

CHAPTER 8

Principal Elements of the Ottoman State-Formation Process through an Eliasian Perspective

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Introduction

This chapter interrogates how far an Eliasian approach related to European state-formation processes in the study of *The Civilizing Process* (Elias 2000) and *The Court Society* (Elias 2006) can be applied to Ottoman history. This is an attempt to reappraise these theories in scope to open up lines of fruitful thought and so to understand the Ottoman society. Based on early modern European royalties, these models are widely accused of being nonuniversal and even Eurocentric. Yet, this study aims to bring a new reflection on these works through Eliasian conceptual tools—namely, social figurations,¹ chains of interdependence,² and balance of power,³ as well as the implementation of some of Elias's questions, of his methodology, and in particular of his conceptualization in a non-European setting. We intend to highlight the identical effects of the same social form within societies located at a great distance in time and space.

We are nevertheless aware of the fact that there are significant structural differences between the European courts and the Ottoman court, such as the mode of production, the political and socioeconomic system, the composition of social classes, and the role and place of religion in the society. For this reason, it becomes necessary to determine, in the first place, the rhythms and representative dynamics related to the process of the social evolution of the Ottoman Empire. After a brief chronological history of the Ottoman Empire, we aim to explore, firstly, the Ottoman political and economic system and composition of social classes. The examination of the distinctive features of the Ottoman court will help us to interrogate, in the second part of the chapter, whether “monopoly mechanism”

and “transformation of private into public monopolies,” as highlighted in Elias’s discussion of state-formation processes, can be explored in the Ottoman context.

In the last section, we will present the force of the janissaries in the Ottoman administration as a representative dynamic and the sources of religious authority in competition (sultan and ulema). This section will help us discuss to what extent the effective structures of the court were determinant. Hence, this offers a good opportunity to understand how the sultan had to carefully balance social tensions and/or restore them when appropriate.

1. Distinctive Features of the Ottoman Court

The Ottoman State, founded in 1299, was transformed into an empire with the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Mehmet II in 1453. The rising period of the Ottoman Empire is generally considered to be during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Geographic expansion, trade, economic growth, and cultural development helped to define the reign of Sultan Suleiman as a Golden Age (1520–66). Sultan Suleiman’s death in 1566 marked the beginning of an era of revolts and revivals (1566–1683). After its era of power and glory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of stagnation, and from the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the long period of gradual decline started. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were characterized by permanent crises that impacted social and economic conditions as well as the administrative system, and were accompanied by a series of unsuccessful wars and loss of territory. The *Tanzimat*, meaning “reorganization of the Ottoman Empire,” was a period of reformation that began in 1839 and ended with the First Constitutional Era in 1876. This era was characterized by various attempts to modernize the empire with educational, institutional, and legal reforms. The Second Constitutional Era began after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 with the sultan’s announcement of the restoration of the 1876 constitution and the reassembling of the Ottoman Parliament. It marks the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

1.1 Political and Economic System

In Ottoman society, the principal means of production was the land, whose ownership rested with the state, which represented all of the ruling class—namely, the Sultan, the administrative and the military apparatus, and the religious apparatus (the ulema and religious scholars). In the empire, the *timar* system was one in which the projected revenue of a conquered territory was distributed in the form of temporary land grants. From the late sixteenth century, the monetary crisis due to the depreciation of money and the budget deficit related to wars combined to create inflation through which the increased tax burden disrupted the *timar* system.⁴ The *timar*⁵ was a benefit granted by the sultan, entitled on a revocable basis, to a leader of the Ottoman army. Its owner, the *sipahi* (feudal cavalryman of the Ottoman Empire whose status was comparable to that of the

medieval European knight),⁶ raised taxes owed to the state by the peasants of his field and equipped a number of fighters. The timar was divided into tenures—in principle, inalienable—attributed to peasants in hereditary usufruct.

In the early seventeenth century, in the empire there was great pressure on fixed incomes, the stagnation of the manufacturing industry, and the great commercialization of agriculture. All in all, the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was characterized by developments that had their origin in the articulation of its structure with the European market economy. The most fundamental of these developments was the dissolution of the timar system in agriculture, with the transition to a system of production for the market.⁷ The centralization of the empire was accompanied by an expansion; having expanded its borders to the maximum, it was unable to continue its conquests from the late seventeenth century. The pillage, the spoils of war, and the taxes collected from the conquered countries, which represented the financial resources of the state, fell while the costs increased. In Ottoman society, trade was despised, and, from the beginning, this sector had been abandoned with privileges to foreigners. Only non-Muslim foreigners were granted permission to trade freely throughout Ottoman territories. Therefore, the state was forced to find new sources of revenue.

