

Ghost Rations:

Empire, Ecology, and Community in the Ottoman East, 1839-94

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Abstract

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“Ghost Rations” draws on environmental history and the history of capitalism to explain the development of the communal conflicts that tore apart the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional Ottoman Empire. It focuses on the Ottoman East in 1839-94, a period that began with a Sultanic declaration of religious equality and ended with a dramatic wave of communal violence, the Hamidian Massacres (1894-97). Recent work has described how communal boundaries hardened thanks to the rise of new discourses and symbols of belonging put forth by powerful agencies like the Ottoman state, European colonial powers, and Protestant missionaries. This project builds on these discursive and intellectual explanations for ethnic and religious divides, but it argues that in order to understand how new ideas about difference and belonging came into practice, we must account for provincial partners and the material conditions that assisted in their spread and uptake. To accomplish this, “Ghost Rations” takes up famine, the most intense of material conditions, in the decades before the Hamidian Massacres. The first half focuses on the 1839-76 expansion of imperial institutions that worked to define and police communal boundaries. The second half analyzes three cases of famine between 1879 and 1894, when these reform-oriented institutions wielded outsized influence by distributing life-saving humanitarian aid. These institutions, however, also had the effect of distributing hardship unevenly along ethno-religious lines. New technologies like the telegraph, environmental forces like El Niño, and financial changes like the spread of banking combined to distribute hunger and hardship along confessional lines. Suffering unequally borne radicalized communal tensions and set the stage for unprecedented violence in subsequent years.

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Transliteration, Style, and Abbreviations

Transliteration

Armenian

I generally use Library of Congress guidelines, using Western Armenian transliterations for texts and people of the Ottoman Empire and reserve the use of Eastern transliterations for Eastern Armenian people and texts, e.g:

- *Batmut'awn Hayots'* (published in Istanbul) and not *Patmut'awn Hayots'*
- *Mshak* (published in Tbilisi), not *Mshag*

The major exceptions to the Library of Congress guidelines are for popular forms for some names and words, e.g:

- In Western Armenian names, –ian instead of –ean
- In Eastern Armenian names, –yan instead of –ean
- Karekin Srvandztiants not Karekin Srvantsdeants'
- Mkrditch Khrimian not Mkrdich' Khrimian
- Nerses Varzhabedian not Nersēs Varzhabedian
- Matteos Izmirlian, not Madt'eōs Izmirlean
- Garabed Ūtūjiyan, not Garabed Iwt'iwjean
- Maghakia Ormanian, not Maghak'ia Ōrmanian

Turkish

Below is pronunciation guide for some unfamiliar letters and sounds for non-Turkish speakers:

- *ş* = *sh* in “ship”
- *ç* = *ch* in “chip”
- *c* = *j* in “jack”
- *ı* = *ə*, a neutral vowel sound like the *u* in “circus” or the *e* in “catcher”
- *ü* = no equivalent in English, but analogous to the *u* in the French *sur*
- *ö* = no equivalent in English, but analogous to the French *feu* or *coeur*
- *a* = pronounced like the *a* in “far,” not “fate”
- *e* = pronounced like the *e* in “met” or “shed,” not “mere”
- *i* = pronounced like the *ee* in “sheep”

For Ottoman Turkish transliteration, I use modern Turkish orthography with no diacritics, but I do maintain dashes for Persian and Arabic structures and drop the consonant shifts of modern Turkish:

- *Bil-cümle* not *bilcümle* or *bi'l-cümle*
- *Ba-mazbata* not *bâ-mazbata* or *bamazbata*
- *Mütalaa* not *mütâla'a* or *mütâlâa*
- *İktisad* not *iktisat*
- *Olub* not *olup*; *olunmakda* not *olunmakta*

While I generally do not mark long vowels, I do for some proper nouns or where I deemed it necessary for clarity:

- *Manzûme-i Efkâr*
- *Bâb-ı Âlî*

I change the consonant for the Arabic definite article “*al*” corresponding with “sun” and “moon” letters, but I omit the apostrophe sometimes used in Turkish transliterations:

- *Ferik es-Seyyid*, not *e’s-Seyyid* or *el-Seyyid*

For names of Sufi orders, I use Modern Turkish orthography without long vowels, except where deemed necessary for clarity:

- Bektaşî
- Nakşibendi
- Kadiri

Armeno-Turkish

For transliterating Armeno-Turkish, for Turkish words I follow the Turkish orthography described above, and for Armenian words I follow the Armenian guidelines above.

Arabic and Persian

I generally follow the guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

Stylistic Notes

For omissions in quotations, I use a spaced ellipsis (“ . . . ”), with any following punctuation and a space on either side, per the *Chicago Manual of Style* 13.48.

For foreign words repeated throughout a chapter (e.g. *Tanzimat*), I italicize the first instance and omit italics for the remainder of the chapter.

For words in the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, I follow that entry, omitting italics, diacritics, and non-English characters, e.g:

- Tekke not *tekke*
- Lira not *lira*
- Dervish not *derviş*
- Sharia not *şeriat*
- Pasha not *paşa*
- Shia not *Şii*, *Shi‘a*, or *Shī‘ah*

Geographic and Place Names

In general, I use modern Turkish spellings, omitting epithets like “Gazi” and “Kahraman” added to some city names during the time of the Turkish Republic. For discontinued place names, I provide the present-day city or region in parentheses. If the place is not in Turkey, I include the state in whose borders it currently falls:

- Antep, not Gaziantep

- Harput (Elazığ)
- Maku (in Iran)
- Doğubeyazıt, not Bayazid or Bayezîd

I use modern Turkish for place and proper names except commonly-used names:

- Istanbul not İstanbul
- Izmir not İzmir

For Ottoman Provincial divisions, I use vilayet (which is in the *Oxford New American Dictionary*), as well as the following translations:

- *Vilayet* or *Eyalet*: province
- *Sancak* or *liva*: district
- *Kaza*: sub-district
- *Nahiye*: township

Multi-lingual Transliterations and Translations:

Occasionally, I have provided transliterations multiple languages. To indicate the language, I provide an abbreviation beforehand, though I do not repeat the abbreviation if it is the same language in the same page, uninterrupted:

- Arm. = Armenian
- Ott. = Ottoman
- Tur. = Turkish
- Kur. = Kurdish (if a specific dialect, indicated in text)
- Ar. = Arabic
- Per. = Persian

For example:

- Armenian National Constitution (Arm. *Azkayin Sahmantrut 'iwn Hayots'*, Ott. *Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyan*).
- Nakşibendi-Halidi (Ar. *Naqshbandî-Khālīdī*) and Kadiri (*Qādirī*) brotherhoods

List of Archives and Abbreviations

I draw on sources from the following archives and indicate them in the footnotes accordingly:

| | |
|-----|---|
| ABC | American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Cambridge, MA) |
| AFF | Armenian Film Foundation Collection of the Institute for Visual History and Education at the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation |
| BL | British Library (London) |
| BN | AGBU Nubarian Library [<i>La Bibliothèque Nubar de l'UGAB</i>] (Paris) |
| CDA | Ottoman Archives [<i>Cumhurbaşkan Devlet Arşivleri</i>] (Istanbul) |
| FO | Foreign Office, British National Archives (London) |
| GAT | Yeghishe Charents Literature and Art Museum [<i>Eghishe Ch'arents 'i Anvan Grakanut 'yan ev Arevsti T'angaran</i>] (Yerevan) |
| PCC | For the BN fond Patriarcat de Constantinople, Correspondence des provinces |

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Dedication

For Beirut, its refuge and diversion.

May it find the same.

Introduction: In Light of Dark Histories

*What would the light
Do without eyes to knife*
– Sylvia Plath, “The Jailer”

East of Anatolia

Anatolia is the peninsula surrounded by the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Seas, what makes up western Turkey today. Betraying its Hellenic past, its name comes from the Greek word ἀνατολή (*anatolē*), which means “sunrise” or “east.” Indeed, if you were sitting in Greece, a demitasse coffee cup in your hand as you tried to catch a glimpse of the morning light, you would be looking east toward Anatolia. Moving even further east would take you to a different region, higher, more rugged, where mountains and dormant volcanoes have stood their ground for millennia. Winding and weaving among them, you would find the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates. Until the beginning of the 20th century, this region east of Anatolia commonly took names like Armenia and Kurdistan, names that had nothing to do with the east or the sunrise but with the people who lived there.¹ Still, the young Turkish Republic had no room on its maps for Armenias, Kurdistans, or any names that might shed light on the darkest chapters of its history. So, in the decades after the Republic’s 1923 founding, the authorities there decided

¹ The name “Kurdistan” was used for parts of these regions since at least since the 14th century. For a detailed history of that toponym, see Baki Tezcan, “The Development of the Use of ‘Kurdistan’ as a Geographical Description and the Incorporation of the Region into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century,” in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, ed. Kemal Çiçek and Halil İnalçık, vol. 3, 4 vols. (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uva.x004482629>; on appearances of the name “Armenia” and its Armenian equivalent “*Hayk*” in Greek and Armenian sources, see Moses Khorenats’i, *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 77–88, especially 80n19 and 88n6, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39076006246875>.

on another name for these lands, a funny name – Eastern Anatolia (*Doğu Anadolu*), “the Eastern East.”²

The name Eastern Anatolia enacted a subtle expulsion of “Armenia” and “Kurdistan” from maps today, mirroring the expulsions from these lands faced by Armenians, Kurds, and others during the First World War (1914-18), Turkish War of Independence (1918-23), and well after. In 1915, Armenians, along with Assyrians and other Christians, were targeted for removal and extermination as a result of genocidal plans executed by Ottoman authorities. Linked policies of removal, extermination, and effacement continued under the Kemalist leaders who succeeded them. In the midst of this grim Ottoman twilight, many of the region’s Kurds faced similar fates, as related campaigns of displacement and violent assimilation unfolded (and have continued to unfold through to the present).³

The morning light of “Anatolia” came in handy to mask these dark pasts on Republican maps, but we need not accept their attempts to re-orient how we name these lands.⁴ Still, a name

² This is not to say that maintaining names like Armenia or Kurdistan would necessarily have been better. For some examples of how preserving place-names could also function as a form of effacement in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, see Barbara E. Mundy, “Place-Names in Mexico-Tenochtitlan,” *Ethnohistory* 61, no. 2 (April 1, 2014): 346–47, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-2414190>; on changing toponyms in Republican Turkey, see Kerem Öktem, “The Nation’s Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponymes in Republican Turkey,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 7 (September 23, 2008), <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/2243>; see also Sevan Nişanyan, *Adını Unutan Ülke: Türkiye’de Adı Değiştirilen Yerler Sözlüğü [A Country Forgetting Its Name: A Dictionary of Transforming Place Names in Turkey]* (Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2010); on the effacement of Arabic toponyms in Israel/Palestine, and on the history of mapping there more broadly, see Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 11–54.

³ For a careful comparison of the campaigns of extermination and displacement against Christians and Kurds, see Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 167–69. On internal displacements of Kurds from 1916 to 1934, see 109-119; and on the violence and massacres executed against Kurds in Dersim in 1936-38, see Marin Van Bruinessen, “Genocide in Kurdistan? The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38) and the Chemical War against the Iraqi Kurds (1988),” in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, ed. George J. Andreopoulos (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 147–48; for a copy of the 1937 order cited therein, which gives orders to render “harmless on the spot” those who have or did arm themselves, to “annihilate in entirety their villages and to remove their families,” see İsmail Beşikçi, *Tunceli Kanunu (1935) ve Dersim Jenosidi* (Istanbul: Belge, 1990), 67.

⁴ On the act of naming shared spaces giving rise to “the most extreme instances of . . . attempts to assert physical control . . . and to obtain validation of their conflicting claims” in Israel/Palestine and especially Jerusalem, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia

would be useful to discuss this place variously known as (Eastern) Anatolia, (Western) Armenia, and (Northern) Kurdistan. In addition to drawing on those names, I will also borrow one from other historians, who have recently called this region the Ottoman East.⁵ Like the others, this toponym has its flaws. Namely, Armenia and Kurdistan were not exceedingly “Ottoman” places before the 1830s. Yet, it is that period from which this project departs, the period when Istanbul tried to transform its nominal sovereignty over these borderlands into something more forceful, systematic, and uniform, when it tried to make Armenia, Kurdistan, and its other domains resemble each other. Since it was during this period that Ottoman authorities re-doubled on efforts to render the provinces east of Anatolia into a recognizably “Ottoman” East, the name, even if aspirational, is not wholly unfitting.

Reform, Community, and Violence

Attempts to spread Ottoman authority to the eastern provinces came along with reforms aimed at reinvigorating the empire’s flagging fortunes vis-à-vis imperial rivals. There was no single beginning to the reforms; many important shifts were taking place across the 18th and 19th centuries.⁶ Still, for the study of the Ottoman East, one critical beginning was the formal announcement that took place shortly after the enthronement of Sultan Abdülmecid I (*r.* 1839-

University Press, 2010), 14–17; on the effacement of Arabic toponyms in Israel/Palestine, and on the history of mapping there more broadly, see Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*, 11–54.

⁵ Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi, eds., *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 1–2.

⁶ Karen Barkey traces a long 18th century from 1703 to 1808, when a critical mass of provincial elites joined the Palace to check the forces of reaction and enable “another round of more important reforms that were to be carried out by Mahmud II.” See Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 223–25; some have suggested we look to the reign of Sultan Selim III (*r.* 1789-1807), including Ali Yaycioglu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 1 and 1n1, and on the importance of the “New Order” in 1789, see 38-40; others have singled out events during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (*r.* 1808-1839), like the 1826 abolition and massacre of the Janissary corps, as in Baki Tezcan, “The Second Empire: The Transformation of the Ottoman Polity in the Early Modern Era,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 3 (December 6, 2009): 367–68; on discussions of periodization and how the Tanzimat comes out of a “much longer pre-history than is commonly assumed,” see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 9.

61).⁷ Called the Edict of Gülhane, its declaration in 1839 started a reform era that would come to be known as the *Tanzimat*. The era took its name from the plural form of the Arabic-derived word *tanzim*, which means ordering, regulating, systematizing.⁸ True to its name, the Tanzimat inaugurated increasing attempts to reproduce uniform governing structures across the empire, including new systems of conscription, property, and taxation.

The changes also had pronounced impacts in areas home to mixed populations of Muslims and non-Muslims like the Ottoman East, because the Edict of Gülhane promised security of life and property and juridical equality for Christians and Jews.⁹ Previously, non-Muslims had been tolerated but subordinated by the Islamic dynasty, and this confessional hierarchy had been a cornerstone of the Ottoman imperial order.¹⁰ In the Ottoman East, the Tanzimat raised new questions about old boundaries between Christians like Armenians and

⁷ Even Abou-El-Haj, who writes skeptically about presentations of the Tanzimat as a complete break with an older system of government, grants that there were “peculiar tensions” during this period of Istanbul’s consolidation, which “differed from its early modern counterpart” in how it responded not only to external imperial rivals but also to desires for internal re-organization. See Rifa‘at Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, 2nd ed (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 62–68.

⁸ The word *tanzim* can also refer to putting something into writing (“*kaleme alma*”), which is important to bear in mind for Chapter 1. For several of the many meanings of *tanzim* and its plural *tanzimat*, see Şemseddin Sami, *Kâmûs-ı Türkî* (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2006), 444; in Bedros Zeki’s Ottoman-Armenian dictionary (1912), the idea of putting into writing is also present, as one of the meanings is “poetry” (“բանասիրություն [panahiusut ‘iwn]”). See Bedros Zeki, *Türkçeden Ermeniceye Mükemmel Lügat* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2009), 247.

