ways to accommodate different national groups within a socialist framework. These trans-empire political movements, born out of the experience of nineteenth-century empires at Europe's edges, opened the way for new kinds of political thinking.

One European empire managed to create itself in the 19th century and this was the German Reich. In the 1860s, Otto von Bismarck seized the initiative in the European inter-empire competition. After Prussia's victories in wars against Denmark, Austria, and France, and incorporations of German-, Danish-, and Polish-speaking areas, King Wilhelm I was proclaimed Kaiser (Caesar). The formation of Germany's empire in Europe—explicitly named as such—preceded its interest in colonies overseas.

Through their empire-building efforts overseas and nearby and their competition, alliance-building, and negotiation with each other, Germany, France, and Britain consolidated the conception of "Europe" as a singularly powerful agent of political and economic transformation. Ottomans, Russians, and Austrians each took measures to exploit, adopt, preempt, or combat the intrusions—cultural, economic, diplomatic—of the "Western" powers into their politics of empire. None of these empires held still, and all were drawn more tightly into the web of imperial connections and competitions.

Political Imagination in the 20th Century
The restructuring of imperial power is an essential theme of 20th century history, but one in which the nation-state was neither a given nor a telos. After World War I, three imperial actors tried to transform the world of imperial competition, and a fourth relatively young product of imperial expansion—the United States—took a dynamic new role in world politics.

The USSR explicitly offered an anti-capitalist variant of empire on the territories of imperial Russia, and later, after another round of world

war, beyond. The Bolshevik state was based on a new combination of political principles—communism; one-party rule; and empire, expressed in a federation of national republics each linked to the center by the single ruling party.[20] The Comintern, founded in 1919, exported revolutionary challenges to the peoples of other empires. In 1936, Stalin declared, "We now have a fully formed multinational socialist state, which has stood all tests, and whose stability might well be envied by any national state in any part of the world."[21]

Germany and Japan took empire in a more nationalizing direction. The postwar reconfiguration of Germany provided a place for ideologues to define Germanness in an exclusionary, racialized way, to search for non-German scapegoats for defeat, and to dream of an empire in which racial domination replaced the compromises of old empires. The weak states that had been carved out of Austria-Hungary had Germans inside, as well as other people whose resentments could be exploited. Nazi visions of empire were nourished in a European empire that had been stripped of its overseas colonies. The mixture of a German ideology of imperial entitlement with the reduced space of German sovereignty was conducive to the most noxious of fantasies of power over others.[22]

Japan projected nation over empire in China and Southeast Asia in a different way: leading other Asian races to their imperial destiny, against the European and American empires that threatened to control much of the resources of the region. In Manchuria, the Japanese installed the ex-Chinese emperor (a Manchu), encouraged Japanese migration to the mainland, promoted industrialization and agricultural development within a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."[23] Having defeated

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20 On the formation of the USSR as an empire, see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

21 Cited in Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, p. 273.

22 On Nazi empire, see Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2008).

23 On Manchuria, see Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

the Russian empire in 1905, Japan acted aggressively to get around the constraints imposed by other empires and to articulate an imperial vision for its own people and elites of areas it tried to dominate; it was defeated in the second world war by an American imperium built on continental conquest and island bases.

Germany and Japan's nationalized 20th century empires failed in the second world war, but the USSR with its multi-national population and continental resources and the acquiescence of its imperial allies, expanded its empire over what became known as "eastern Europe." Both in its internal and external spaces, Stalin's answer to imperial challenges was communist discipline—one-party rule in the new "people's democ-racies," imprisonment and execution of potential dissenters, and cutting off information about the other side. The traditional tool of moving peo-ple about was applied in many regions: ethnic Russians were relocated to the Baltic republics, from which many local groups were removed; Poles in western Ukraine were sent to formerly German territories allocated to Poland; Tatars in the Crimea were deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia.