From the early eighteenth century, the weakening of Ottoman central authority and the disintegration of internal cohesion corresponded to a process of consolidation of the central administration and the state (absolutist monarchies) at the expense of independent and rival fiefdoms in the West.⁸ It was this new network of center-periphery relationships, and the relative autonomy that this system generated for the domain holders, that culminated with the *ayan* (local leaders) uprising against state power in the early nineteenth century. With the weakening of the central government, and also because new forms of recruitment and funding reduced the military and fiscal role of the sipahi, the system degenerated: especially by the refusal of military service and by the acquisition of hereditary rights on the land. The most powerful timar holders acquired latifundium types of large private estates (so-called *Çiflik*).

In 1808, when the state was forced to recognize the power and legitimacy of *ayan* by a charter (*Senedi Ittifak*), we observe the fragmentation of the authority: not as a consequence of a vertical distribution of sovereignty, which characterized Western feudalism,⁹ but as a consequence of vertical dissociation, which was a function of the horizontal integration of the domanial system in the global market. The timar was dissolved as a political unit. What arose in its place was the domanial system organized as an exchange and production system for the global market. The state in its turn underwent profound changes in its structure that gradually decreased its autonomous character: it gradually lost its autonomous character.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century, the land tenure of the Ottoman Empire underwent significant changes regarding the terms of the possession of state lands (*miri*) and the land of religious foundations. A new land law governing *miri* land was developed; the Land Code of 1858 was the most significant regulation. The

Land Code of 1858 maintained an old distinction between the private ownership of land and community land, whose exploitation was granted to farmers. The code encouraged the cadastral registration of land that actually promoted the growth of private ownership.¹¹ The same legislation, while officially opposing the monopoly of large-scale land ownership, introduced a modern concept of the unique status of private ownership, applicable to all Ottoman subjects without distinction as to religion or social position. The status of private ownership established by this legislation was closer to that of private property because the owner had the freedom to fully enjoy his land, sell it, or transfer it by inheritance.¹²

Until the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire ignored all land registration; it was not until 1858, after the vote of the land law, that the Ottoman government decided to create a land registration department charged with clarifying the land situation of the empire, and to distribute to each owner of land a formal title: this system favored *de facto* the extension of large private property. All the categories of this new division of land were brought back to consolidate the private property. This new regulation was indispensable as a result of the disintegration of the old economy and its subordination to the global market dominated by Western capitalist powers.

1.2 Composition of Social Classes

The main social groups in Ottoman society were the military class and the religious class headed by the sultan, and the class consisting of the rest of the people (*reaya*),¹³ which excluded the soldiers.¹⁴ The ruling class was generally described as military.¹⁵ This class certainly contained civilians, but it was marked by its military character. This class structure was modified in the nineteenth century, but there was no fundamental change in the gap between the dominant class and the exploited classes: the traditional system did not allow the development of private property to the point where the proprietors could detach from the state to be a politically independent and rival class, on the model of the European bourgeoisie.

1.2.1 Janissaries

At the top of the state, the janissaries, deprived of all rights in theory (except that of being a servant and warrior), became very quickly, during the most flourishing periods of the empire from the sixteenth century, a religious¹⁶ and commercial force and a turbulent enactor of Ottoman policy. According to Akdağ (1947), they got rich in a spectacular way through their economic activities and turned into an opposing force. According to the balance of forces, the sultan could confiscate the property of viziers, but it became impossible for him to do so for the goods of these soldiers-traders and property owners,¹⁷ as such an act would have endangered the internal security of the empire. In addition, the fortunes of the janissaries were exempt from taxes.¹⁸ Each time the sultan had enough power, he tried to cut off their heads, but the janissaries always managed to keep their property and their power.

Janissaries were a formidable instrument of conquest and power for the Ottoman dynasty. But the presence in the capital of this well-equipped elite troupe endowed with a strong esprit de corps was not without its downsides. Manipulated by other high dignitaries or their own chief, the janissaries intervened more than once in the political life of the empire and sometimes had tense relations with the sultan. The currency depreciations and late payments consistently pushed the janissaries to express their discontentment. They became a power in the court of the sultan, and the reforms never touched their privileges.¹⁹ From the sixteenth century, the history of the janissaries was a series of revolts, assassinations, and overthrows of viziers, agas, and even sultans: Bayezid II (1512), Murad III (1595), Osman II (1622),²⁰ Ibrahim I (1648), Mustafa I,²¹ Mustafa II (1774), Selim III (1807),²² and Mustafa IV (1808).