⁹ After describing rights and obligations regarding conscription, tax payment, property, and criminal trials, the document says, “The Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of our lofty Sultanate shall, without exception, enjoy our imperial concessions.” See J.C. Hurewitz, ed., “The Gülhane Decree and the Beginning of the Tanzimat Reform Era in the Ottoman Empire, 1839,” in *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: European Expansion, 1535-1914*, trans. Halil İnalcik (Yale University Press, 1975); for more on the decree and the reform process in general, see Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 38–51; Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 137–38; Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 34, no. 2 (November 1, 1994): 173–203, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1570929>.

¹⁰ Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 1, 2002): 769 and 776.

Assyrians, Muslims like Kurds and Turks, and the many communities who had long defied or straddled those boundaries.¹¹

Although 1839 had inaugurated a new era of moves toward confessional equality, by 1894, that equality seemed like a distant dream. In that year, anti-Armenian, anti-Christian violence began erupting across the Ottoman East in what came to be known as the Hamidian Massacres (1894-97). In some places, soldiers ripped through Christian quarters; in others, it was mobs of “ordinary” people.¹² While there were examples of officials orchestrating violence, elsewhere officials struggled to contain popular outbursts of looting, razing, and murder.¹³ Ethnic and sectarian boundaries were far from the only fault lines exposed by the Hamidian Massacres. The outbreaks also exposed urban-rural divides, as rural people heard about attacks and traveled to urban centers to join the plunder.¹⁴ Yet, despite the variety of violent acts, actors, and motivations, in virtually all accounts – even official accounts – the death and destruction fell disproportionately on Armenians.¹⁵ The aftermath was bleak, with many tens of thousands dead, and many more wounded, homeless, hopeless. What took place in the Ottoman East during this

¹¹ On the Tanzimat’s project of Ottomanism to unify the empire’s disparate ethnic, religious, and regional communities, see Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 314–20.

¹² Levon Giridlian, interview by J. Michael Hagopian, Film, March 22, 1984, 4:56-12:32, AFF 218, USC Shoah Foundation: The Institute for Visual History and Education, <https://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage?testimonyID=56468&segmentNumber=4&returnIndex=0>; Vahram Eretzian, interview by J. Michael Hagopian, Film, October 3, 1985, 9:00-11:42, AFF 309, USC Shoah Foundation: The Institute for Visual History and Education, <https://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage?testimonyID=56663&segmentNumber=10&returnIndex=0>.

¹³ Jelle Verheij, “Diyarbakir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895,” in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbakir, 1870-1915*, ed. Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 129 and 137–38.

¹⁴ Giridlian, interview, 4:56-12:32; on observers in Harput suggesting a Kurdish “invasion” was taking place, see Ali Sipahi, “Narrative Construction in the 1895 Massacres in Harput: The Coming and Disappearance of the Kurds,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (March 30, 2018): 86–88.

¹⁵ When asked why the Armenian death toll was so much higher than that of their Muslim neighbors, the governor of Sivas Province suggested it was because of Armenian “cowardliness” and their supposedly poor gun skills. Edip Gölbaşı, “The Official Conceptualization of the Anti-Armenian Riots of 1895-1897: Bureaucratic Terminology, Official Ottoman Narrative, and Discourses of Revolutionary Provocation,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (March 30, 2018): 55.

period from 1839 to 1894, one that began with a radical declaration of equality and ended with a dramatic outbreak of communal violence?

Authors of that time and subsequent generations have suggested that the violence that accompanied the Tanzimat arose from the reform movement's failure to deliver on promises of confessional equality. They have blamed that failure on ruthless European powers, treacherous Ottoman Christians, or hopelessly corrupt Ottoman officials.¹⁶ Yet, to say that the violence arose from a failure to implement political equality is to assume that such equality is required to prevent communal outbreaks. We would be hard pressed to find any political system that creates the egalitarian society it says it will. In the 19th century, Istanbul was no exception with its stalled attempts toward the elusive goals of equality and inclusion. Washington, London, Paris, and Petersburg were also striving toward inclusion for groups whose subordination had long been central to collective life.¹⁷ While the Tanzimat did not eliminate sectarianism, neither did European attempts to emancipate Jews eliminate anti-Semitism, nor did American attempts to emancipate slaves eliminate racism.¹⁸ Those communities and too many others still bear witness

¹⁶ On external enemies and impressionable Christians hindering the Tanzimat liberties granted to non-Muslims, in the words of the doyen of Ottoman constitutionalism, Midhat Pasha: "What was it then that brought about the concert of complaints which from time to time arose from the East? The explanation is simple. The Porte, by an anomaly unfortunate but honorable to herself, had granted the Christian races more liberty and more means of instruction than it had allowed to the Mussulmans. The eternal enemies of our Empire, profiting skilfully [sic] by this circumstance, found no difficulty in inspiring some of these races with separatist ideas. Thus the complaints heard in Europe on the part of the Christians arise not exactly from persecution or oppression, but from the fact that they are urged on to hostile aspirations, which they themselves can scarcely be brought to admit." See Midhat Pasha, "The Past, Present, and Future of Turkey," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, August 1878, [see fourth page, not numbered]; on hopelessly corrupt Ottoman officials, see Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 104 and 127; for the text that did much to inscribe into modern Turkish historiography the trope of the treacherous Ottoman Christian as an instrument of ruthless foreign imperialists, see Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün bütün eserleri*, vol. 20 (Kaynak Yayınları, 2007), 1 and 10.

¹⁷ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 773.

¹⁸ Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 12; Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 22.

to the long and uncertain paths to equality and inclusion. If Istanbul's supposedly unique failures cannot explain increasing outbreaks of communal violence, then what can?

Joining recent scholarship in dispensing with the idea of uniquely Ottoman failures, this project offers three overlapping arguments to answer that question.¹⁹ First, it argues that the phenomenon of mass violence across ethnic and religious boundaries in the Ottoman East was not an old, established pattern but one that arose from new notions of civilization and progress shared across different sects and ethnicities.²⁰ Examining sources produced by Ottoman officials, Armenian clergymen, American missionaries, and British consuls, this project shows how these actors may have seen themselves as at odds with each other, but their ideas of progress and modernity deployed markedly similar notions of community, history, and purity. Looking to these shared aspects of their visions demonstrates how there was a widespread consensus that collective life ought to be organized around well-defined and well-policed ethno-religious communities.

Acknowledging and highlighting the shared aspects of these reform visions is crucial to the second argument, that shared notions of progress and communal boundaries spread as they did thanks to the cross-confessional groups of provincial advocates they attracted. As Istanbul attempted to impose direct rule, it recruited to its cause powerful Christian and Muslim spiritual brotherhoods. Invested with resources and authority from the Sublime State, Kurdish sheikhs and

¹⁹ Karen Barkey's work turned the question of Ottoman decline on its head, seeking to explain not its collapse but its longevity. See Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 5; for a work situating Barkey's thesis in discussions of the Ottoman and other empires, see Alan Mikhail and Christine M. Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 733–34; for more on the Ottoman decline thesis and more recent critiques, see Dana Sajdi, ed., *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London; New York: Tauris, 2007), 1–40.

²⁰ For a similar argument in the context of Ottoman Mount Lebanon, see Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 164–65; and for Ottoman Kurdistan, see Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992), 180–81.

Armenian clergymen alike preached faith in the Tanzimat. They also tried to enact the discrete communal boundaries they envisioned, condemning hybridity and ambiguity in daily life, including shared spaces, languages and spiritual practices. In these ways, the empowerment of these spiritual brotherhoods served to highlight and barricade ethnic and religious boundaries in the Ottoman East.

Still – moving to the third argument – understanding the uptake of ideas about difference and belonging requires us to account for more than the existence and spread of shared visions of reform and progress. The presence and availability of an idea cannot alone explain its widespread adoption, even if many powerholders were actively promoting it. Why did a crucial mass of people come to see the world as these Tanzimat reformers did, divided into discrete communities locked in tension?²¹ To understand the adoption of ideas about difference and belonging, we need to keep a close eye on the material conditions in which they took root. For the Ottoman East during this period, that requires us to chart the ideas of difference and belonging alongside histories of capitalism and environmental histories. A new world of global exchange was expanding and upending life with the attenuation of land-based Asian trade routes, the advent of steam-based transportation, and the expansion of colonial empires. As a result, new property regimes, wage disparities, and transportation channels transformed how people could eke out a living from the land. What is more, major famines struck the Ottoman East in decades leading up to the Hamidian Massacres, in 1879-81, 1887-88, and 1892-94. These disasters provide snap shots of the re-organizations of capital, food, and land during the decades just

²¹ On violence as a cause rather than a result of ethnic consciousness in Ottoman Macedonia, see İpek K. Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878–1908* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 217. Examining how violence could not only arise from but also give rise to more rigid communal boundaries is important, and it is part of the reason that this project examines the period 1839 to 1894 - the period before massacres unprecedented in form and in scale would erupt across the Ottoman East.

before a massive sectarian outbreak. Examining changing economies and ecologies in the Ottoman East helps to explain the changes in communal boundaries and tensions there. Access to necessities made some ideas about difference and belonging appear more plausible than others. Indeed, when some communities receive grain and others go hungry, the divisions sown are not easily overcome.

Together, these three arguments suggest new ways to approach increasing ethnic and religious violence in the 19th century Ottoman East. By examining the shared ideas that inspired the Tanzimat, the provincial partners who took up and spread those ideas, and the material conditions in which this all took place, we can better account for how the reform era effected more rigid communal divides and violence across them.

Equality, Difference, and Belonging

To study difference and belonging in the Ottoman East is to investigate an issue present anywhere we find communal difference. Depending on place and time, these issues have taken different names and forms – communalism, racism, sexism, or Islamophobia – but wherever they are, they etch the lines dividing privilege from disempowerment.²² Communal differences in the Middle East and elsewhere may create the potential for exclusion, dispossession, and violence, but that need not give way to fatalism. Communal difference is, after all, also a precondition for coexistence, as well.²³

²² While questions about boundaries other than ethnicity and religion are pressing, this project will only engage them in passing. Excellent work on these issues is in no short supply, however. For instance, recent work has highlighted how attempts to cohere sectarian and/or ethnic communities have masked or even justified violence and exclusion along gender or class lines. For work on the uneven and gendered ramifications of nation-building and recovery among Armenians in post-genocide Turkey, see Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford University Press, 2016), 122, 129, and 160–61; on the ways Maronite and Druze elites emphasized communal boundaries to maintain their own privileges in Mount Lebanon, see Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 83–84 and 94–95; on examples of class exclusion and national visions in Mandate Palestine, see Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 11–12, 17.

²³ Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 39–40; Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 1–3.

For the study of conflict and coexistence in the Middle East, moving past questions about supposedly unique failures allows us to focus instead on the paradoxes of success. Reformers of many stripes in the Ottoman East had grand ideas about how to re-organize society and resuscitate the empire, but by implementing reforms through institutions arranged by ethnicity and sect, they intensified the very boundaries they sought to downplay. As Istanbul executed the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman East, it empowered provincial forces that worked toward highlighting communal divides. In her work on religious minorities in the Middle East, Saba Mahmood foregrounds a similar process in Egypt. She shows how attempts to introduce confessional equality there over the past two centuries have sparked conflicts that served to rigidify or even produce religious boundaries, creating conditions for sectarian inequalities could “flourish.”²⁴ Violence against Egypt’s Coptic Christians and other non-dominant faith groups, she suggests, need not reflect the failure of creating a Western-style secular order. That violence could, in fact, reflect an unfortunate byproduct of the success of creating such an order.²⁵ Drawing on these insights, this project examines how the Ottoman reforms across the 19th century may have aimed toward pan-Ottoman unity through equality, but they were in practice achieving just the opposite.

Still, a framework comparing a secular West to a Middle East rooted in some notion of an Islamic tradition will not do in the Ottoman East, since that region was home to groups like

²⁴ Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*, 2, 12–15, and 22.

²⁵ Ussama Makdisi takes a similar approach in his work on sectarianism in the Mashriq, the region including Syria, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine (sometimes called the Levant). Following Saba Mahmood, Wendy Brown, and Talal Asad, he also foregrounds the tensions and even the violence that could be interwoven into the project of forging secular governance, questioning the “the universal and colonial pretensions of Western discourses about religious freedom and tolerance.” See Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 14–15; see also Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 37–38; on the tensions within discussions of tolerance in the Middle East and for Muslims in contemporary Europe, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 59–62, 165, and 178.

Armenians, Assyrians, Alevis, and many others who do not fit such a framework. Ussama Makdisi raises this point in his work on difference and belonging in areas around Syria and Lebanon called the *Mashriq* (also called the Levant). He pushes back against portrayals of the Middle East as trapped between the two imperfect options of a “Western-derived” notion of the secular and some ill-defined notion of the Islamic tradition.²⁶ Following Makdisi, this project foregrounds how people in Ottoman domains faced challenges and questions similar to those in the “West” and elsewhere: how to establish a more robust sovereignty based on an expansion of representative governance and how to transform subordinated classes of people into purportedly equal citizens. Just as in the Mashriq, so too in the Ottoman East, the implementation of new ideas of co-existence cannot be reduced to a cynical adaptation or hopeless mistranslation of a “Western-derived” secularism. Rather, ideas about difference and belonging arose from locally-grounded thoughts, debates, and practices that were responding to the common challenge of forging meaningful political equality.

Yet, the history of difference and belonging in the Ottoman East requires a different approach than one for the Mashriq, in part because the results of those thoughts, debates, and practices were so markedly different. Even if states like Lebanon have turned out to be quite prone to tensions and conflicts along communal lines, there was no radical or lasting expulsion of Christians or Muslims on the scales seen in the Balkans or Anatolia. In the Mashriq, stubborn if contested notions of a secular or “ecumenical” belonging have persisted, and their sutures have helped to prevent or mitigate such territorial splits and displacements.²⁷ Yet, in the Balkans and

²⁶ Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 14–16.

²⁷ Makdisi tells his history through his concept of the “ecumenical frame.” It has three related meanings: a body of thought that tried to reconcile desires for political equality with a history of Muslim superiority, a system of government that strove to cultivate that equality, and a legal order that tried to adjudicate between upholding individual rights and sectarian communal rights. The “ecumenical frame” developed in step with communal violence and sectarianism as we know them today. This “conjoined development,” Makdisi suggests, makes it incumbent upon us today to trace their histories together. See Makdisi, 24.

Anatolia, the stitches did not hold, and the ensuing dismemberment caused bloodshed on unseen scales.²⁸ Murder, dispossession, and displacement have repeatedly ravaged these areas in attempts to engineer new demographics, leaving cities of “ghosts” in their wake.²⁹ Until the present, dominant national teleologies have targeted anything (or anyone) that might contradict the narrow stories they tell.³⁰ Why did the Ottoman East see intensifying communal violence with devastating and lasting divisions along ethnic and religious boundaries, while the neighboring lands of the Mashriq have retained many of the multiple sects and ethnicities living there since the Ottoman era? Answering that question requires a historical investigation slightly different from the intellectually-focused one Makdisi offers for the Mashriq.³¹ To understand why communal violence repeatedly and increasingly struck the remote and agrarian provinces of the Ottoman East, we must look not only a look at new ideas of difference and belonging but

²⁸ Makdisi himself acknowledges the different trajectories of different parts of the empire. He even suggests that a “Great Divergence” between the Mashriq, on one hand, and the Balkans and Anatolia, on the other took place during and after the Tanzimat. See Makdisi, 20 and 76.

²⁹ On the “ghosts” lurking in Thessaloniki’s (Salonica’s) history, see Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430 - 1950* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2006), 11–13; for an example of the violence of demographic engineering in the Late Ottoman Balkans, see Tetsuya Sahara, “Paramilitaries in the Balkan Wars: The Case of Macedonian Adrianople Volunteers,” in *War and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, and Their Sociopolitical Implications*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Isa Blumi, 2013; on the concept of demographic engineering and its place in Ottoman and Turkish history, see Uğur Ümit Üngör, “‘Turkey for the Turks’: Demographic Engineering in Eastern Anatolia 1914-1945,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, Norman M. Naimark, and Fatma Müge Göcek (Oxford University Press, 2011), 288–90.