At the same time, the USSR continued its long-standing practice of cultivating national difference as a core practice of imperial governance. The "friendship of nations," the mobilization of cadres from ethnic groups, supervised through the one-party system and police controls, the formal division of the state into nationalized units and sub-units—these offered models and challenges to empire leaders and their opponents around the world. Imperial power was being configured yet again in mid-20th century—by imperial powers interacting—aiding, challeng-ing, obstructing—each other.

Decolonization, Transformation, New Forms of Sovereignty

And what of the stuttering history of modernizing in colonial empires? Shifts in policies and practices after World War II came about not because colonial empires had reached the end of a life cycle, but because the struggle among empires in the war had devastating effects on win-ners as well as losers, because racial ideologies, never stable, had led to such repugnant consequences, because key colonies (Indonesia and

Indochina) had to be recolonized after the Japanese occupation, and because France and Britain needed more efficient colonial production for economic recovery and adopted new—"developmental"—strategies intended to obtain it. At the same time, European leaders changed their core conceptions of what states are supposed to do in Europe itself, and it was not obvious that overseas parts of these empires could be neatly cut off from reforms "at home."

The implementation of the welfare state after the war increased the stakes of incorporation into a unit that could be labeled "French" or "British." Economic development—explicitly aimed at raising the standard of living and availability of social services—became the means by which France and Britain renewed their sense of imperial mission and recast their hopes for making colonies productive and stable. In the French case, colonial subjects were declared to be citizens in 1946 and their representatives—albeit not in proportion to population—took seats in the Paris legislature. Political activists and the leaders of social movements in Africa promptly tried to give social and economic substance to citizenship—demanding equal wages, social services, and political voice. These demands, expressed in the same language in which postwar empire defended its legitimacy and coming from colonies whose people had fought for France and Britain in the war, were hard to dismiss. Unable to maintain empire on the cheap, France and Britain now had to weigh the costs of maintaining their demanding empires in relation to alternative arrangements. Their willingness to divest themselves of colonies emerged from the unexpected effects of the post-war initiative to modernize imperialism.[24]

Both African political actors and the leaders of European France with whom they were engaged, had empire very much on the mind at the end of World War II. French leaders, determined to hold together a complex combination of metropole, old colonies, new colonies, protectorates, mandates, and the peculiar case of Algeria—whose territory

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24 On decolonization in British and French Africa, see Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

was fully French but whose people were not—renamed the empire the "French Union." After 1946, when colonial subjects were made citizens of the union, the French administration tried to contain the implications of this fundamental legal reform in the face of assertive trade unions, veterans of the French army, student associations, and political movements, all making claims in the name of the equality of citizens. The French state became trapped between the danger that its new emphasis on imperial inclusion would not go far enough—leading to revolution, as in Algeria—or that it might succeed, leading to rising burdens on the budget coming from impoverished territories.

African leaders were also not secure in their positions or demands. They were hemmed in by their territorially based constituencies, their desire for African unity, their need for French resources and the benefits of French citizenship, and their disagreements among themselves over the creation of a unified African nation. It was out of the simultaneous claims for equality and diversity inside a complex French polity that Dia's appeal for multinational polities arose.

It was only in 1960, that both France and West African leaders backed away from the forms of federation and confederation—from the complex, layered ideas of sovereignty that they had advocated—and into a political form they had not sought: the nation-state. Both France and its former African colonies then rewrote their histories as if the independent nation had long been the aspiration of their peoples. By the 1970s, France was striving to keep out the children of the people it had once tried to keep in.

Elsewhere midway through the 20th century, the supposed transition from empire to nation-state was also not self-evident. The mixed populations in southern and central Europe that had lived under multiple empires, including the Ottoman and the Habsburg, and suffered waves of ethnic cleansing, each supposed to assure that every nation would have its state, in the Balkan wars of the 1870s and 1912–13, and after World War I, were once again subject to transfers of populations after World War II. Ethnic Germans were expelled from some places, Ukrainians and Poles from others. Even so, state did not correspond to nation, and a deadly burst of ethnic cleansing followed in the 1990s.