The manifestations of the janissaries in the capital caused the emergence of military-economic counterpowers in the provinces. The central government was experiencing operating problems, in particular with the degeneration of the janissary corps. Moreover, the succession of military defeats and separatist insurgencies had quickly convinced Sultan Mahmud II of the need to reform the army and administration. In 1826, he destroyed the janissary corps and abolished the granting of military fiefs to sipahi in 1831 before building a new army trained by German instructors under his direct control.

1.2.2 Ulema

In the administrative system of the Ottoman Empire, the hierarchical order determined the functioning of the religious power between the sultan and the ulema. The imperial political system, with its autocratic nature, was based on a consensus around the sultan's authority and absolute obedience to him. However, it should also be noted that the sovereign drew his legitimacy from sacred law, whose "guards" were the ulema. This particular relationship was expressed in the establishment of a formal hierarchy, including the higher positions in the corps of ulema, those of judges of Islamic law, and professors of the religious sciences. It was possible to access to these positions only through a career strictly determined by the state. Access to the most prestigious careers, and therefore to the group of the body of official ulema (*ilmiye*), was regulated at the time of Suleiman the Magnificent in the sixteenth century.²³

The sultanate was indeed a divine institution. The sultan was supposed to be the shadow of God on earth, in which all creatures could find refuge. Besides, the sovereign held the title of the ruler of Islam whence he drew his legitimacy.²⁴ His relations with the ulema were therefore crucial to his legitimacy. Hence the gradual establishment of the body of ulema became a prominent cog in the political, administrative, and legal organization of the empire. They played a central role in both the transmission of the sacred law and education in justice and the provincial administration. The judges of the Islamic legislation (*kadı*) judged not only according to the divine law, but according to the tacit law (*örfi hukuk*)²⁵ and the code of laws issued by the sultan himself (*kanun*), which explains the legitimate aspect of the mutual interdependence of the sultan's powers and ulema in

society. The prerogatives of the ulema went beyond the simple juridical-religious framework; as in the provinces, they were asked to solve notarial, administrative, or municipal cases. Accordingly, as noted in G. Veinstein (2003), there was both the “bureaucratization” of ulema and the “clericalization” of the state.

In this system, it is clear that the ulema were, in many domains, the privileged instruments of political power. Most of the time, they acted or emitted legal opinions depending on the interests of the state. Moreover, it was with rare exception that they participated openly in rebellions. However, for religious reasons, this subordination was not absolute. Muslim law, which the sultan himself was also subject to, prohibited him from having the power of life and death over the ulema, as he did over his subjects. Unlike the members of the army and the Ottoman bureaucracy, the members of the ulema could not be executed and their properties could not be confiscated. Moreover, the fatwas of the head of the hierarchy of the ulema led to the depositions of the Sultans Ibrahim I in 1648, Mehmed IV in 1687, Ahmed III in 1730, and Selim III in 1807.

The political, military, and financial crisis that the empire experienced in the seventeenth century led to the questioning of the authority not only of the judges of the Islamic legislation, but also the members of the official ulema in general.²⁶ This questioning of political power and the immunity enjoyed by the ulema was violated or circumvented on several occasions. Their status was revoked, and then they were executed as mere subjects. Three religious leaders were even sentenced to death—in 1634, 1656, and 1703—for being involved in politics. More generally, members of the official ulema suffered from, at least until the middle of the seventeenth century, a relative devaluation of education and the primacy of men of the sword. In these troubled times, the population was also more sensitive to the preaching of sermons and charisma of the Sufis.

In the eighteenth century, with the restoration of the power of the sultan, a new alliance was formed between the sovereign and the corps of official ulema, who became the central religious institution. For the corps of official ulema, the “new alliance” with the political authorities had several consequences. The members of the ulema were still theoretically exempt from executions and confiscations. Especially, the families of the great ulema were granted privileges that allowed them to build gradually a sort of aristocracy. The institution of the corps of official ulema evolved considerably over time and varied according to the political and social context.²⁷ The formation of an aristocracy of ulema—considered a factor in the stability of both the ulema and the empire—was done primarily by the guarantee given to the great ulema to see their sons’ access to the same ranks and privileges and by the containment of patronage even within families. From 1715, the sons of the great ulema had no need to comply with the conditions of age or level of study in order to earn degrees. A quota was also introduced to allow the sons of ulema to receive diplomas without having to pass an exam.²⁸