³⁰ A 1914 survey completed by the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate listed over 2,500 religious sites under its control, with 200 monasteries and 1,600 churches. In 1974 about “half of these sites had vanished utterly. Of the remainder, 252 were ruined. Just 197 survived in anything like a usable state.” Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (Reaktion Books, 2007); on the less studied but no less drastic disappearance of Iranian, Azeri, and Islamic architecture in 20th century Yerevan, see Markus Ritter, “The Lost Mosque(s) in the Citadel of Qajar Yerevan: Architecture and Identity, Iranian and Local Traditions in the Early 19th Century,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 239–40, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157338410X12625876281109>; on the architectural targets in Bosnia in the 1980s and 1990s, see Helen Walasek, ed., “Destruction of the Cultural Heritage in Bosnia-Herzegovina: An Overview,” in *Bosnia and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage* (Routledge, 2016), 23–29; on the fraught politics of restoration in the city of Ani located on the directly on the Turkish side of the Turkish-Armenian border, see Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, “Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 73, no. 4 (2014): 528–55, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsah.2014.73.4.528>; on fraught politics of the restoration the Cathedral of the Holy Cross (Սուրբ Խաչ եկեղեցի) on Akhtamar Island in Lake Van, see Hrant Dink, “Tarihin Cilvesi [Wiles of History],” *BirGün*, January 18, 2007, <https://www.birgun.net/haber/tarihin-cilvesi-11892>.

³¹ Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 8.

also at the material, economic, and ecological conditions that made those divides seem plausible to a critical mass of people there.

National Dismantling and Social Construction

Raising in earnest questions about the history of difference and belonging in the Ottoman East is a privilege that has come with time and distance from the traumas of the Empire's dissolution. Like histories of the Caucasus or the Balkans, those of the Ottoman East are written in the shadow of violence unresolved and difficult to broach. For too long, discussions of this region and its Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, and Turks have come in the form of zero-sum histories, those told to construct or re-habilitate national protagonists, "to score points like wrestlers on a mat."³² In light of these dark pasts, even toponyms that suggested a history of "shameful acts" would be replaced with names like the "Eastern East."³³ The end of the Cold War reduced what some have called denialist "static," the obstruction generated by those seeking to downplay and disavow their roles in ethnic, religious, and national bloodshed.³⁴ Still, dangers loom for those who dare to write, speak, or research about these regions, especially within the jurisdictions of authorities invested in particular versions of history. Violence unacknowledged lurks like a disease untreated. Contested memories of past bloodshed beget present repression, laying bare the "dis-ease" that lurks beneath denial.³⁵ In the past two decades, questioning

³² Dink, "Tarihin Cilvesi [Wiles of History]."

³³ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, is said to have referred to the annihilation of Ottoman Armenians as a "shameful act." See Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 12-13n19.

³⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Writing Genocide: The Fate of the Ottoman Armenians," in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, Norman M. Naimark, and Fatma Müge Göcek (Oxford University Press, 2011), 34-35.

³⁵ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 120.

official histories in Turkey and Armenia, for instance, has brought harassment, lawsuits, jail time, and murder.³⁶

There are ready solutions to these present repressions (some restraint in policing speech and research, for example), but solutions are less forthcoming for the conceptual challenges of telling the history of communal boundaries. How can we tell a history of communal difference and belonging if telling such a history forces us to draw on the very categories we seek to destabilize? “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” so what other tools do we have at hand?³⁷ A previous generation of scholars has turned to the idea of social construction to show how communal boundaries are neither ancient nor static but “invented,” “constructed,” or “imagined.”³⁸ These approaches have proven to be a potent corrective to older histories that treated nations, ethnicities, and religions as things in themselves – very old, mostly unchanging, and liable to provoke continual clashes.³⁹ Showing how difference and belonging have been “socially constructed” opened a space to question what forces drive the shifting lines of communal divides.

In the past decade, many Ottoman historians have taken up that question. Some have underscored how political and economic re-organizations of the 18th and 19th century Ottoman

³⁶ Turkish and Armenian authorities have prosecuted and even imprisoned authors for their research, writing, and statements concerning the history of Kurds and Armenians in the region. For examples, see “The Strange Case of Yektan Turkyilmaz: An International Incident,” *Duke Magazine*, February 2008, <https://alumni.duke.edu/magazine/articles/strange-case-yektan-turkyilmaz-international-incident-update>; Susanne Fowler, “Turkey, a Touchy Critic, Plans to Put a Novel on Trial,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2006, Late Edition edition; Nezahat Alkan, “Hrant Dink’e bir 301 davası daha [Another Article 301 Case Against Hrant Dink],” *BirGün*, September 25, 2006; “Turkey Brings Another Case Against an Ethnic Armenian,” *New York Times*, 2005; “Popular Turkish Novelist on Trial For Speaking of Armenian Genocide,” *New York Times*, December 16, 2005.

³⁷ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 112.

³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), 6–7; Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5–6.

³⁹ For an example of this fatalism, see Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 356; for new iterations of theories predicting continual conflict based on immutable communal boundaries, see Robert M. Hayden, “Intersecting Religioscapes and Antagonistic Tolerance: Trajectories of Competition and Sharing of Religious Spaces in the Balkans,” *Space & Polity* 17, no. 3 (December 2013): 320–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2013.850822>.

Empire blurred or rigidified the boundaries between Christian and Muslim, Kurd and Armenian, or Sunni and Shia.⁴⁰ Others have delved into how changing property relations and modes of production worked to re-enforce ethnic and religious divides during the same period.⁴¹ And still others have interrogated the internal coherence of communities themselves, showing how class or gender formed important (and potentially deadly) fault lines within them.⁴² Works like these take up the call of a previous generation by questioning purportedly ancient and static divides, instead highlighting the forces that have produced and re-staged those communal boundaries to serve particular needs at particular moments.

This project benefits from and draws on these works, but it suggests that we can take our interrogation of old divisions even further. If acknowledging how communal boundaries are neither static nor clear has been so fruitful, what stops us from deploying a similar acknowledgement for the other sorts boundaries we take for granted, like those separating humanity from nature? Social construction has been useful for historicizing the development of communal boundaries, but if we confine our discussion to the realm of the symbolic or “imagined,” then we risk implicitly buying into another sort of boundary, that between the

⁴⁰ Dzovinar Derderian, “Shaping Subjectivities and Contesting Power Through the Image of Kurds, 1860s,” in *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, ed. Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 94–97; Elyse Semerdjian, “Naked Anxiety: Bathhouses, Nudity, and the Dhimmī Woman in 18th-Century Aleppo,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 4 (November 2013): 652–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743813000846>; Richard Edward Antaramian, “In Subversive Service of the Sublime State: Armenians and Ottoman State Power 1844-1896” (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan, 2014), 49, 56, and 84; Sabri Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 213–14.

⁴¹ Stephan H. Astourian, “The Silence of the Land,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, Norman M. Naimark, and Fatma Müge Göçek (Oxford University Press, 2011), 57–59; Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 131–32 and 169; Mehmet Polatel, “Armenians and the Land Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1870-1914” (Ph.D., Istanbul, Boğaziçi University, 2017), 71–72 and 109–11; Owen Robert Miller, “‘Back to the Homeland’ (*Tebi Yergir*): Or, How Peasants Became Revolutionaries in Muş,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4, no. 2 (2017): 302 and 307.

⁴² On gender, see Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 8 and 122–23; on class, see Varak Ketsemanian, “The Hunchakian Revolutionary Party and the Assassination Attempts Against Patriarch Khoren Ashekian and Maksudzade Simon Bey in 1894,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 4 (November 2018): 736.

abstract and the real.⁴³ Relegating communal belonging to a slippery realm of ideas and symbols would relegate it to the role of a passive receiver of effects from economics, ecology, and science. That approach will not do, because it cedes the floor on any discussion of the material world to the rules put forth by scientists, economists, and other experts.⁴⁴ To avoid confining its findings to the realms of the symbolic and abstract, this project traces not only ideas about difference and belonging but also their interplay with changing capital channels, access to food, and other material conditions.

Admittedly, this method carries with it the risk of reifying the division between a world of ideas and a world of material things. Indeed, that division is both useful as a shorthand and often seemingly apparent in our daily lives. Still, instead of adopting that division wholesale, we can do so tentatively, keeping a close eye out for slippages and shifting boundaries in moments of hybridity and ambiguity. Those are the moments that lay bare how the line between thoughts and things, just like that between Christians and Muslims, is neither static nor clear. Paying attention to those shifts and ambiguities reveals the interplays of the material and the abstract, how access to concrete things like grain and embodied experiences like hunger could shape communal divides in the minds of imperial subjects.

Shifting Natures

To understand how changing arrangements of capital and new relationships to the land transformed difference and belonging in the Ottoman East, we need to interrogate how not just communal boundaries but how all sorts of conceptual divisions give rise to novel forms of power. This includes the boundary separating humanity from nature, one that has also been taken

⁴³ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 2–4.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, 2–4.

up with gusto in recent histories of the Middle East. As those works point out, foregrounding ecological processes can help us transcend national boundaries. Just as there is no history of the Nile confined to Egypt alone, there is no history of the Tigris-Euphrates confined to Turkey alone.⁴⁵ The waters and weather patterns that feed their waters reach far beyond the boundaries of any state. Likewise, taking into account the effects of global climatic forces like the “Little Ice Age” (c. 1550-1850) has given rise to histories that escape the bounds of nations and nation-states, whose leading roles have tended to push crucial forces to the background.⁴⁶ This phenomenon has been especially true in places like the Middle East, where large semi-arid tracts on the margins of rainfed agriculture make the region highly vulnerable to even slight shifts in temperature and precipitation.⁴⁷

Focusing on ecological or nonhuman processes has also served to foreground the lives of those who lived and worked close to the land, those sometimes called peasants, the lower classes, or the subaltern.⁴⁸ For a region like the Ottoman East, a provincial backwater where most people lived by raising crops and livestock, such perspectives is crucial.⁴⁹ Sometimes the environment

⁴⁵ Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 20.

⁴⁶ For a brief introduction to the Little Ice Age, see A.E.J. Ogilvie and T. Jónsson, “‘Little Ice Age’ Research: A Perspective from Iceland,” *Climatic Change* 48, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 9–122, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005625729889>.

⁴⁷ Sam White, “Little Ice Age Crisis of the Ottoman Empire,” in *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Alan Mikhail (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 80–81; Zozan Pehlivan, “Abandoned Villages in Diyarbekir Province at the End of the ‘Little Ice Age’, 1800-50,” in *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, ed. Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 223–46.

⁴⁸ Chris Gratien, “The Ottoman Quagmire: Malaria, Swamps, and Settlement in the Late Ottoman Mediterranean,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies; Cambridge* 49, no. 4 (November 2017): 585, <http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1017/S0020743817000605>; Khaled Fahmy, “Medicine and Power: Towards a Social History of Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 16–17.

⁴⁹ Between 1881 and 1908, an estimated 75-80% of people were cultivators. Many of the difficult-to-enumerate remainder were likely pastoralists. There was of course, also, significant overlap. See Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration*, New York University Studies in Near Eastern Civilization, no. 9 (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 8; Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 843.

enabled the seemingly powerless to wield unexpected power based on their intimate knowledge of nature, allowing them to demand resources, avoid exploitation, or even escape a collective death sentence.⁵⁰ Still, just as ecological processes could highlight emancipatory potentials, so too could they exacerbate inequalities. When tax-collectors demanded payments before the harvest was ready – or after it had been destroyed by a drought – vulnerable producers had to seek out exploitative loans, whose seemingly endless re-payment could devour their livelihoods for years to come.⁵¹ Whether emancipatory or exploitative, the Janus-faced effects of ecological forces offer a way of uncovering less seen processes, and they provide for re-readings of histories that we think we may already know.⁵² These forces gesture toward a world of interactions that have too long lingered in the background while the spotlight has shone on this or that budding nation.

Yet, useful though those ecological forces may be for de-centering analysis from a particular community, nation, or state, some of the aforementioned work urges us to think about nature or the environment as an historical “actor” or “agent” in its own right.⁵³ We should be careful not to trade one kind of coherent actor for another. Natural forces were no doubt important, but reifying nature as an “actor” poses the same risks as doing so for humans. This sort of talk about human agency over nature gained momentum with the 19th century

⁵⁰ Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*, 20; Samuel Dolbee, “The Desert at the End of Empire: An Environmental History of the Armenian Genocide,” *Past & Present*, 4, accessed April 6, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz055>.

⁵¹ In 19th century Nablus, for instance, officials demanded taxes from olive producers at the same time they collected during the grain harvest, long before olives matured. This disregard for the later olive harvests forced producers into vulnerable states. To pay the tax man, olive cultivators needed to have money saved from past years, or else they would have to borrow from local merchants at whatever rates they would provide. Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 143.

⁵² Dolbee, “The Desert at the End of Empire,” 7–8.

⁵³ Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*, 21; Pehlivan, “Abandoned Villages in Diyarbekir Province at the End of the ‘Little Ice Age’, 1800–50,” 225–26.

development of the social sciences.⁵⁴ Maintaining these older ideas of agency and simply admitting “nature” into the once exclusively human club of “actors” may allow for a new set of subaltern and nonhuman agents to burst onto the stage, but it leaves untroubled the idea of (human, white, colonizing, Western, masculine) “agency” operating against the backdrop of (nonhuman, nonwhite, colonized, Oriental, feminine) nature.

Why should we question that human/nature divide? That supposed boundary is neither static nor clear, and following its shifts and ambiguities has provided useful historical insights. Recent work on cotton production and imperial finance in British-administered Egypt by Aaron Jakes, for instance, foregrounds the supposed human/nature divide and the sorts of powers it could serve. Jakes focuses on cotton-leaf worm infestations that devastated Egyptian cotton crops in the 1880s and 1890s. During the ensuing blame game for the resulting damage, the line dividing humanity from nature could bend according to particular needs. In the 1880s – when the Anglo-Egyptian administration could have taken preventative action against the worms at the cost of dampening crop revenues (and speculation based upon them) – the Cairo authorities adopted a fatalistic acceptance of “natural or divine agency beyond human control.”⁵⁵ The authorities accepted no blame for the damage, and they offered little more than non-binding advice and directives. Yet, in 1894, when these worms devastated harvests at a moment of acute financial distress, the idea of “beyond human control” vanished. Instead, culpability was passed onto specific people, Egyptian smallholders whose supposed ignorance and greed had nourished the cotton-worms and their havoc.⁵⁶ Attitudes toward cotton-worms during this period show how

⁵⁴ Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail, eds., *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 9–11.

⁵⁵ Aaron Jakes, “Boom, Bugs, Bust: Egypt’s Ecology of Interest, 1882–1914,” *Antipode* 49, no. 4 (2017): 1049, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12216>.

⁵⁶ Jakes, 1048–49.

a shifting human/nature divide took on different forms at different moments, depending on the desires and needs of the Cairo authorities and their financial partners.⁵⁷

While the Ottoman East did not produce very much in the way of cotton or other globally-traded cash crops, insights about the shifting human/nature divide can still shed light on the region's history during the same period, which had no shortage of agrarian disasters. These included a handful of famines and droughts that struck during the reign of the last powerful Sultan, Abdülhamid II (*r.* 1876-1909).⁵⁸ Work on the famines that have erupted around the world in the past two centuries have taken up the human/nature divide in productive ways. Amartya Sen's scholarship made a splash when it suggested that the starvation of 20th century famines in South Asia and Africa arose less from natural occurrences than from human action (and inaction).⁵⁹ He and others have underscored how nature served as a convenient scapegoat, displacing the inconvenient human culpability of imperial administrators and profiteers. They show how powerholders ignored, enabled, or even profited from the "silent violence" of hunger.⁶⁰ These authors have also suggested that we re-think famine's supposedly natural provenance. Mike Davis has consciously used the word "holocausts" to describe major famines

⁵⁷ For a discussion of fatalism versus human action in the history of statistics and probability, see Ian Hacking, "How Should We Do the History of Statistics?," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 189–202. Hacking suggests that new statistical measures and applications of probability inspired new ways of thinking about disease. For example, in 1832, a cholera epidemic gripped Europe and inspired widespread fears, but fifty years later, another epidemic came and it "passed from a deterministic scourge to a probabilistic contagion."