In Africa, the Rwandan genocide of 1994 was yet another post-imperial attempt to produce a singular people who would govern themselves. In the Middle East, the breakup of the Ottoman empire after 1918 has still not led to stable states: opposed nationalists claim the same territory in Israel-Palestine; different groups vie for power in Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere.

The collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and the breakup of the USSR can be understood in imperial terms. The Soviet Union's strategy of fostering national republics—led by communist intermediaries with native credentials—provided a road map for dis-aggregation as well as a common language for negotiating new sovereignties. The largest of the successor states, the Russian Federation, is explicitly multi-ethnic. The 1993 constitution offered Russia's constituent republics the right to establish their own official languages, while defining Russian as the "state language of the Russian Federation."[25] After an unruly interlude, Vladimir Putin revived the traditions of patrimonial empire. As he and his protégés attempt to define and control their version of "sovereign democracy," to compel loyalty from governors, mayors, and other critical intermediaries, to win the competition for Russia's borderlands, and to wield effectively wield Russia's prime weapon—energy—in the international arena, Russian empire has reappeared in yet another transmutation on its Eurasian space.

The most innovative of today's large powers is the European Union. Europe had been torn up from the 5th century to the 20th by the aspirations of some of its elites to produce a new Rome and the determination of others to prevent such an outcome. It was only after the mutual destruction of World War II and the consequent inability of Europeans to hold onto their overseas colonies that the deadly competition among European empires came to an end. Between the 1950s and 1990s European states put their freedom from empire to use in working out confederal arrangements among themselves.

The European Union that emerged from this restructuring has functioned most effectively when limiting its ambitions to administra-

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25 *Constitution of the Russian Federation* (Lawrenceville and Moscow: Brunswick and Novosti, 1994), article 68, sections 1 and 2.

tion and regulation. Anyone who passes abandoned customs houses along frontiers where millions of people have died in repeated wars can appreciate the remarkable transformation attempted by the Schengen states. One of the most basic attributes of sovereignty—control of who crosses a border—has been pushed up to a European level. This decision became a matter of contention by 2015, reminding us that national conceptions of the state had only recently detached themselves from imperial ones. Europe's transit from conflicting empire-building projects to national states shorn of colonies to a confederation of nations underlines the complexity of sovereign arrangements over a long time.

After 2001, it became fashionable among pundits to anoint the United States an "empire," either to denounce the arrogance of its actions abroad or to celebrate its efforts to police and democratize the world. The "is it or isn't it?" question is less revealing than an examination of the American repertoire of power, based on selective use of imperial strategies. In the 20th century, the United States has repeatedly used force in violation of other states' sovereignty; it does occupations, but it has rarely sustained colonies.

But the USA's national sense of itself emerged from an imperial trajectory: Thomas Jefferson had proclaimed in 1776 that the rebellious provinces of the British empire would create an "Empire of Liberty." The new polity emerged on what we could call a Roman-style politics of difference: on the basis of equal rights and private property for people considered citizens and the exclusion of Native Americans and slaves. Extension over a continent eventually put great resources in the hands of Euro-Americans, and after nearly foundering on the rock of slavery, American leaders gained the strength to choose the time and terms of their interventions in the rest of the world.

Empire has existed in relation to and often in tension with other forms of connection over space; empires facilitated and obstructed movements of goods, capital, people, and ideas. Empire-building was almost always a violent process, and conquest was often followed by exploitation, if not forced acculturation and humiliation. Empires constructed powerful political formations; they also left trails of human suffering. But the national idea, itself developed in imperial contexts, has not proved to be an antidote to imperial arrogance.

We live with the consequences of these uneven paths out of empire, with the fiction of sovereign equivalence, and with the reality of inequality within and among states. Thinking about empire does not mean resurrecting the British, Ottoman, or Roman empire. It allows us to consider the multiplicity of forms in which power is exercised across space. If we can avoid thinking of history as an inexorable transition from empire to nation-state, perhaps we can think about the future more expansively. Can we imagine forms of sovereignty that are better able than either empires or nation-states to address both the inequality and diversity of the world's people?