In the nineteenth century, the reforms undertaken by the Ottoman power led even further to a bureaucratization of the ulema. The judges of the Islamic law were integrated into a grid of positions, salaries, and grades. Their prerogatives were reduced. They had to use a civil code derived from Islamic law (*Mecelle*),

written in Ottoman Turkish, to be accessible to everyone and proclaimed by the sultan. At the time of Sultan Abdulhamid, the religious authority of the sultan was also enhanced through the development of his status as a caliph. Yet again, the religious authority was never totally subordinate to the political authority.²⁹

2. Monopoly Mechanism and the Transformation of “Private” into “Public” Monopolies

The evolution of land tenure, the terms of possession of state land, the process of the development of private property, and the articulation of the structure of the Ottoman economy with that of the European market were studied in the previous section. In this part of the chapter, we will examine whether Elias’s two principal elements of state-formation processes (monopoly mechanism and transformation of private into public monopolies) can help us to reconsider these representative phenomena that contributed greatly to the evolution of the administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire.

2.1 Monopoly Mechanism

Elias (2000, 269) defines *monopoly mechanism* in the following:

if, in a major social unit, a large number of the smaller units, which, through their interdependence, constitute the larger one, are roughly equal in social power and are thus able to compete freely—unhampered by preexisting monopolies—for the means to social power, i.e., primarily the means of subsistence and production, the probability is high that some will be victorious and others vanquished, and that gradually, as a result, fewer and fewer will control more and more opportunities, and more and more units will be eliminated from the competition, becoming directly or indirectly dependent on an ever-decreasing number.

The same mechanism can be seen at work in the Ottoman Empire, though taking rather different paths according to various circumstances, as we have already discussed in the first section. We observed also in the Ottoman example that the means of subsistence and production was the land; the monopoly mechanism was applied to it and finally led to the monopoly of coercion and fiscal power—that is, the state, which was the instrument required to ensure the control of the land. Referring to the laws issued by the sultan for landholding and taxation, Halil İnalçık explains the Ottoman tax system as follows: “It was this law code, actually a combination of Islamic and local practices related to the Roman-Byzantine legacy, which administered the relationships in Ottoman landholding and taxation.”³⁰

It should be particularly noted that the Ottoman Empire contained too large an area and too great a diversity of interests for the monopoly mechanism to work to the benefit of the ruler, the sultan. By conquering new territories from different states, the Ottomans adopted and adapted the existing tax systems already used by the previous governments. The inheritance of multiple legal and political traditions’ tax systems created regional diversity.

Although the monopoly mechanism existed, in Eliasian terms, in the Ottoman court, these regional variations in different parts of the empire, and between different communities, necessitated an adaptation of the Ottoman tax system to the local conditions. Since the geographical and social divergences within the empire were great, the local/centrifugal forces had a different strength, and centralization became a really difficult process to achieve.³¹ It was only during the *Tanzimat* period in the nineteenth century that the uniting and the centralizing measures, particularly in the sphere of taxation, were regulated by new reforms to the tax system, including the abolition of tax-farming (*iltizam*).³² These regulations demonstrate the role played by the monopoly mechanism in the Ottoman state-formation process.

2.2 Transformation of “Private” into “Public” Monopolies

Elias (2000, 276) defines the transition from private to public monopolies in the following proposition:

the phase in which control over the centralized and monopolized resources tends to pass from the hands of an individual to those of ever greater numbers, and finally to become a function of the interdependent human web as a whole, the phase in which a relatively “private” monopoly becomes a “public” one.

According to Elias, the turn from private into public monopoly is actually a function of social interdependence, and this phase is highly observable in societies with a complex and extensive division of functions. From this perspective, he shows how the private power of individuals over monopolized resources becomes a collective power and in which ways private property becomes a public function and the monopoly of an individual is finally socialized.

We argue that this shift from a private to a public monopoly also played an important role in the Ottoman state-formation process. In the nineteenth century, the need for a complex and specialized administrative apparatus and social interdependence provided the conditions for the development of a centralized bureaucracy that had an increasingly public character. Inevitably, this process restricted the power of the sultan. As we have already discussed, the *Tanzimat* reforms regarding financial centralization, the recognition of the power and legitimacy of local leaders by a charter (*Senedi İttifak*) in 1808, and the cadastral registration of land promoting the growth of private ownership were the most remarkable regulations illustrating the process of transforming private into public monopolies.