⁵⁸ For work on earlier famines from the same century in central Anatolia see Özge Ertem, "Eating the Last Seed: Famine, Empire, Survival and Order in Ottoman Anatolia in the Late Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D., Florence, European University Institute, 2012); see also Semih Celik, "Scarcity and Misery at the Time of 'Abundance beyond Imagination': Climate Change, Famines and Empire-Building in Ottoman Anatolia (c. 1800-1850)" (Ph.D., Florence, Italy, European University Institute, 2017).

⁵⁹ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1–3.

⁶⁰ Michael Watts outlines his idea of "silent violence" in his book by the same name. For his explanation, see Michael Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, & Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), xxii–xxiii, and for an example of that "silent violence" at work, see 301–2.

of the 19th century, suggesting that the deaths of many tens of millions arose from human action rather than nature's vagaries.⁶¹

Drawing on the insights offered in these works, this project offers new ways to read the history of the Ottoman East. It shows how endowing nature with human like agency does not go far enough, because it leaves unasked important questions about the shifting nature of that divide those like it. Adopting such categories to frame our own analysis risks missing how various powers and interests have sought (and continue to seek) to guide the kinds of historical questions we ask. Rather than taking our analytical categories from the historical actors we study, we would be better served by seizing on these divisions of the world as they appear in our sources, and taking them as clues pointing to those subtle forms of power at work.⁶² What forces do such divisions of the world enable, conceal, and justify? We can see an example of this in the Ottoman East in the 1880s, when a cash-strapped Ottoman government tried to collect taxes from famine-stricken areas, and American and British observers disparaged the Ottomans for continuing to demand taxes at all. While taxation in the Ottoman Empire could indeed become violent, these outsiders shared the seemingly innocuous assumption that the Empire had an internally coherent financial system, somehow disconnected from a globalizing world of credit and debt. That assumption blinded them to the ways that the Empire's foreign debt collectors were a key driving force for the demands of impossible tax payments. It was a casual division of the world that hid how it was not Ottoman tax collectors but financiers on far off trading floors who were snatching food off people's tables.

⁶¹ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 9–12; see also Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944), 167–68.

⁶² Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 79 and 95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1962879>.

This project suggests that tracing the shifts and slippages in both conceptual and communal boundaries provides a useful heuristic for approaching the history of the Ottoman East, encouraging a closer look at the arbitrary and sometimes sinister divisions wherever they have arisen. Seemingly neat boundaries require constant adjustments in a messy world. Whether between human and nature, state and society, Christian and Muslim, or Armenian, Kurd, and Turk, we should read attempts to underscore or enforce such divides as red flags, outing the red herrings of attempted boundary-making. Studying the power that arises from framing the world in terms of clean boundaries is important because it is this power that tried to impose such boundaries across communities who had lived in multi-confessional, multi-ethnic worlds for many centuries. To provide examples of this method, the chapters that follow take up communal and conceptual boundary-making during periods of reform, transformation, and crisis, including moments of financial distress that coincided with major droughts and famines in the Ottoman East.

Chapter Outline

This project takes up the period 1839-94, the period that began with a radical declaration of confessional equality and ended with the years-long series of sectarian outbreaks called the Hamidian Massacre. To trace these changes, the project highlights the shared aspects of new ideas about difference and belonging, the cross-confessional coalition of provincial actors who participated in their spread, and the material conditions in which they took root. This period saw the advent of novel intellectual currents, political systems, ecological forces, and financial reorganizations, and the changes they wrought in the Ottoman East sowed the seeds of divisions that would rigidify communal divides and provoke increasing communal violence across them.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on shifting communal boundaries during the political and religious re-organizations that took place during the Tanzimat reform era (1839-76). Chapter 1: The Grammar of Reform looks at the shared features of reform as imagined by Ottoman and Armenian authors, as well as American and British interlopers, and how those reforms encouraged more policing of communal boundaries. While the goals and constituencies of these different authors varied quite a bit, their visions of civilizational uplift shared key aspects. They all suggested that to be civilized was to maintain the purity of deep pasts. They therefore condemned as backward hybrid practices, languages, and beliefs that they deemed to be adopted from outsiders, even close neighbors. The Ottoman East was full of such sharing, which violated the communal, cultural, and linguistic boundaries that reformers imagined. Drawing on examples from oral literature, spiritual practices, and print vernaculars, this chapter shows how reformers strove to segregate hybridity, believing that it would save their empire from decline. In so doing, however, they were deconstructing the very flexibility that had served as the foundation for the Ottoman Empire's earlier power.

Chapter 2: Faith in the State turns to the execution of the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman East, taking up the roles of Christian and Muslim religious brotherhoods in the reform project. After militarily defeating the most important of the autonomous principedoms in the region, the Ottoman administration sought to re-produce the uniform structures of its rule there. It accomplished this with the help of the members of the fast-changing religious brotherhoods, like Nakşibendi-Halidi Sufis and priests of the Armenian Apostolic Church. These spiritual authorities aligned themselves with Istanbul's reform plans and preached the blessings of the Sublime State, which the chapter explores through the correspondence of the Ottoman governor and Sufi sheikh, Hayreddin Pasha, and the Armenian Abbot of Surp Garabed Monastery in Muş,

Karekin Srvandztiants. Still, fluid notions of difference and belonging in these regions offended the sensibilities of these spiritual authorities. To enact their visions of reform, they worked to define and police communal boundaries. Previously, cross-confessional coalitions could rise and fall depending on the distribution of power and political goals. Local dynasts could band together and raise mixed Christian and Muslim forces against Istanbul's armies. With the Tanzimat realignments, the horizons for political action changed. With the defeat of the region's autonomous dynasts and the empowerment of particular Christian and Muslim spiritual brotherhoods, the reform era made communal boundaries more salient in the formation of political coalitions and reduced possibilities for cross-confessional alliances.

The next two chapters, 3 and 4, take up the reign of the last powerful Sultan, Abdülhamid II (*r.* 1876-1909) until the beginning of the Hamidian Massacres in 1894. Chapter 3: Shot of a Gun, the Sound of a Stream examines the period surrounding the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War and the famines that broke out in the Ottoman East during and after this conflict. This was a moment of profound crisis and political transition, ending the Tanzimat and enthroning Abdülhamid II. Starting in 1875, Ottoman troubles began to mount: the Empire defaulted on its sovereign debt, violence and rebellion broke out in the Balkan provinces, and Russia intervened to deal the Ottomans a resounding military defeat in 1878. A flurry of diplomatic activity and territorial changes followed, but stepping back from negotiating tables in imperial metropolises foregrounds the effects of these overlapping crises in the Ottoman East. There, war, famine, and rebellion wrought hardships whose uneven effects highlighted and radicalized communal boundaries. Examining the overlapping effects of drought, humanitarian aid, and an influx of modern weapons, the chapter shows how such forces in these agrarian provinces were just as potent as the political visions for sowing ethnic and religious divides.

Chapter 4: Indeterminate Criminal turns to the period 1881-94, one that appeared to a time of consolidation and rehabilitation for the Ottomans. Still, crises continued to stir, boiling over in the Hamidian Massacres in 1894-97, which killed many tens of thousands of mostly Ottoman Armenians. Fraught questions of responsibility loom over discussions of this violence, and many have worked to accuse or absolve Ottoman authorities of their roles in orchestrating and profiting from these continual outbreaks of murder and dispossession. Yet, prosecuting or defending the culprits risks buying into ways of discussing these massacres that mask the ongoing, slower sorts of violence that pummeled the region in the long lead-up to outbreaks, like debt, hunger, and dispossession. To seize on these sorts of violence, this chapter turns to finance and agriculture, two arenas deeply intertwined in the Ottoman Empire and especially its eastern provinces. Tracing developments in these two arenas reveals how novel forms of power were inflicting the violence of debt, hunger, and dispossession, and intensifying divisions between the peoples of the region.

Together, the chapters suggest a different way of approaching the decades between the Tanzimat's declaration of equality in 1839 and the outbreak of the Hamidian Massacres in 1894. By tracing the intellectual currents, political re-organizations, ecological forces, and financial crises at play during this period, these chapters examine the shifting boundaries of communities, like Christian versus Muslim, and of concepts, like humanity versus nature. They show how new ideas about difference and belonging arose across the texts penned by authors of different ethnicities and sects, and how those ideas enlisted a variety of provincial actors to aid in their spread. What is more, the economic and ecological conditions of the region provided fertile ground for these ideas of more rigid communal divides to grow and thrive. Rather than dwelling on the objects those boundaries purportedly define, the chapters instead focus on how those

boundaries could move, rigidify, and loosen, and how those changes could conceal, unleash, and justify the novel forms of power that would, ultimately, unravel the stitches that had held together this multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society for centuries.

Chapter 1: The Grammar of Reform

High cold masks of amnesia.

How did I get here?

– Sylvia Plath, “The Jailer”

Pure Origins and Deep Pasts

In the Middle East today, especially in its ex-Ottoman lands, concepts like religion and ethnicity continue to define salient aspects of political life, including the boundaries of violence. Communal conflict there is easily written off by an assumption of timeless difference and endless tensions between Christian and Muslim, Sunni and Shia, Kurd and Turk, and so on,⁶³ but that familiar fatalism offers little to explain how or why ethnic and religious divisions came to be so salient in the first place. A related question, one this chapter addresses, is how changing forms of government may have affected ethnic and religious boundaries. This question is important because the past two centuries have brought a political rupture in the form of modern statehood. Regimes began to centralize and rationalize government, to introduce forms of representative rule, and to seek some form of political equality – elusive goals, fraught with exceptions and exclusions. Modern states also had a perception of themselves as a rupture from what came before. They saw themselves as “the embodiments of a new age.”⁶⁴ In Ottoman lands, a project of modern statehood came about in the *Tanzimat* reforms (1839-76), which brought promises to reform the government, army, and bureaucracy, and to guarantee equal protections for life and property, regardless of sect. The guarantees of juridical equality – as they have in other contexts

⁶³ Such arguments are reminiscent of Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2007); while many authors have disavowed that phrase, there are still those who suggest the best we can hope for is “antagonistic tolerance,” a seeming peace but mere cease fire liable to ignite with a shift in power. For that thesis, see Hayden, “Intersecting Religioscapes and Antagonistic Tolerance.”

⁶⁴ Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 51.

– brought communal difference to the center of claims to modern statehood.⁶⁵ How exactly did the Tanzimat reforms affect communal boundaries and tensions across them?

There are two main approaches to this question. One suggests that the Tanzimat and subsequent attempts to bring about modern statehood were never or only imperfectly adopted, preventing the emergence of a post-sectarian order.⁶⁶ Still, another approach suggests that ethnic and confessional tensions were incidental to modern statehood: it was not failed or imperfect reform projects but the advent of reforms that rigidified and radicalized communal boundaries between Copt and Muslim in Egypt,⁶⁷ Christian and Muslim in Syria,⁶⁸ Maronite and Druze in Mount Lebanon,⁶⁹ or Shia and Sunni during the Lebanese Mandate.⁷⁰ Yet, whereas works about communal tensions in these Arab provinces have taken two different approaches to ethno-religious divides – that they could arise in spite of or because of modern statehood – work on the Ottoman East has dwelled more on the former, the failed or incomplete application of the reforms. By the Ottoman East, I mean the provinces just north of Syria, a region that has gone by many names including eastern Turkey, (Northern) Kurdistan, (Western) Armenia.⁷¹ A similar narrative about the failure or non-application of reforms there has appeared throughout histories of the region: in the 1830s and 1840s, the Ottomans arrived, and their European-trained conscript army removed the Kurdish princely families (*mir*, pl. *miran*) that had ruled for centuries. Yet, ineffective Ottoman administrators failed to fill the shoes of the *miran*, producing conditions for

⁶⁵ Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 132 and 139; Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 5–6.

⁶⁶ For an excellent discussion of recent books on these topics, see Michael Gasper, “Sectarianism, Minorities, and the Secular State in the Middle East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 4 (November 2016): 769, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074381600091X>.

⁶⁷ Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*, 66–68.

⁶⁸ Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 165–66.

⁶⁹ Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 51–52.

⁷⁰ Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 29–33.

⁷¹ Cora, Derderian, and Sipahi, *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century*, 1–2.

violent feuds and general disorder.⁷² As a result of these failures, the Ottoman administration that did develop there tended to rely on *ad hoc* and violent measures to govern. Cunning officials, local strongmen, state-armed tribal chiefs collected taxes and took up policing duties, and they successfully contrived threats and debts to justify their brutality to the center, all while continually enriching themselves.⁷³ According to this telling, it was this failure “to establish a new order” that destabilized relations among the region’s many ethnic and religious groups.⁷⁴ While this version of the region’s history acknowledges that the Tanzimat had something to do with communal violence, it still rests on the assumption that a full and sincere execution of the Tanzimat could have averted or at least mitigated the rise of communal tensions. These are the tensions that would grow and erupt continually until the end of the Empire, when imperial powers parceled up the empire, and a Turkish nationalist resistance then repelled them from Anatolia. All the while, myriad campaigns of ethnic cleansing, demographic engineering, and genocide left the broader region’s population crudely partitioned between Christians and Muslims.⁷⁵

⁷² Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 175, 181, and 228; Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 59–62; Selim Deringil, “‘The Armenian Question Is Finally Closed’: Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 349.

⁷³ On tax reform attempts, see Nadir Özbek, “The Politics of Taxation and the ‘Armenian Question’ during the Late Ottoman Empire, 1876–1908,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 787–89; on the formation of the Hamidiye tribal regiments and the violence they wrought on people and troubles they caused for civil administrators, see Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 74–93.

⁷⁴ Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Réformes ottomanes et cohabitation entre chrétiens et Kurdes (1839-1915),” *Etudes rurales*, no. 186 (March 29, 2011): 46; see also Tessa Hofmann and Gerayer Koutcharian, “The History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman Empire,” *Armenian Review* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 13; Stephan H. Astourian, “On the Genealogy of the Armenian-Turkish Conflict, Sultan Abdülhamid, and the Armenian Massacres,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 21 (2012): 181n37. Stephan Astourian, makes a similar claim about the Tanzimat bringing a deterioration between ethnic and religious groups in the region, but he does not offer why this is the case, flagging it as an important topic for future research.

⁷⁵ Rogers Brubaker, “Aftermath of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples,” in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, ed. Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen (Westview Press, 1997), 157–59.

What if the collapse of communal relations in the Ottoman East arose not from a failed or incomplete aspects of this modern statehood project but because of its successes? This question has been generative of new approaches to communal tensions in areas like Lebanon and Egypt, and this chapter suggests it could be generative for new approaches in the Ottoman East, as well.⁷⁶ It examines the widely-shared features of reform as imagined by Ottoman and Armenian authors, as well as American and British interlopers. These early reformers conflated civilization with purity and singular origins, and they sought to re-inscribe and police ethnic and religious difference where they found porous and ambiguous communal boundaries. Their widely-held conflation of civilization and purity was a shared foundation of the Tanzimat reforms, and it drove their desire to impose rigidity and definition wherever they found flexibility and ambiguity – the same flexibility and ambiguity that in fact had enabled the Ottoman Empire’s early successes and rapid expansion.⁷⁷

The first section provides background about the Tanzimat reforms and Ottoman modernization, engaging with Ussama Makdisi’s and Selim Deringil’s work to distinguish between reform efforts from earlier and later periods of the Tanzimat and the ways reformers positioned themselves vis-à-vis tradition and the past. Establishing these distinctions is crucial for understanding the different approaches to reform taken in the Ottoman East as compared with the Levant, North Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula.

