



# Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State (Routledge Studies in Modern History)

By Isa Blumi

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Investigating how a number of modern empires transform over the long 19<sup>th</sup> century (1789-1914) as a consequence of their struggle for ascendancy in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* moves the study of the modern empire towards a comparative, trans-regional analysis of events along the Ottoman frontiers: Western Balkans, the Persian Gulf and Yemen. This inter-disciplinary approach of studying events at different ends of the Ottoman Empire challenges previous emphasis on Europe as the only source of change and highlights the progression of modern imperial states.

The book introduces an entirely new analytical approach to the study of modern state power and the social consequences to the interaction between long-ignored "historical agents" like pirates, smugglers, refugees, and the rural poor. In this respect, the roots of the most fundamental institutions and bureaucratic practices associated with the modern state prove to be the by-products of certain kinds of productive exchange long categorized in negative terms in post-colonial and mainstream scholarship. Such a challenge to conventional methods of historical and social scientific analysis is reinforced by the novel use of the work of Louis Althusser, Talal Asad, William Connolly and Frederick Cooper, whose challenges to scholarly conventions will prove helpful in changing how we understand the origins of our modern world and thus talk about Modernity. This book offers a methodological and historiographic intervention meant to challenge conventional studies of the modern era.

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"This is a welcome addition to scholarship on Ottoman administration and political economy in the 19th century. His theoretical discussion and review of the literature present a...clear and comparative framework influenced by a variety of anthropologists, philosophers, and historians. This is a dense study that can be used to encourage discussion in graduate courses." -*M. Safa Sarac, O?Glu, Department of History, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, USA*

"Isa Blumi's new book is a remarkable attempt to deconstruct currently-held – if not universally accepted – ideas about the birth of modernity, relating the emergence of the modern world to the developments of nineteenth-century imperialism. ..the reader is led to a refreshingly new understanding of the history of empire and a reconsideration of the compelling, liberal narrative of nationalism....Blumi's book is an extremely welcome addition to reading lists on empire, states and nations, and on historical approaches to modernity, even as the interpretation forces us to continue seeking answers to questions which defy most forms of cohesive responses." -*Isabel DiVanna, University of Cambridge, UK*

### **About the Author**

**Isa Blumi**, PhD (2005 NYU), is currently a Fellow at the Centre for Area Studies at Leipzig University. He teaches Balkan, Middle Eastern and world history at Georgia State University. His previous books include *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire* (2003); *Chaos in Yemen* (2010 with Routledge) and *Reinstating the Ottomans* (2011).

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