3. Royal Mechanism, Chains of Interdependence, and Balance of Powers

Figurational sociology suggests that human societies need to be studied in their historical contexts, which consist of long-term processes of development

and change. Moreover, human beings can only be understood in their interdependencies with other human beings. This should be rather considered as a “greater functional interdependence of parts within a whole.” In Eliasian terms, “underlying all intended interactions of human beings is their unintended interdependence.”³³

Elias’s theoretical tools lead us to reflect on the concept of figuration as a social formation in which individuals are related to each other by a specific mode of mutual dependencies in order to learn how and to what extent the specific, dynamic groups of the Ottoman court were formed. The Eliasian approach helps us to determine the chains of interdependencies, the *structural peculiarities*, and the changes of the figurations that the Ottoman high dignitaries formed together in the society. This approach shows us the validity of the following quotation when applied to Ottoman society: “Single individuals can have latitude of freedom which enables them to detach themselves from a particular figuration and integrate themselves into a different one, but whether and how far this is possible depends on the particular nature of the figuration concerned. Moreover, the same persons can form different figurations with one another . . . conversely; different people can form the same figurations with certain variations.”³⁴

The Eliasian perspective allows us to see the network of interdependencies within which a high dignitary finds a certain degree of individual choice and at the same time imposes limits on his freedom of choice in the Ottoman court society. By using this approach, it is possible to detect the networks of mutual dependencies in which each individual is registered by a chain of interdependencies and where each individual action depends on the others. In this network of mutually dependent people, relationships are constantly in process.

According to Elias (2000, 482), society is neither merely a collectivity of individuals existing without a society, nor a “system” beyond individuals, “but the network of interdependencies formed by individuals.” To put Eliasian methodology in the Ottoman context allows us to draw attention to the positioning of the sultan as a person and constitutive power of the formation of Ottoman court society. Applying an Eliasian approach to the study of Ottoman court society invites us to explore the complex network of social interdependencies and the balances of power among the high dignitaries of the empire. The Eliasian perspective draws attention to the need to see that the action of each individual contributes unwittingly to perpetuate a process—that is to say, a mechanism that falls within unplanned historical trends—and unintended or unanticipated human actions.

Principally, we propose to examine the Ottoman court with another important element in Elias’s discussion of state-formation processes: the royal mechanism.³⁵ Figurational sociology helps us to analyze the evolution of Ottoman society through the study of the reproduction and maintenance of tensions as a process of interaction between internal and external factors. The Eliasian approach allows us to see that the sultan was constantly concerned with predicting potential conflicts in the court to take the necessary measures and use the appropriate

instruments of domination in ensuring the maintenance of the balance of power, just as the ruler described in Elias's *The Court Society*.

From an Eliasian perspective, we argue that there was a balance of power between the administrative, economic, and military rulers within the Ottoman court. These are precisely the chains of interdependence that allowed various interests to be represented in the Ottoman court and ensured the political stability of the state. This study argues that Eliasian sociology has an explanatory power in the Ottoman context. At this point, we may refer to Menell (1974, 118) to understand the importance of figurational sociology: "Even the most powerful are dependent on countless others . . . The longer are the chains of interdependence, the smaller will be the proportion anyone will know personally of those with whom he is interdependent. Contacts are more frequently indirect than direct and face-to-face."

From a figurational perspective, the conflicts that occurred in the Ottoman order around the political and economic powers highlight the systems of tensions within the empire. These rivalries tended to overthrow the political authority or, at worst, to fragment the society into structurally similar property segments—rather than being revolutions aimed at transforming the structure of the society. These conflicts could deplete or impoverish the society; they did not tend to change it. When considered from this point of view, we examined, in the first section, the positioning of janissaries in the Ottoman court society in order to analyze the chains of interdependence and the balance of administrative, economic, and military powers.

The history of the janissaries, their relationships with the sultans, and their alliances and conflicts with other high dignitaries in the Ottoman Empire can also be read from a figurational approach. The unique situation of the sultan in the Ottoman court shows some similarities with the king in the French court. Elias (2006, 129) describes the positioning of the king as follows:

The king alone feels no pressure from above. But the pressure from the ranks below him is certainly not inconsiderable. It would be intolerable, would hurl him into oblivion in a moment, if all the social groups or even all the court groups below him, acted in the same direction against him. But they do not act in the same direction. Through their interdependence, his subjects' potential for action is directed largely against each other, so that they cancel each other out in their effect on the king.

In other words, in Eliasian terms (Elias, 2006, 141), "he needs only to regulate these tensions and to create organisations which both maintain the tensions and differences and facilitate their supervision."