⁷⁶ Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 20 and 81–87 Ussama Makdisi suggests the late Ottoman Empire saw a “great divergence” between the Arab provinces of the “Ottoman South” and the “Ottoman North,” the Balkans and Anatolia. As his work is more concerned with the former, he does not dwell on why history took the course that it did in Anatolia. This chapter can be read as addressing the question of why the Tanzimat project as articulated there was fraught.

⁷⁷ On how the first and second Ottoman Sultans, Osman I and Orhan enjoyed successful and lasting early expansion thanks to their openness to accepting Christian allies in a broader process of network-building, see Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 43–58; for an overview of the debates about the origins and rise of the Ottomans, see Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (SUNY Press, 2003), 5–13.

The second section looks at how the reforms in the Ottoman East aimed to structure, organize, and regulate the flexibility and hybridity found among its spiritually and linguistically diverse communities. Drawing on Sudipta Kaviraj's work concerning orality and flexibility in India, this section examines Anatolia's rich tradition of orally-performed songs and stories, foregrounding the hybrid cultures and vagabond canons it produced.

The third section examines a specific song, said have been sung by Alevi spiritual leaders in the Ottoman East, as an example of the markedly intimate cross-confessional practices observed between Armenians and Alevis there. It draws on Saba Mahmood's work concerning spiritual practice and subject formation to suggest that performances of shared belonging in the Ottoman East produced subjects for whom flexibility and ambiguity were not aberrations.

The fourth section examines reactions to the same song as well as other cross-confessional practices and spaces. Ottoman, Armenian, and Western observers reacted in remarkably similar ways when faced with porous and ill-defined communal boundaries. They searched in history to find when their communities, in their supposed ignorance, had corrupted their practices and languages by sharing with and borrowing from their neighbors. In response, reformers sought to re-create the purity they imagined to have existed in the deep past. To read against these reactions, this section draws on the method of genealogy put forth by Friedrich Nietzsche and further developed by Michel Foucault.

The fifth and final section turns to an important realm where the project of reviving purity from the deep past moved ahead, that of language. It follows discussions in the Ottoman and Armenian press about two of the region's most widespread print vernaculars, Turkish and Armenian. Reformers' reactions to borrowed vocabulary and grammatical structures mirrored their reactions toward inter-confessional practices. They turned to the deep past to identify

periods of greater purity and then they set about ordering, structuring, and organizing their languages to match them. Adopting Edward Said's distinction between *filiative* and *affiliative* relations, the section shows how the quest to dispel hybridity affected not only practices people performed but also a key medium for speech, thought, and print.

Together, these sections underscore how 19th century reformers of many kinds – Ottoman, Armenian, American, European – shared a method, or even a grammar, of reform. They searched in the deep past for pure origins, where they found the inspiration for systems that could organize imperial life in the present. In this frenzy to introduce “civilization” and save the empire from its doom, these reformers strove to segregate the hybridity that had come about through porous and ambiguous communal boundaries. Ironically (and tragically), these were the same flexibility and hybridity that Ottoman statesmen at the time and, centuries later, historians later would underscore as crucial to the empire's early success, rapid expansion, and successful management of its diverse ethnic and religious communities.⁷⁸ It was no coincidence, then, that it was only following this reform movement bent on restraining flexibility and hybridity that communal relations in later periods grew to be increasingly contentious, volatile, and violent.

The Time of Reform

In the first half of the 19th century, major shifts were taking place in Ottoman governance. In earlier periods, the Empire had expanded across Eurasia and North Africa, but by the 1800s, it was receding in the face of unruly vassals and powerful neighbors. The Ottomans had suffered a series of military defeats and a declining economic power relative to their imperial rivals like the

⁷⁸ “The founders of the Ottoman dynasty owed their first successes more to the justice and tolerance which they displayed than to the force of their arms.” For this, see Midhat Pasha, “The Past, Present, and Future of Turkey,” [second page, not numbered].

Romanovs, the Hapsburgs, the British, and the French.⁷⁹ This change of fortunes provoked a series of shifts all aimed at securing the Empire's future. Before the 19th century, a ruling paradigm of "religious subordination" managed the Empire's diverse faith groups: the dynasty, its officials, and its allies in the Islamic intelligentsia (*ulema*) were working to maintain an Islamic order that was already in place.⁸⁰ The center's version of orthodox Sunni Islam enjoyed supremacy, and imperial rule hinged on religious difference and toleration. Whenever groups questioned the supremacy of that Islamic order through dissent or uprisings, the Sublime Porte responded forcefully.⁸¹ Absent any direct challenges, however, the Empire showed a notable degree of tolerance toward many forms of Islam, even those deemed heterodox or heretical.⁸² Istanbul also showed flexibility and tolerance toward its enormous population of Christians and Jews, a behavior that enabled the Empire's rapid expansion.⁸³

Still, beginning in the late 18th century and through the 19th, military defeats and economic marginalization made the Empire's image of supremacy less tenable. By the 1800s, the Empire was not maintaining supremacy but struggling for survival. Although many authors have portrayed the Empire as backward, Oriental, and incapable of change, its rulers in fact drew up a series of energetic responses to shifting imperial power relations. The already-achieved Islamic order was transforming into one that sought not maintenance but modernization. In the old paradigm, officials and local notables were in the business of upholding an Ottoman Islamic

⁷⁹ For a thorough review of the debates surrounding Ottoman decline, see Sajdi, *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee*, 1–40.

⁸⁰ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 769 and 776.

⁸¹ Makdisi, 776.

⁸² Makdisi, 776.

⁸³ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 43–58; on how the concepts of justice, compassion, tolerance, solace (*adalet, insaf, hoşgörü, istimalet*) appeared in sources about early Ottoman conquests, see Necdet Öztürk, "Osmanlı Toplumunun İnşasındaki Temel İlkeler: Adalet, İnsaf, Hoşgörü, İstimâlet Kavramları [Foundational Principles in the Building of Ottoman Society: Justice, Compassion, Tolerance, Solace]," *Yeni Türkiye* 60 (2014): 1–6; Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, 5–13.

supremacy that already reigned, even if, at times, that supremacy was little more than a “polite fiction.”⁸⁴ A string of Sultans and statesmen overcame opposition and pressed forward with plans to re-organize the military, the tax system, and the bureaucracy. They also moved ahead with ambitious plans to selectively introduce popular representation and political equality. Decades before the 1860s abolition of chattel slavery in the United States or of serfdom in the Russian Empire, an Ottoman Sultanate decree in 1839 announced plans to provide juridical equality for a historically non-dominant group, its non-Muslim subjects.⁸⁵ That decree, the Edict of Gülhane, marked the beginning of what historians would refer to as the *Tanzimat* reform era (1839-76). The announcement acknowledged that the past century had transformed the empire’s former strength and prosperity into “weakness and poverty.” Still, the decree offered hope, suggesting that Tanzimat changes could reverse this trend “within five or ten years.”⁸⁶ There was a vital shift taking place, at least in official eyes.

Like their imperial rivals, the Ottomans also took up a civilizing mission and fashioned an ideal subject who reflected the ideals of a modernizing Ottoman and predominantly Turkish Muslim elite.⁸⁷ They also identified an Oriental foil to that ideal subject in peripheral areas, subjects whom the reform project sought to educate and civilize.⁸⁸ Some of them were said to lack civilization because of their ways of life, like nomadic communities often called “Arabs”

⁸⁴ Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 338–39.

⁸⁵ After describing rights and obligations regarding conscription, tax payment, property, and criminal trials, the document says, “The Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of our lofty Sultanate shall, without exception, enjoy our imperial concessions.” See Hurewitz, “The Gülhane Decree and the Beginning of the Tanzimat Reform Era in the Ottoman Empire, 1839”; for more on the decree and the reform process in general, see Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, 38–51; Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 137–38; Abu-Manneh, “The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript.”

⁸⁶ Translation by Halil İnalçık, from Hurewitz, “The Gülhane Decree and the Beginning of the Tanzimat Reform Era in the Ottoman Empire, 1839.”

⁸⁷ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 770.

⁸⁸ Deringil, “Nomadism and Savagery”; Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 770.

and “Kurds.”⁸⁹ Others were deemed to need reform because of their spiritual practices, and the Empire’s former toleration of inner-Islamic diversity morphed into a kind of civilizing mission.⁹⁰ Increasingly at the end of the 19th century, communities like Alevis and Yezidis became the targets of state-sponsored, missionary-like campaigns to align their beliefs with the center’s Sunni orthodoxy.⁹¹ Spiritual and economic uplift were expected to come hand-in-hand, as well. Re-aligning beliefs, officials believed, would lay the groundwork for obedient, productive cultivators who would contribute to the revenues and overall power of the empire.⁹² This was not the first time that an Istanbul-sponsored orthodoxy had disciplined those whom it deemed to be heterodox,⁹³ but this iteration had a slightly different goal in mind. Rather than subordinating the disobedient, it focused on molding them into educated and civilized communities who would contribute to a broader revival of the Empire.

How did Ottoman officials actually describe these reforms? Selim Deringil and Ussama Makdisi both foreground the language of civilization in official sources. Deringil’s work has examined sources from Anatolia and Arabic-speaking provinces in the Arabian Peninsula, Libya, and Yemen, especially during the reign of the autocratic Sultan Abdülhamid II (*r.* 1876-1909).

⁸⁹ Deringil, “Nomadism and Savagery”; Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (University of Washington Press, 2009); Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 61–62.

⁹⁰ For an excellent treatment of the issue of “heterodoxy” and of groups labeled as “heterodox” by central orthodoxies, see Markus Dressler, “How to Conceptualize Inner-Islamic Plurality/Difference: ‘Heterodoxy’ and ‘Syncretism’ in the Writings of Mehmet F. Köprülü (1890–1966),” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): 241–60.

⁹¹ Deringil, *Well-Protected*, 69–84.

⁹² Candan Badem and Mehmet Yıldırım, “Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde ‘Dersim Islahatı’ (1870-1913) [The ‘Dersim Reforms’ According to Documents of the Ottoman Archives],” in 2. *Uluslararası Tunceli (Dersim) Sempozyumu’nda Sunulan Bildiriler 20 – 22 Eylül 2013 [Presentations at the 2nd International Tunceli (Dersim) Symposium, 20-22 September 2013]* (Tunceli, Turkey: Tunceli University, 2014), 173–75.

⁹³ For earlier examples, see Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 164–96; Nir Shafir, “Moral Revolutions: The Politics of Piety in the Ottoman Empire Reimagined,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 3 (July 2019): 596–98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417519000185>; Butrus Abu-Manneh, “Between Heterodox and Sunni Orthodox Islam: The Bektāşi Order in the Nineteenth Century and Its Opponents,” *Turkish Historical Review* 8, no. 2 (November 7, 2017): 203–18, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18775462-00802004>; İlber Ortaylı, “The Policy of the Sublime-Porte towards Naqshbandīs and Other *Tarīqas* during the Tanzimat Period,” in *Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transactions 9 (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 89–100.

Deringil shows how Ottoman officials seeking to reform provincial subjects described them as “simple-minded” and lacking civilization.⁹⁴ Makdisi draws on similar examples from the Levant to identify a shift in the paradigm of imperial rule from “religious subordination” to “temporal subordination.”⁹⁵ He suggests the Ottomans went from maintaining an already-reigning Islamic supremacy to reforming and modernizing the backward subjects of its peripheral areas. As a result, officials began selecting people and places deemed to be stuck in the past and trying to bring them forward – with the rest of the Empire – into a reformed future.⁹⁶ To underscore this shift, he examines how Ottoman officials responded to communal violence in Mount Lebanon and Damascus. Although their responses to these violent episodes were different, the responses shared a key framing device: the contrast between a just, civilized Ottoman state and its pre-modern, fanatical, tribal subjects.⁹⁷

Still, while Ottoman officials may have dismissed nomadic and provincial communities as lacking civilization, their reform project did not attack the past wholesale. Many of them believed that the keys to civilization lay in the past. The revival of the empire’s glorious history, according to the 1839 Tanzimat decree, required a revival of its past adherence to the sharia and the Quran.⁹⁸ Even after the second Tanzimat decree in 1856, which did not mention Islamic law, official correspondence still called on the past for answers about how to reform the empire.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Deringil, *Well-Protected*, 41–42; Deringil, “Nomadism and Savagery,” 322–24 and 327–29.

⁹⁵ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 769.

⁹⁶ Thomas Kühn, “Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872-1919,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007): 315–18.

⁹⁷ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 781.

⁹⁸ In Abu-Manneh’s analysis, “The restoration of the rule of sharia and law in the state are seen as the best prescription for the restoration of the state’s strength and prosperity.” See Abu-Manneh, “The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript,” 195, and see also 197-98.

⁹⁹ On difference between the 1839 and 1856 Tanzimat decrees, see Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, 53–56; Makdisi suggests this later timing when he writes that “Ottoman Orientalism emerged in its own right during the last decades of Ottoman rule.” See Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 787.

While Makdisi and Deringil cite examples of officials condemning imperial subjects and their practices as backward, their solutions to these problems were also steeped in structures and hierarchies from the past.¹⁰⁰ In 1861, the aftermath of bloodshed between Christians and Druzes in Mount Lebanon and the massacres of Christians in Damascus, Ottoman and European officials established new political order. It is true that the new order condemned sectarian violence as an example of “a very old thing,” the people carrying out “an ancient struggle,” but the proposed solutions were no less old. The idea was to replace an existing class of tax collectors (sing. *muqataʿji*) with members of sectarian hierarchies. While it may have been new to confer ruling responsibilities onto these elites, that these people were selected demonstrated how the reform process was grounded in structures and hierarchies imagined to be age-old. Likewise, Deringil cites an 1885 memorandum by the Hijaz Governor Osman Nuri Pasha, which describes the need to “civilize” the Bedouin of that region, because their “savage old customs” were “against Sharia and modern laws” and would leave them “bereft of the legal structure that would ease their path to civilization.”¹⁰¹ The note targets Bedouin customs not because they were stuck in the past, but because they contradicted the “legal structure” that drove progress. Osman Nuri Pasha’s idea of civilization demanded structure, one that would come not only from “modern laws” but also from practices that conformed to Islamic legal systems like the sharia, imagined to be age-old.¹⁰² The memorandum shows how reformers did not condemn the past wholesale but relied on the past to create structures and guidelines for organizing the present.

¹⁰⁰ Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 152.

¹⁰¹ Translation from Deringil, “Nomadism and Savagery,” 327; for more on this source, Osman Nuri Pasha, and his views about sharia law in the Arabian Peninsula, see Selçuk Akşin Somel, “Osman Nuri Paşa’nın 17 Temmuz 1885 Tarihli Hicaz Raporu,” *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 18, no. 29 (May 1, 1996): 4–5.

¹⁰² The sharia was not a stable series of laws or codes, but part of the Ottoman reform process consisted of attempts to create a civil code based on it. In this way, the sharia was, starting in 1869, subjected to a different set “general principles and theoretical constructs” in the production of a civil code. It was known in Turkish *Mecelle*, published in 1876. On the sharia, its defenders, and its detractors, see Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 55–66.

This distinction – between condemning the past and drawing upon it – is not merely semantic. It is crucial for understanding the relationship between the reform process and broader social changes that took place during the same period. Faced with porous and ill-defined communal boundaries, reformers imagined systems that would rigidify and segregate the intermingled ways of life that they encountered. They wrote about the pure origins of their communities, and they lamented the ways provincial and nomadic subjects had deviated from those pure origins.¹⁰³ They searched in history for periods *before* the point when their communities, in their supposed ignorance, had corrupted their practices and languages with borrowings from their neighbors, and they sought to re-create the purity they imagined to have existed in the deep past. It was not that provincial subjects were stuck *in* the past as much as that they had deviated *from* the past. This valorization of imagined past purity was not limited to Ottoman officialdom, but, as the following sections will show, it was shared among Ottoman, Armenian, British, and American reformers. They all looked to history to inspire systems, rules, and structures that could organize and civilize Ottoman subjects.¹⁰⁴ This shared notion of reform precluded the idea that flexibility and hybridity could themselves play crucial roles in structuring and regulating communal relations.

Vagabond Canons

We can observe widespread attempts to organize communal life along the lines of imagined purities from the deep past in reactions to the oral and folk culture of the Ottoman East. There, songs, stories, and sacred rites – all important to daily life and piety of the region’s many

¹⁰³ On “philological mourning” and “auto-ethnography” among Ottoman Armenians in the 19th century, see Marc Nichanian, *Mourning Philology: Art and Religion at the Margins of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian and Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 37–38 and 48–55.

¹⁰⁴ In Arabic-speaking parts of the Empire, for example, Butrus al-Bustānī’s work in the early 19th century called for a revival of the Abbasid “golden age.” See Hannah Scott Deuchar, “‘Nahḍa’: Mapping a Keyword in Cultural Discourse,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 37 (2017): 55.

communities – relied more on oral rather than textual transmission.¹⁰⁵ Studying oral and folk culture is important precisely because it was not written down until recently. While that aspect leaves it with a relatively sparse archive (an issue taken up later), it also facilitated simultaneous flexibility and continuity. This section and the one that follows examine examples of songs, stories, and sacred spaces in the Ottoman East to show how orality provided a flexibility crucial to managing the region’s many communities. Then, in the fourth section, I will dwell on the reactions of reformers, who sought to define these ambiguous boundaries and police them.

In his work on language and identity-formation in modern India, Sudipta Kaviraj has highlighted how the oral aspects of language there were more emphasized than in parts of Europe, where written aspects of language had more priority.¹⁰⁶ In Europe, writing may have been seen as a way of preserving words for posterity, giving the words “a kind of material immortality,” but the opposite was true in India, where writing, recorded on physical media, subjected ideas to “decay and destruction.”¹⁰⁷ In the arena of sacred rites and practices, orality had the effect of creating a silent but powerful flexibility. Spiritual authorities could refrain from writing down important sacred practices and instead transmit them orally from generation to generation. Memory is an imperfect instrument for reduplication, but reliance upon memory was also productive of silent flexibility. It “fulfilled the historical need for flexibility within a

¹⁰⁵ For some notes on oral traditions among Armenians during the Ottoman and Soviet periods, see James R. Russell, “Preface,” in *An Armenian Epic The Heroes of Kasht (Kašti K’ajer)* (Ann Arbor, MI: Caravan Books, 2000), ix–xviii; on the role of orally recounted epic tales as historical sources in the works of Moses of Khoren (b. ca. 410) and Mikayel Chamchian (1738-1823), see Marc Nichanian, “Enlightenment and Historical Thought,” in *Enlightenment and Diaspora: The Armenian and Jewish Cases*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and David N. Myers (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 105–13; on oral traditions among Kurds, see Metin Yüksel, “Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia: The Survival and Revival of the Kurdish-Kurmanji Language in the Middle East, 1925–1960” (Ph.D., Chicago, IL, The University of Chicago, 2011), especially pp. 41-42.

¹⁰⁶ Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 129.

¹⁰⁷ Kaviraj, 130.

formally rigid structure in a subtle and partly covert fashion.”¹⁰⁸ Oral practices allowed the appearance of continuity to coexist with great but subtle flexibility. Kaviraj highlights how sacred rites could change across time and space. As a result, something that referred to itself as the “the eternal religion (*sanatana dharma*)” could actually “keep changing constantly.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, eschewing writing provided adaptability to practices and beliefs that were supposed to appear as a rigid, “eternal” set of religious practices.

In the Ottoman East we can find similar examples of quiet but powerful flexibility in spiritual and narrative traditions transmitted orally rather than textually. A prominent example of this was the story-telling tradition of the traveling musicians and performers (Tur. *âşık*, Arm. *ashugh*, Kur. *dengebêj*) who plied the Ottoman East and adjacent areas. In an 1893 article in *The American Journal of Folklore*, A.G. Seklemian, an Armenian from the village of Bitias (near Hatay, Turkey), wrote about story-telling in his region: “It was the custom for the villagers to assemble during the long and tedious winter evenings and recite tales.”¹¹⁰ Just as Kaviraj describes how spiritual practices could shift within a “considerable space for informal amendments,” so too did the stories and songs performed by Anatolian story-tellers change with various tellers.¹¹¹ Itinerant Sufi mystics, Seklemian wrote, changed the details of stories, “introducing polygamy” where there had been none in an Armenian story, or “substituting a tekya (Moslem convent) for the Armenian monastery, a Dervish for the Armenian monk, a muezzin for the Armenian sexton, etc.” Seklemian also underscored how continued oral

¹⁰⁸ Kaviraj, 132.

¹⁰⁹ Kaviraj, 132.

¹¹⁰ A.G. Seklemian, “The Youngest of the Three,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 6, no. 21 (1893): 150–52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/533310>; in collaboration with New England-based author, editor, feminist, and suffragist Alice Stone Blackwell, Seklemian would go on to publish a volume of Armenian folktales in English with considerable commentary. See A.G. Seklemian, *The Golden Maiden* (Cleveland, OH and New York: The Helman-Taylor Company, 1898), <http://archive.org/details/Seklemian1898ArmenianTales>.

¹¹¹ Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, 133.

transmission and a lack of texts created the space for changing details: “As the tales are not printed, the various story-tellers, in Oriental countries, qualify the details according to their abilities and descriptive powers, the plot being in all cases essentially the same.”¹¹² His description foregrounds the simultaneous flexibility and continuity of oral culture – it was at once constantly changing and “essentially the same.” Thanks to an absence of writing, details could change to suit the situation, the performer, or the audience.

This flexibility in song and story took place across languages, the boundaries of which were also quite fluid. It was not uncommon for people to know at least a smattering several of the region’s many languages and dialects, a multi-lingual milieu that was also productive of creoles (discussed later in the chapter).¹¹³ The Ottoman-born, Soviet Armenian ethnographer Gevorg Halachyan (1885-1966) wrote about the bilingualism around the provinces of Erzincan and Erzurum where he grew up. As a teacher there, writing about his experience as a teacher in a mixed school, he talks about teaching his Kurdish and Armenian students both languages, using the Armenian alphabet for teaching Kurdish.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere in Anatolia, the same alphabet was adapted to Turkish, and became the medium of a thriving print culture (and the first novel written in Turkish).¹¹⁵ Sharing languages also facilitated the movement of tales. Central figures of Armenian literature, education, and ethnography like Khachatur Abovyan (1809-48) and Karekin Srvandzians (1840-92) discussed how the communities of Kurds and Armenians concentrated in areas of the Ottoman East shared story-telling traditions. Since these rural areas

¹¹² Seklemian, “The Youngest of the Three.”

¹¹³ For occasional Armenian articles discussing Kurdophone Armenians and their linguistic creoles, see “K’rdakhōs Hayerē Ew K’iwrderēn Lezun [Kurdophone Armenians and the Language of Kurdish],” *Azadamard*, no. 520 (March 7, 1911): 1; see also “K’rtahayk’ [Kurdish-Armenians],” *Masis*, no. 2650 (July 1, 1880): 2.

¹¹⁴ Gevorg Halajyan, “Yerku Khosk’ [A Few Words],” *Hay Azgagrut’yun Ev Banahyusut’yun* 5 (1974).

¹¹⁵ For an introduction to the history of that language, Armeno-Turkish, see Murat Cankara, “Rethinking Ottoman Cross-Cultural Encounters: Turks and the Armenian Alphabet,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2014.951038>; the novel was Vartan Pasha, *Akabi Hik’ayēsi* (Istanbul: Miwhēndis Ōghlu T’abkhanēsi, 1851).

were “without writing,” Srvandztiants wrote, and since many Armenians spoke Kurdish, anyone interested in oral traditions among Armenians would need also to record the “substantial corpus” of Kurdish oral culture as well.¹¹⁶ While scholarship today may be divided between fields like Kurdish Studies and Armenian Studies, scholars at that time acknowledged that such divisions were untenable. Bilingualism and orality made them so, because a shared canon moved freely across porous linguistic boundaries.

The flexibility enabled through orality in Anatolian stories and folk songs raises provocative and entertaining questions about shifting details, especially when concerning taboo subjects like cross-confessional love. There is a popular Turkish folksong (Tur. *türkü*), still recorded today, called “Ahçik.” In one version, said to be from the Harput (Elazığ) region, a Muslim man pines over the loss of a beloved “Ahçik,” a Turkish pronunciation of the Armenian word *aghchig*, meaning maiden. Some sources have said the song is inspired by specific people, a man from Harput (Elazığ) named Mustafa and his Armenian beloved, whom he tried to convince to convert to Islam: “*Gel seni götürem, İslam eline* [Come, I’ll take you into Islam].”¹¹⁷ In one recorded version, however, the song steps back from the conversion narrative by changing the lyrics to “*Gel seni götürem Harput eline* [Come, I’ll take you into Harput].”¹¹⁸

If we take seriously the observations about orally-recounted stories shifting over time, we can imagine the song’s confessional or gender identifications shifting, as well. Taking into account how common it was for Ottoman subjects to know at least a smattering of multiple

¹¹⁶ Celilê Celil, “Bir Çift Söz [A Few Words],” in *Aşiq û Maşûq: Ermenice Kaynaklardan Kürt Ermeni Aşk Massalları [Love and Beloved: Kurdish Armenian Love Stories from Armenian Sources]*, ed. Rober Koptaş and Karin Karakaşlı, trans. Sarkis Seropyan (Istanbul: Aras, 2017), 14–15.

¹¹⁷ Fethiye Sert, “Elazığ Harput Türküleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme [A Study on the Folk Songs of Elazığ Harput],” *Ana Dili Eğitimi Dergisi* 5, no. 1 (January 30, 2017): 71, <https://doi.org/10.16916/aded.269425>; Fikret Memişoğlu, *Harput Âhengi [Music of Harput]* (Istanbul: Matbaa Teknisyenleri Basımevi, 1966), 76.

¹¹⁸ See 1:40-45 of Ulaş Kurtuluş Ünlü, Murat Aldemir, and Celal Bakar, “Ahçik,” Streaming Audio, Koro İle T.H.M. Ezgileri Halimiz Ahvalimiz, Vol. 7 (Metropol Müzik Üretim, 2001), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=193zdKcID74>.

languages, we could imagine an Armenian singer referring to a Muslim beloved as *aghchig* in a song otherwise sung in Turkish.¹¹⁹ In fact, we can find examples of shifting gender and confessional identifications in another story called “Ahçik,” performed as a folk dance in the Sivas region, just north of Harput. In that version, a presumably Muslim woman pines over a non-Muslim man called “Ahçik,” according to a 1988 interview from the region.¹²⁰ Perhaps the people there took the word *aghchig* to be a man’s name rather than the Armenian word for maiden. Or perhaps they *did* understand the word to mean “maiden” but preferred it that way. Even with more research, we cannot know what story the “original” song told, and even if we could, it would not change the varied ways performers and audiences understood it. What is evident, however, is the flexibility and ambiguity offered by orality. One understanding of “Ahçik” suggests the conversion narrative of a Muslim man attracting a non-Muslim woman to Islam, one not uncommon elsewhere in the empire.¹²¹ Yet, another tale by the same name opens new possibilities for understanding the plot. Small changes in the details subvert the conversion narrative in multiple ways. These shifting details, intentional and otherwise, continually transformed the story’s meaning, depending on the performer, audience, and place of the performance.

Other shifting details in the “Armenian girl song” show how slight changes, varied readings, and different performances could welcome very different interpretations of the same tale. The “Armenian girl song” is more explicit about ethno-religious identity than “Ahçik,”

¹¹⁹ For introductory information about the Armeno-Turkish language, Turkish printed with the Armenian alphabet (mostly) for Turcophone Armenians, as well as engagement with that language by prominent Ottoman intellectuals, see Cankara, “Rethinking Ottoman Cross-Cultural Encounters.”

¹²⁰ Erdoğan Önder, “Folklor Sosyolojisi Açısından Sivas Halayları [Folklore Sociological Perspectives on Sivas Folk Dances],” *Türklük Bilimi Araştırmaları*, no. 10 (February 1, 2001): 94–95.

¹²¹ Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 153–64; Marc Baer, “Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul,” *Gender & History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 425–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0953-5233.2004.00347.x>.

since it uses the Turkish word “*Ermeni*” to describe the beloved. The narrator repeatedly implores an Armenian beloved “to see reason” (*imana gel*) and convert to Islam, but she repeatedly refuses, declaring she will not convert (*Var git, İslamoğlu, dönmem dinine*). Still, by the last verse, she gives in.¹²² A change in the title of the song foregrounds the story’s upholding of a boundary between Muslims and Christians, a boundary that was critical for regulating Ottoman social, political, economic life.¹²³ In a version of the song published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture in 1999, the song is given the title “A Christian Girl’s Conversion to Islam.”¹²⁴ That title highlights the beloved’s change of religion and emphasizes the Christian-Muslim boundary by framing the song as a story about a Christian woman’s conversion to Islam.

The reading suggested by the title “A Christian Girl’s Conversion to Islam” masks an important subtext, however. As others like Mehmet Bayrak and Fuat Özdemir have pointed out, the beloved’s tone softens only in his last verse, when the lover reveals his name is Ali. Upon hearing his name, the beloved responds, “If your name is Ali, then I’ll convert to your religion.”¹²⁵ Bayrak and Özdemir argue that the name Ali suggests that the lover is an Alevi.¹²⁶ This subtext, if emphasized by the performer and/or understood by the listener, changes the meaning of the beloved’s conversion. It suggests that the conversion was not upholding the dominance of Muslims over Christians. Instead, it undermines that boundary, underscoring

¹²² Ahmet Şükrü Esen, *Anadolu Türküleri*, ed. Pertev Naili Boratav and Fuat Özdemir (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı [Turkish Republic Ministry of Culture], 1999), 49–51; Ali Ercan, *İmana Gel Gavurun Kızı [See Reason, Daughter of an Infidel]*, Streaming Audio (Hülya Plak, 1970).

¹²³ Everything from clothing to bathing could invite scrutiny. See Semerdjian, “Naked Anxiety”; Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 16–40.

¹²⁴ The songs were collected and published from the notebooks of Ahmet Şükrü Esen (1893-1944), a former Turkish Justice Ministry bureaucrat and parliamentarian who collected aspects of Anatolian folk culture between 1925 and his death in 1944. Referencing those papers could reveal what title, if any, he gave the song when he recorded it. Esen, *Anadolu Türküleri*, 1–2.

¹²⁵ Mehmet Bayrak, *Alevi-Bektaşî Edebiyatında Ermeni Âşıkları [Aşuğları] [Armenian Balladeers in Alevi-Bektaşî Literature]* (Ankara: Öz-Ge, 2005), 78–81.

¹²⁶ “Alevî” is a word that means “of Ali,” referring to the reverence for Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, that Alevis have in common with many Shia communities.

instead a fellowship between heretic Alevi and infidel Armenians. The song does not openly defy the Christian-Muslim boundary – the beloved converts, after all – but it need not. When compared with the version published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture in 1999, the subtext is clear. The published version did not call the song “An Armenian Girl Converts to Alevism.” It did not, I would argue, because such a title would foreground warm relations between infidel Armenians and heretical Alevis, subverting the boundary between an orthodox Sunni Islam and Christianity, and the dominance of the former over the latter. In these versions, we see how changing not even the song but simply its title could frame the narrative in very different ways.