From a figurational perspective, we also examined, in the first section, the balance-of-power struggles between the main sources of religious authority in the Ottoman Empire. Correspondingly, we now propose to reconsider the fluctuating relationship between the sultan and the ulema in the light of the following remarks by Norbert Elias in his essay "On Civilizing Processes, State Formation and National Identity":

For if two groups become more, or more reciprocally, interdependent than they were before, each of them has no reason to fear that it may be dominated, or even annihilated, by the other. The struggle may result after many tests of strength in a fusion. It may result in a unit dominated by one group while still compromising both. It may result in the complete disappearance of one of them in the new unit emerging from their struggle. There are many more possibilities . . . It is enough to point out that every move towards greater functional interdependence between human groups engenders structural tensions, conflicts and struggles, which may or may not remain unmanageable.³⁶

This section shows us, finally, that the hierarchical order of military, administrative, and economic powers within the society of the Ottoman court was fluctuating, just as Elias presented it for the European courts. Similarly, the upheavals constantly altered the position and distance of the administrative, economic, and military elites to the sovereign. In both cases, the balance within the society was remarkable by its instability. Likewise, the ruler took advantage of the rivalry between the high dignitaries who were always seeking prestige and favor.

All in all, it is evident that the strengthening of differences, oppositions, and rivalries between the elites and within each social group between the different degrees and levels of the hierarchy of status and prestige was one of the important strategies of domination of the Ottoman court. By taking into consideration the sociology of interdependence and thinking about the oppositions between the most powerful elites of the empire, we can detect the basis of imperial power as expressed in the notion of unlimited power and absolutism.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that, as Elias demonstrated in the case of the French court, the maintenance of tension was also a vital issue for the sultan: the prospect of a perfect harmony between his subjects constituted a threat to his existence. However, it is interesting to observe in both cases that the ruler was fully aware of this situation and carefully maintained dissensions and conflicts within the court. Likewise, the sovereign, in both courts, relied upon the oppositions of the social field in which his function arose: it was enough for him to exert a regulatory action on these conflicts and to create entities to be in charge of keeping these rivalries and these distinctions in order to guarantee the stability of the imperial government.

Just like the French ruler in *The Court Society*, the sovereign in the Ottoman Empire would provoke jealousies, keep dissensions within groups, guide the direction of the reactions of the high dignitaries, and even apply pressures to strengthen his absolute authority. But it required a high degree of calculation and flexibility to carry out this delicate task: to cope with this vigilance, the ruler kept everything under control during his reign. The sovereign himself accepted the binding rules of the tool of domination in order to maintain and signify his absolute power in this very particular network of interdependencies. It was through this meticulous mechanism that the ruler could ensure the continuity of his power.

Accordingly, this chapter showed us the similarities of the positioning of the king in *The Court Society*, with the critical stance of the sultan in the Ottoman Empire. Like the king, the sultan tried to prevent a unification of court society against him and by which he reproduced and maintained the tensions. As a precondition of his rule, the sultan exploited all kinds of hostilities between his subjects to increase their loyalty and dependence toward him.

There is no doubt that the sultan was freer than his subjects, just like the ruler in *The Court Society*, but he certainly was not completely free, if we mean by this that he was independent from others. In both cases, each action of the sovereign established his dependence on his subjects. It should be noted similarly that the sovereign did not seem to be connected via a direct link to a social strata. Nevertheless, he was a part of the network of human interdependencies and did not evolve out of all these contingencies and social dependencies. For both cases, this network assured the ruler a position of strength; he could also, to some extent, mobilize it by his active influence on the social field.

By following Elias's interpretations in *The Court Society*, it is possible to detect another similarity between the French court and the Ottoman one, with some differences as well. In both cases, the ruler's social power increased with a developing economy through his dependence on different social groups for each unique incidence. In the French court, the king ruled well as long as the bourgeoisie and nobility held each other in check while maintaining a rivalry for power. In the Ottoman case, the janissaries and ulema had considerable influence on the structure of the court (as we have already analyzed above). The sultan could depend on the military elites when dealing with some issues, while he could find support in the religious elites on other issues. Depending on the context, he distanced himself from a different social group by supervising, maintaining, and reproducing the balance of tensions for effective domination.

Consequently, this chapter examined the uneven development of various state apparatuses—military, administrative, and religious—as well as the discrepancy of systems of tension and opposition in Ottoman court society. We examined the Ottoman court with an Eliasian perspective that considers the court as a fundamental instrument of imperial strategy. Like the ruler in *The Court Society*, the sultan was the source of all authority and legitimacy. Likewise, the sultan had to know how to achieve balance and how to maintain pressure and counterpressure against the court, this being one of the main functions of the exercise of power that ensured the continuity of the state. What characterized both the European court and the Ottoman court was the exploitation of antagonisms between those dominated in order to ensure the permanence of a dependency vis-à-vis the sovereign. Thus, it becomes evident for both cases that the ruler was confronted with the task of managing the tensions within the social field in order to continue his domination. As a consequence, this chapter asserts that the principal elements—monopoly mechanism, royal mechanism, transformation of “private” into “public” monopolies—in Elias's discussion of state-formation processes is applicable in the Ottoman example, though taking a rather unique direction according to the diverse circumstances.