Heretics and Infidels

Another song, said to be sung by Alevi spiritual leaders (*dede*) in the Dersim region (today’s Tunceli), provides a powerful example of a sacred song whose contents also eschewed a Christian-Muslim boundary for one that suggested a fellowship of heretics and infidels, the warm relations between non-Muslims and Muslims who ran afoul of the center’s orthodoxy. Before delving into the song, a few words are in order on the Alevis of Anatolia. Alevism confounds classification.¹²⁷ Before the mid-20th century, what people called “Alevi” consisted of a vast array of highly localized spiritual practices, many of them quite different and even conflictual. Alevis in Turkey were concentrated mostly in rural parts of southwestern, central, and eastern Anatolia, and they included speakers of Turkish, Kurmanji Kurdish, and Zaza.¹²⁸ Scholars have argued that Alevism contains influences from Shiism, forms of Islamic mysticism (especially

¹²⁷ In the 19th century, Alevis in the Ottoman East especially were referred to as *Kızılbaş* (“red-head” in Turkish), a reference to the distinctive red headgear that Alevi supporters of Shah Ismail wore during the Ottoman-Safavi conflicts of the 16th century. Today the term is considered pejorative, so I will use Alevism.

¹²⁸ Zaza, or Zazaki, is an Iranian language sometimes glossed as a type of “Kurdish” although, linguistically speaking, it is considered a “separate linguistic unit.” For more on the Zaza language and its speakers in the context of Kurdish studies, see Garnik Asatrian, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds,” *Iran & the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009): 5.

Bektashi Sufism), Central Asian shamanism, and expressions of Anatolian Christianity.¹²⁹ There are numerous contested categorizations of Alevis – one position groups Alevism with Sufism and Islamic mysticism, another position highlights the significant links with Shiism, and yet another argues that Alevism is separate from Islam altogether.¹³⁰ Religious rituals called *cem* are run by an officiant known as a *dede*, and music plays a central role.

The song discussed here was said to be sung by a *dede* around the areas formerly known as Dersim, a mountainous region of the central part of eastern Anatolia, nearby the source of the Tigris River. A version of this song was published in 1911, in the travel accounts of the British Vice-Consul at Van, Captain L. Molyneux-Seel. It tells the story of the Sunnis who were transporting the decapitated head of Hussein, son of Ali and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, who had been killed at the Battle of Karbala (680 C.E.). The event is widely seen as intensifying the divisions between Shia and Sunni Islam. While transporting the severed head of Hussein, this band of Sunnis stopped at the home of an Armenian priest named “Akh Mrtouza Keshish” (*keşiş* means “monk” in Turkish). The priest noticed something supernatural about severed head and wanted to keep it. His eldest son, knowing his father’s motive, volunteered to substitute his own head for Hussein’s. So, the Armenian Keshish beheaded his eldest son and offered the head to the murderers. They rejected it, so he tried the ruse again and again, beheading each of his five other sons. Still, the band of Sunnis rejected each of their heads in turn. Finally, before offering the head of the seventh son, the Keshish heard a voice that told him to smear some of Hussein’s blood on the head of his last son before offering it. The priest obeyed

¹²⁹ Kabir Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 69–74; Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 16–46; Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, “The Emergence of the Kızılbaş,” in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: The Life and Times of F. W. Hasluck, 1878 - 1920*, ed. David Shankland, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004).

¹³⁰ Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism*, 9; on shared histories and practices of Armenians and Alevis in eastern Anatolia, see Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 433–46.

and offered his last son's head. They accepted it, and the priest stashed the head of Hussein in his home. Shortly afterwards, the priest's only daughter entered the area where the head was stored and, in its place, she saw a golden plate filled with honey. Unable to resist, she had a taste, and then she, a virgin, became pregnant. When the priest confronted his daughter about her abrupt pregnancy, a flame flew from her nose and took the form of a child, who was Muhammed al-Baqir, the fifth Imam and son of Hussein.

This fantastic story, like those mentioned earlier, changed with its various tellers. The early twentieth century British classicist F.W. Hasluck mentions having heard the song's story, which also found its way into Armenian sources as well.¹³¹ In 1880, the Istanbul Armenian newspaper *Masis* published the travel writing of a B. Tatarian (*T'at'arean*), who describes a version of the same song. He also provides an Armenian translation of it, which he claimed a *dede* would movingly sing with tears in his eyes. The first part of this published translation maintains many key elements of the Molyneux-Seel version, including the Armenian priest and his seven beheaded sons saving the severed head of Hussein from disgrace. Still, it does not include the priest's virgin daughter or her giving birth to the fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir. Instead, the Sunni "infidels" (*k'eaqfirnerē*) return to the priest's home and imprison him. While sitting in his cell, the sixth imam, Jafer (the son of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir), visits the priest and brings a revelation: Jesus, Hasan, and Hussein would come and pass final judgment on the (Sunni) infidels with the help of the Prophet Muhammad, Ali (father of Hussein and nephew of the Prophet) and Hacı Bektaş, the eponym of the Bektashi Sufi order.¹³² The 1900 writings of an

¹³¹ F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 155. Hasluck cites the American missionary George W. Dunmore's 1857 piece about shared practices, but Hasluck seems to be citing Dunmore about similarities between Alevi/Kızılbaş and Christians in the region, since Dunmore does not mention the song in the piece. For a closer reading on Dunmore's work, see Karakaya-Stump, "The Emergence of the Kızılbaş."

¹³² P. T'at'arean, "Dersim," *Masis*, no. 2638 (June 17, 1880): 2–3; for a short introduction on the conflation of and relationship between Alevi, Bektaş, and Kızılbaş, see Albert Doja, "A Political History of Bektashim from Ottoman

Armenian traveler named Antranig, published in Tiflis (in the Russian Empire's Caucasus Viceroyalty, today Tbilisi), also included a copy of the translation that had been printed in *Masis* in 1880. Antranig also mentions the warm relations he observed between Armenians and Alevis.¹³³

This song represents an example of a spiritual practice that celebrated an Armenian-Alevi fellowship against Sunnis, Turks, and “infidels.”¹³⁴ It constitutes an example of what I would call a performance of shared belonging, which was enabled by the flexibility of oral practices. Following Saba Mahmood, I argue that spiritual practices like these can be read not only as outward expressions of inner belief, but also as embodied practices that shaped belief. Mahmood's work urges us to examine how practices could teach or transform ethical or political subjects.¹³⁵ Drawing on an Aristotelian idea taken up in recent decades by Michel Foucault and others, she argues that embodied practices are more than just reflections of an already-existing inner-self. Practice is also aspirational – it is a way of cultivating the desired contents of that inner-self.¹³⁶ Some may wear hijab to express an inner feeling of modesty, but others may wear a hijab in order to cultivate that inner feeling of modesty.

Here, I ask what sort of inner beliefs performing or listening to something like this *dede's* song might have cultivated within subjects of the Ottoman East. Like the some of the various

Anatolia to Contemporary Turkey,” *Journal of Church and State* 48 (2006): 423–52 and Irène Mèlikoff, “Bektashi/Kızılbaş: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences,” in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Ozdalga, and Catharina Raudvere (Routledge, 2005).

¹³³ Antranig, *Dersim Janabarhortut 'iwn Ew Deghekrut 'iwn [Dersim: Journey and Geography]* (Tbilisi: Arakadib Mn. Mardiroseants'i, 1900), 199–201.

¹³⁴ These three words are conflated in the above versions of the texts, highlighting the ambiguity of the concepts of Sunni, Turk, and “infidel” in the 19th century. For a brief discussion of the term “Turk” and the contemporary ambiguity it maintains between ethno-nationalism and legal citizenship, see Kabir Tambar, “Brotherhood in Dispossession: State Violence and the Ethics of Expectation in Turkey,” *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (February 10, 2016): 34–35, <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.1.03>.

¹³⁵ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 119–31.

¹³⁶ In Mahmood's words, the “kind of work one performs on oneself in order to realize a particular modality of being and personhood.” See Mahmood, 120.

readings of the “Armenian girl song” above, the song of the *dede* expresses a shared belonging between Armenians and Alevis. Some versions of it weave together venerated figures of both faiths, with Alevi-Bektashi figures like Hacı Bektaş, Ali, and the Twelve Imams working together with an Armenian priest and Jesus. In remote areas of the Ottoman East, in the absence of authorities invested in policing the boundaries between Christianity and Islam, and in the presence of those who drew on aspects of both faiths, performances of shared belonging like this song could have highlighted cohabitating communities’ shared origins and shared beliefs, rather than attempting to inscribe differences between them. They also could have been doing the work of cultivating feelings of shared belonging across various faith groups, whatever the intentions and interpretations of performers or audiences.

Still, without any more information about this song other than mentions of it in travelers’ observations, we can do little more than speculate. Indeed, as far as I know, there are few if any archives that record why, how often, or to whom such songs were performed. This lack of information is not a mere methodological obstacle or empirical setback. It tells us about how the kinds of stories within these songs did not have a place in the archives.¹³⁷ It also tells us about worlds in which this song was sung, where orality was just as powerful, if not more powerful, for transmitting narratives and sacred rites.¹³⁸ This example and those of songs and stories mentioned earlier demonstrate how supposedly rigid spiritual practices, not being written down,

¹³⁷ On folk and other non-archival sources as discussed in the context of India and Italy, see Gyanendra Pandey, “Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories,” in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 281–98; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, 11th ed. (New York: International, 1992), 53–55.

¹³⁸ For a more examples of stories shared between Armenians and Kurds in Anatolia translated into Turkish, Rober Koptaş and Karin Karakaşlı, eds., *Aşiq û Maşûq: Ermenice Kaynaklardan Kürt Ermeni Aşk Massalları [Love and Beloved: Kurdish Armenian Love Stories from Armenian Sources]*, trans. Sarkis Seropyan (Istanbul: Aras, 2017); for Armenian folktales collected in and published in the 1870s, see Karekin Srvandztiants, *Hamov Hodov*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Paris: Arax, 1949); Karekin Srvandztiants, *Hamov Hodov*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Paris: Arax, 1950); Karekin Srvandztiants, *Mananay* (Istanbul: Y.M. Dndesean, 1876).

could in fact change with time. In some areas, those changes facilitated ambiguous practices, beliefs, and even love stories that crossed a porous boundary between Christianity and Islam. The content of these stories and songs suggest that, at least in parts of Anatolia, a temporal openness and flexibility gave rise to a social and spiritual landscape that was not easily divided along the Christian-Muslim boundary that may have organized life in other areas.

Reactions and Origins

While the content of these songs and stories suggests how shared belonging could have been performed or understood in the Ottoman East, the reactions that these songs and stories provoked can tell us something else. They show how the authors, officials, and others traveling to the region during the 19th century saw hybridity as a source of suspicion and a problem to be solved by imagining singular origins and identifying where and how communities had deviated from them. Examining these reactions in the context of shared practices in the Ottoman East highlights how certain conceptions of history based on singular origins were interwoven into the fabric of the reforms meant to bring civilization to these areas and secure the Empire's future.

In their reactions to shared or hybrid practices, many observers responded with a search for origins. When confronted with practices like the *dede's* song, officials, travelers, and others who came upon them turned to history to explain the seeming dissonance they felt in the face of the observed harmony between Alevis and Armenians. They searched in the past to locate when and how groups like Alevis and Armenians came to share practice, belief, and belonging. To their minds, these groups were supposed to segregate along a Christian-Muslim boundary. They explained the anomaly by locating a past moment when the constituent groups supposedly mixed, a mongrel misstep that led to the hybridity they observed. These mixtures, in turn, became an explanation for their supposed ignorance or lack of civilization.

We can find an example of this in Captain Molyneux-Seel's reactions to the *dede*'s song. He framed the question of how such a song came about as one of "racial origin." He suggests that the song's existence indicates the "Christian origin" of the Alevi: "Proclaiming the great Imam Bakir to have been born of the daughter of an Armenian priest appears to be one which a race not of Christian origin would hardly have maintained." He also suggests that similarities in Alevi and Christian practices and beliefs were evidence that there had been in the past "a very thorough intermingling of Christians and Mohammedans, if in fact the two were separate races."¹³⁹ Likewise, when the American Protestant missionary George Dunmore visited the region of Dersim in the 1850s, the questions he raised concerned origins – whether people there were of "Christian stock," whether they were true or "nominal" Muslims.¹⁴⁰ In both cases, the authors confront what appears to them as a dissonance – Alevi showing deference and respect to their Christian neighbors – and their response is to question whether Alevi were not, in fact, of Christian "origin." To their minds, origins were pure, not mixed. In the presence of perceived hybridity, then, they turned to the past, when they imagined there were pure, constituent parts that had come together with "intermingling" to form that hybrid presence.

Shared sacred spaces, like spiritual practices and songs, also raised questions about the origins and original affiliations. Across former Ottoman lands, we can find historical and contemporary examples of communities of various creeds sharing sacred spaces and the practices and even beliefs that went with them.¹⁴¹ In the early 20th century, the British classicist F.W.

¹³⁹ L. Molyneux-Seel, "A Journey in Dersim," *The Geographical Journal* 44, no. 1 (July 1914): 49, 67.

¹⁴⁰ George W. Dunmore, "Kharpoot Letter from Mr. Dunmore, March 4, 1857," *The Missionary Herald* 53, no. 7 (July 1857): 216–20.

¹⁴¹ Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey, eds., "Religious Pluralism, Shared Sacred Sites, and the Ottoman Empire," in *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites: Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 51–52; for major debates, sources, and details about the sharing of sacred spaces in historical and contemporary periods, see Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds., *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, First Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 2–8; for a theory of "antagonistic tolerance" see Hayden, "Intersecting Religioscapes and

Hasluck traveled through Ottoman realms making notes of sacred spaces and practices. His work focused more on shared sacred spaces in the Balkans and western Anatolia, presenting dozens of examples from those regions. He also mentions cases farther to the east. These include anecdotes about Armenians visiting Sufi *tekkes* in Konya and Sivas and Muslims visiting churches in Ankara, Gümüşhane (Erzurum) and Kayseri, as well as various communities together venerating the spring of Abu Ishak in Erzurum.¹⁴²

The sharing of sacred practices, beliefs, and everyday life provoked suspicion from Armenian and Ottoman reformers who arrived to the Ottoman East in the 19th century. Armenian clergymen sent to the Ottoman East in the mid-19th century to survey the flock wrote displeased reports about the hybridities they observed among their co-religionists.¹⁴³ The Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate dispatched a clergyman named Boghos Natanian to regions of the Ottoman East in the late 1870s. He was charged with gathering information about the Armenian communities in the Ottoman East, including areas around Dersim. He noted how Alevis there would sometimes “go to Armenian monasteries, and sometimes they bring fruit and other gifts. At the same time, they also pray, and they respect the church as someplace sacred.”¹⁴⁴ In the case of a tribe of Alevis called the Hirani, their practices and belief resembled those of Armenians: they drank wine, and their women, like Christian women, walked freely, and when they spoke, they used Armenian words. They also had “rites like Christians as well. They do not go to the mosque to pray. They are separate from Turks in terms of race and religion [*ırk ve din*].”¹⁴⁵ Natanian’s

Antagonistic Tolerance,” 324; for a critical look at shared spaces in the Balkans and the sources used to study them, see Tijana Krstić, “The Ambiguous Politics of ‘Ambiguous Sanctuaries,’” in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: The Life and Times of F. W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*, ed. David Shankland, vol. 3 (İstanbul: Isis Press, 2013), 256–58.

¹⁴² Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:67, 105–7.

¹⁴³ Derderian, “The Image of Kurds, 1860s.”