Notes

1. See how Goudsblom (1977, 6) explains the significance of social figurations in the writings of Norbert Elias: “Human beings are interdependent, in a variety of ways; their lives evolve in, and are significantly shaped by, the social figurations they form with each other. These figurations are continually in flux, undergoing changes of different orders—some quick and ephemeral, others slower but perhaps more lasting. The long-term developments taking place in human social figurations have been and continue to be largely unplanned and unforeseen. The development of human knowledge takes place within human figurations, and forms one important aspect of their over-all development.”
2. See specifically the section entitled “Human interdependencies—problems of social bonds” for the meaning of *chains of interdependence* in Eliasian terminology (Elias 1978, 134–57).
3. Elias (1978, 80–103) presents various forms and evolutionary states of the power balance as “game models.”
4. The timar system was created by Sultan Murat I (1360–89). The timar system was abrogated in the mid-nineteenth century. For debates about the date of the dissolution of the timar system, see Aydın (2001).
5. On the status of the land and the system of timar, see Barkan (1943); Barkan (1980); İnalçık (1954); İnalçık (1955); İnalçık (1996); Timur (1979); Akdağ (1995).
6. The sipahi is instrumental as a link between the peasant unity and political center. The timar mediates between the center and the domestic groups, without an independent political institution: the sipahi is an extension of the state bureaucracy. So the meaning of timar should be sought in the political and administrative logic that binds the domestic peasant economy and the state into a single whole and interdependency. The same logic, in fact, reveals the constitutive structure of the Ottoman society.
7. On the changing nature of the Ottoman trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Stoianovich (1953); Stoianovich (1960); İnalçık (1971); Tezel (1971); Genç (2007).
8. The analysis proposed by Norbert Elias illustrates the conflicts and confrontations that are at the origin of the modern state. The second volume of *The Civilizing Process*, entitled “State Formation and Civilization,” investigates in the West the formation of the stable, centralized specialized organizations. On the basis of French and English examples, he illustrates the formation and functioning of the “royal mechanism” by which he examines the power balance within the unit of rule and its significance for the central authority (Elias 2000, 312–44).
9. At this point, it is legitimate to point out the differences of the Ottoman system with that of Europe. In feudal Europe, the lord stimulated the surplus production and exercised a direct and personal control over the serfs who worked in the land of his field. In the Ottoman Empire, as a patrimonial system, it was the state bureaucracy that stimulated the surplus production by using its control over the state machinery to levy taxes on the peasants, who had direct access to the means of production. Such a view of the Ottoman economic organization also indicates that the models of the Ottoman economy built on the timar as a production system are fundamentally inaccurate. Although the timar was central in the constitution of the Ottoman system as a form of provision of benefits, it was not a production unit, but rather a political and administrative institution to incorporate the peasant domestic unity

in the wider world of the empire. Unlike the feudal lord who was directly involved in the process of domestic production, the holder of the timar, the sipahi, appeared more like a military figure in charge of an administrative institution whose function was limited to the collection of taxes and the supply of troops in wartime. Moreover, unlike the feudal lord, sipahi had no ownership of the land or *reaya* (Sultan's subject). Theoretically, all the land and people belonged to God and were entrusted to the sultan. The property of the state land was more inclusive rather than exclusive, or more political than economic. This is why no domestic unit was excluded from the access to the means of its own survival. Thus, the timar was not a property unit interposed between the family and its means of production, but rather the political institution superimposed on the family, which kept the first relationship to the means of production.

10. According to some authors, the changes undergone by the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be defined as a form of feudalism. They seem to base their arguments on the transition of the timar system to the manorial economy, on the rise of *ayan* (local leaders), and on the emergence of forced labor in the production. There are three major indices against the argument of the feudalization of that society and power. First of all, the domains' owners never reached the degree of political autonomy enjoyed by the feudal lords in Western Europe; they were also never been able to capture the state apparatus for their own use. The state continued to have authority over the domains, at least by its legal monopoly on land and on labor, in addition to military and political interventions. Secondly, Western feudalism was a social system oriented toward consumption, while the widespread production of marketable products was prevalent in the Ottoman agriculture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Admittedly, this was a form of disarticulated production for the market, because of the "peripheralization" of the economic activity. But the fact remains that the generalized commodity production was, in principle, incompatible with feudality. Finally, unlike the feudal economy, this was a system of expanded reproduction, but of a kind that came in coordination with the centers of the global system. As for the hypothesis of the development of capitalism in the Ottoman Empire after its incorporation into the global system, it relies mainly on the assumption that—the global system, being capitalist—the Ottoman economy should also have been capitalist since it was a part of it. The literature in Turkish related to the feudalism/capitalism opposition is both too abundant and controversial to be cited in this chapter. For theoretical discussions, it is essential to consult Dobb and Sweezy (2006); Wallerstein (1974). There is also a very clear comparison of England and France, and Eastern and Western Europe, in the context of the problematic of economic development and the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Brenner (1976).
11. Belarbi (1983).
12. Young (1906, 45–83).
13. On the land problems and the status of the exploitation of peasants in the Ottoman Empire, see Barkan (1980, 125–49, 725–88); Barkan (1956).
14. Kınlı (2006, 26–27).
15. Itzkowitz (1972, 40); Findley (1980, 13, 45); Shaw (1982, 167); Mumcu (1986, 38); Akyılmaz (2000, 20).
16. Within the framework of this study, it is obviously not possible to take into consideration the issues arising from the religious affiliation of the janissaries to the Bektasi order till the nineteenth century. But still we may note the fact the Bektasi order was

- banned throughout the Ottoman Empire by Sultan Mahmud II in 1826 with the abolition of janissaries.
17. The manuscript *Kavanin-i Yeniçeriyân* (The laws of the janissaries) provides a useful framework for the laws and regulations written by a former janissary in 1606. See Toroser (2011).
 18. Grassi (1825, 89–90).
 19. From the reign of Selim I (1512–20), they were allowed to marry once retired. The involvement of the janissaries in crafts, commerce, and agriculture in growing numbers became noticeable in the sixteenth century. See also the article by Cemal Kafadar in which he demonstrates that the janissaries were involved in production and exchange before the sixteenth century. He points out that janissary entrepreneurialism was permitted at the higher state ranks (Kafadar 1991). For a detailed analysis of relations between Ottoman crafts and the janissaries, refer specifically to Kafadar (1981).
 20. Sultan Ahmed I (ruled 1603–17) faced revolts in the empire, the first sign of the disintegration that was to occur much more clearly with the murder by the janissaries (May 1622) of Sultan Osman II (ruled 1618–22), a young ruler eager to restore the empire. After a few years of unrest, Sultan Murad IV (ruled 1623–40) maintained control over the empire.
 21. Sultan Mustafa I was the sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1617 to 1618, succeeded by his nephew Sultan Osman II from 1618 to 1622, who was murdered by the janissaries in 1622; then Sultan Mustafa I was reinstalled on the throne by the janissaries from May 20, 1622, until January 20, 1623.
 22. The eighteenth-century reform efforts culminated during the reign of Selim III (ruled 1789–1807). Sultan Selim's early efforts to modernize the janissary corps created such opposition that thereafter he concentrated on creating a new European-style army called the *nizam-ı cedid* (new order), using modern weapons and tactics developed in Europe. The promulgation of the *nizam-ı cedid* in 1793 did not significantly reform the janissary corps. When Sultan Selim III once again sought to reorganize the army, the janissaries revolted, marched on Istanbul, and deposed the sultan, who was executed shortly thereafter (1808).
 23. For classical studies related to the position of the ulema in Ottoman society, see especially Uzunçarşılı (1965); İnalçık (1973); Heyd (1973); Repp (1986); Zilfi (1988); Veinstein (2001).
 24. See especially Veinstein (1994).
 25. İnalçık (1993); Imber (2004); Özgören Kınılı (2013).
 26. About the developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see chapter 3 of Zilfi (1988).
 27. Yakut (2005, 50).
 28. Zilfi (1983).
 29. Messick (1993, 54–58).
 30. İnalçık and Quataert (1994, 105). See also İnalçık (1996, 15–30).
 31. Herein, see Elias's (2000, 261–67) discussion of the differences between the Holy Roman Empire experience and the paths of development in England, France, and Germany.
 32. Tabakoğlu (2002, 615–19).
 33. Kilminster and Mennell (2009, 179).
 34. Kilminster and Mennell (2009, 2).

35. Stephen Mennell (1992, 66) defines the *royal mechanism* as follows: “the internal balance of social forces within the developing state.”
36. Kilminster and Mennell (2008, 111–12).

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