¹⁴⁴ Arsen Yarman, ed., *Palu-Harput 1878: Çarsançak, Çemişgezek, Çapakçur, Erzincan, Hizan ve Civar Bölgeleri Raporlar*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Derlem, 2010), 150.

¹⁴⁵ Yarman, 2:148–49.

observations show how sacred spaces, languages, and daily life could be shared among members of purportedly different groups.

Natanian also wrote about a group of crypto-Christian Alevi who claimed they believed “in Jesus like Christians do They say they wait for the day they are saved from the hands of the Turks and freely live as Christians Whenever they see an Armenian priest, they show him great respect and kiss his hand.”¹⁴⁶ Natanian casts this flexibility as arising from their ignorance and lack of texts. “They don’t have prayer books. They accept everything their religious leaders say as a religious rule. That is, they lack well-founded religions.” Since spiritual practices were not as centered on texts in these regions, they enjoyed greater flexibility. But to Natanian, this flexibility had produced Alevi who were pliant before their leaders. They suffered from the “lack” of “well-founded religions.” This lack, he speculated, allowed their leaders to mislead them. Here, a hybrid presence provoked a search into the past to imagine the first moment of contact as a source of hybridity. Natanian questioned the origins of the Alevi of Dersim, and he suggested that they might be of Armenian descent: “If we said the majority of these people were of Armenian derivation, I doubt we would be mistaken Maybe these miserable people, with hardships and oppressions over time, and in their ignorance, were forced to change their languages, religions, and habits.”¹⁴⁷ His response to shared practices – his suggestion of “Armenian derivation” – shows how hybridity provoked recourse to origins and the deep past. Natanian, like Molyneux-Seel and Dunmore, reacted by assuming that those

¹⁴⁶ For early examples of similar observations from an American missionary, see Dunmore, “Kharpoot Letter from Mr. Dunmore, March 4, 1857.”

¹⁴⁷ “*Buyük kısmının Ermenilerden türediğini söylersek sanırım yanlış olmam. Çünkü aralarında kullanılan isimlerin çoğu ermenicedir. Özellikle de kadın isimleri, mesela; Maryam, Sırpuk, Markirit vs. Belki de bu zavallılar zamanında zorla, vey gördükleri eziyetler sonucu ya da cehaletten dillerini, dinlerini ve alışkanlıklarını değiştirmek zorunda kalmış olabilirler.*” Yarman, *Palu-Harput 1878 Raporlar*, 2:154–55.

exhibiting hybridity were once pure Armenians before their textless, poorly-founded religions had led them astray.

In a later period, the correspondence of Ottoman officials suggests how hybridity was seen as a threat to be reformed for the good of the Empire. In their assessments of how to reform Alevi-populated areas, these reports demonstrate an assumption that these groups with shared practices were suspect and, as Dunmore suggested, ripe for conversion. Under Sultan Abdülhamid II (*r.* 1876-1909), populations living in geographic peripheries and practicing forms of Islam deemed outside of the center's Sunni orthodoxy, Alevis or Yezidis for example, saw increased attempts to bring them into the orthodox fold. In 1890, the Ministry of Education received instructions to send Sunni preachers to the densely-Alevi Sivas province, a "recently increased" number of people there were following Alevism "as a result of their ignorance." It was necessary that they be "rescued from their ignorance and shown the high path of enlightenment through the appointment of preachers and distribution of religious tracts."¹⁴⁸ The correspondence casts hybridity as the result of ignorance, and suggests correcting that ignorance with religious texts and the dispatch of approved preachers.

In the 1890s, the Palace appointed a special officer, Şakir Pasha, along with the commander of the Fourth Army based nearby, Mehmed Zeki Pasha, to travel to Dersim and assess how to tame the unruly region. The two men co-wrote a report on the Alevis of Dersim in 1896, which shows that they saw the Alevis as ripe for a conversion project that would not only align their faith with that of the center but also pave the way for inducing them to settle, cultivate, and provide regular tax revenues for the treasury. In this and other reports, they too noted how the Alevis practiced a faith close to Shia Islam, and how they also maintained warm

¹⁴⁸ Deringil, *Well-Protected*, 82.

relations with Anatolian Christians. These relationships with other groups roused the officers' suspicions. To render these Alevi more obedient and more productive, they suggested that sheikhs of the conservative Nakşibendi Sufi brotherhood be sent to Dersim with clandestine links to the state. With Istanbul's resources, the Sheikhs would establish Sufi lodges and spread Sunnism among the people.¹⁴⁹ Dispelling spiritual hybridity, their report suggested, would also provide material benefits for the state. First the people would be made to see the light of Sunni Islam, and, "Afterward, the people would become accustomed to agriculture and labor, land would be distributed to poor, and their needs would decrease as they cultivated products like corn and potatoes Taxes would be organized and collected, and road construction could proceed."¹⁵⁰ Here, the Ottoman reports about Alevism suggest, like American Missionary Dunmore's reports, that Alevi were ripe for conversion. While Dunmore had seen opportunities to convert them to Protestantism, Ottoman officialdom saw opportunities to convert them to the center's orthodoxy with the dispatch of Nakşibendi sheikhs. Doing so, reports like these suggested, would render these hybrid and peripheral subjects more reliable and productive for Empire. Abolish hybridity, harness obedience, and reap the products – this is the vision of civilization the note expresses.

Paired with the reactions to shared practices and boundary-crossing above, this note shows how Ottoman officials along with European travelers and Armenian clergymen shared a vision of cross-confessional hybridities. They saw them as a question to be answered and a problem to be solved. The question was when and how a given community deviated from its supposedly pure origins, and the solution was to trace lineages into the past and recover that

¹⁴⁹ Badem and Yıldırım, "Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde 'Dersim Islahatı' (1870-1913) [The 'Dersim Reforms' According to Documents of the Ottoman Archives]," 173–74.

¹⁵⁰ Badem and Yıldırım, 173–74.

purity lost. These conceptions of community, purity, and the past were not unique to these authors writing about the Ottoman East. Many 19th century authors sought histories that would demonstrate “continuities of soil, language, and urban life,” what Michel Foucault called “antiquarian history” in his reading of Nietzsche.¹⁵¹ This sort of history was interested in tracing unbroken lines to singular origins in order to valorize the original communities they imagined: Armenians, Kurds, Turks, or whomever an author had in mind. Communities that could trace longer and more convincing lines to antiquity were often deemed more impressive.¹⁵² The reactions of the 19th century travelers, clergymen, and officials presented above suggest that these authors shared a similar search for unbroken lines.¹⁵³ That is why shared practices provoked their turn to the past. In the face of apparent hybridities that would question unbroken lines to singular origins, they told the history of shared practices as the history of practices that *had once* been pure but, over time, had been corrupted through ignorance and sharing. Hybridity represented a dangerous divergence from “the roots” or pure origins that these authors imagined.¹⁵⁴ To read against this kind of history, Nietzsche and Foucault after him have urged us to leave behind the search for singular origins with a method they call genealogy. Instead of tracing continuous lines to the past, genealogy underscores and even embraces the discontinuous and sometimes contradictory lines to the past, “a number of *diverse* lines of development.”¹⁵⁵

Foucault and Nietzsche were European authors writing about different times and places, but their

¹⁵¹ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Cornell University Press, 1980), 162.

¹⁵² For more on Nietzsche’s ideas of genealogy and history, see Raymond Geuss, *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4–5.

¹⁵³ For more on the early Turkish Republican discourses that instrumentalized Alevism as evidence of Turkish historical continuity and how those discourses were parallel to missionary discourses from the 1800s, see Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism*, 54–75.

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 142.

¹⁵⁵ Geuss, *Morality, Culture, and History*, 2–5; Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 162.

methodological distinction between history and genealogy is still useful for reading the reactions that hybrid practices provoked from officials, clergymen, and travelers in the Ottoman East.

The preceding sections have set out to demonstrate how reform in the Ottoman East during the Tanzimat was less about “temporal subordination” than it was about drawing on the past to concoct systems and boundaries for organizing collective life in the present. Hybridity came to be seen as the antithesis of modernity, since it indicated that communities had strayed from their supposedly pure origins. The Ottoman, Armenian, and Western reactions above did not condemn shared practices and spaces as being stuck in the past as much as they did for their flexibility, fluidity, and deviation from the past. To these authors, people in the Ottoman East had lost the proper way of doing things through their flexible and oral practices, their lack of texts, and their co-mingling in shared spaces. True to the name of the Tanzimat, derived from *nizam*, “order,” reformers responded with attempts at ordering, organizing, and regulating. Theirs was a conception of civilization that rejected these shared songs, stories, and sacred spaces, instead aiming to organize collective life more neatly into the constituent groups they imagined.

A methodological note is in order about the value and the limits of the sources cited in this section. Studying the dismissive reactions in extant sources can be valuable for examining 19th century Ottoman reforms, because they can foreground this widely held notion that sharing and hybridity were evidence of ignorance, deviation, and, ultimately, a lack of civilization. That notion is important because it highlights the widely held logic of the Ottoman reforms, which relied on imagined origins from the deep past to create systems that could organize present peoples and, ideally, lead to a prosperous future. Reading these sources against the grain also gives us room to make inferences about the flexibility and fluidity of collective life in remoter regions of Ottoman realms, areas poorly policed by central orthodoxies. Since many sources

across several languages express similar views, we can speculate that shared practices and hybridity were fairly widespread.

Still, work on shared stories, songs, and sacred spaces presents a serious methodological challenge, because it is difficult to understand these shared practices on their own terms. We lack sources on where, why, and how often they came about, because oral practices, shared spaces, and their participants in the Ottoman East seldom left texts behind for future historians to read. There is also the issue of Anatolia's extreme history of violence, expulsion, and genocide, whose resulting destruction of life brought with it the annihilation of potential sources.¹⁵⁶ The authors who did create and disseminate texts about shared practices were the Ottoman officials, Armenian clergymen, and Western travelers mentioned above. And it was likewise their texts that have been preserved in the archives, libraries, and collections that are accessible today. Since many of the sources that might tell us about shared practices on their own terms either do not exist or have not been preserved, we are limited to brief glimpses of these "contact zones" in the Ottoman East by reading them through "imperial eyes."¹⁵⁷

Mary Louis Pratt borrows the term "contact zone" from linguistics to describe areas of the colonized Caribbean where indigenous and imperial subjects came into contact to exchange language, practice, and belief. While these exchanges took place under the coercive structures of colonial empires, they were still productive of what we could call linguistic, cultural, and spiritual creoles.¹⁵⁸ Linguists mark the shift from pidgin to creole when a community of native speakers emerges. What would the history of the Ottoman East look like if it were conceptualized not as place of ignorant hybridity but of one rich with spiritual, cultural, and

¹⁵⁶ Cora, Derderian, and Sipahi, *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century*, 4–5; Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 27–28.

¹⁵⁷ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 6–7.

¹⁵⁸ Pratt, 6.

linguistic creoles? These sets of historically co-mingled practices had native practitioners, and it is not farfetched to think that some of them grew up not only indifferent but also oblivious to the purported boundaries dividing their languages, practices, and beliefs. Still, the Ottoman, Armenian, and Western writers cited above conflated reform and civilization with the segregation of these creole practices. Given that theirs make up the bulk of extant sources, we have but short glimpses of this creole world, and only those limited to their perspectives.

The next section turns to how the Tanzimat brought similar attempts to disentangle creole aspects of languages spoken in the Ottoman East. Language reform went hand-in-hand with the broader reform project, and, indeed, many of the authors and institutions cited above worked toward reforming both practice and language. Their responses to linguistic hybridity matched the approach they brought to shared practices. Contemporary vernaculars had deviated from their true origins, they said, because people had introduced foreign elements into their original languages and grammars. Like shared practices, vernacular languages also needed to be organized along the lines of systems and grammars with links to the deep past.

Mongrel and Mother Tongues

The previous sections examined how orality and intermingling of communities had produced flexibility and hybridity in the daily and spiritual practices of the Ottoman East, and how the 19th century Ottoman reforms sought to organize, regulate, and order that hybridity and flexibility. Powerful and wealthy institutions supporting different visions of “reform” – Ottoman state, Armenian Church, and American Mission – sent their agents to the region to civilize people there, and civilization meant organizing collective life along the boundaries of supposedly pure and singular origins. In addition to their shared conflation of civilization and purity, these institutions also shared a belief that education was the panacea to the ills of backwardness.

Spreading literacy would facilitate the spread of scientific knowledge, which in turn would halt the empire's decline. Educating people required print vernaculars, however, so that the knowledge of modern sciences could spread quickly. Reformers of different stripes envisioned the formation of print vernaculars that would facilitate education and progress among Turkish- and Armenian-speakers. The guidelines for the print vernaculars they sought to create were parallel to the guidelines they found to dispel shared practices. The method for finding those guidelines was also parallel, as it entailed searching in the deep past to trace singular origins.

Preceding the Tanzimat reforms, vernacular languages were already being taken up across Eurasia as objects of intellectual inquiry and administrative communication. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, vernacular grammars appeared in so many places that one scholar has dubbed the period a “vernacular revolution.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, texts about vernacular language systems appeared in published and manuscript forms discussing German, Russian, and Urdu. The polyglot Ottoman Empire was no exception: vernacular grammars appeared in Greek, Armenian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Turkish, Kurdish, and Albanian.¹⁶⁰

Throughout the Empire, sounds, words, and phrases – much like the songs and stories above – wandered like vagabonds across the tongues of Ottoman subjects, circulating, combining, and re-combining with other sounds, words, and phrases. Linguistic reform plans arose to restrain the cacophony of hybridity. Reformers re-framed linguistic flexibility as corruption, and to correct it, they imagined pure versions of their languages from the distant past.

¹⁵⁹ Michiel Leezenberg, “The Vernacular Revolution: Reclaiming Early Modern Grammatical Traditions in the Ottoman Empire,” *History of Humanities* 1, no. 2 (September 1, 2016): 251–75, <https://doi.org/10.1086/687919>.

¹⁶⁰ Why vernacular languages were taken up as objects of study and government across the globe is still up for debate. Leezenberg rejects the argument that it was the result of dissemination, since the chronology of the publication of vernacular grammars does not accord with that theory. He also rejects that it was the result of the rise and spread of new colonial empires, because, he argues, in the 17th and 18th centuries, such empires were still unevenly established and had not come to exert heavy influences on intellectual currents. Still, he does not offer his own causal mechanism, suggesting that for now it “defies historical explanation.” See Leezenberg, 272–72.

They held up these imagined ancestral tongues as models for organizing the contemporary vernacular. For the Ottoman East, their visions meant changes for two of region's most widely-spoken languages: Turkish and Armenian.¹⁶¹

As the language of the administration, Ottoman Turkish attracted much attention from reformers in the imperial capital. They drafted statements and founded institutions around the goal of spreading modern scientific knowledge to a larger Ottoman Turkish-speaking audience, and to accomplish that dissemination, they said, the Ottoman language needed to become easier to learn and read. Sultan Mahmud II (*r.* 1808-39) took an initial step in the direction of establishing Ottoman grammatical standards by ordering the publication of a commentary on a treatise about syntax written by Ali Kuşçu (*d.* 1474, 879 *hicri*), a 15th century Transoxanian scholar.¹⁶² Mahmud II turned not to contemporary scholars or his own *ulema* (much to their displeasure), but to a scholar from Central Asia who had written centuries earlier.¹⁶³ The Sultan, apparently, preferred looking to the past. His choice of a Central Asian author also foreshadowed linguistic developments to come. Other reformers would also search in the distant past and in

¹⁶¹ Developments in these two languages also shared aspects of those taking place in Kurmanji Kurdish – another of the most-widely spoken languages in the Ottoman East. Still, given the slightly later development of changes in Kurmanji, the different approaches to hybridity, and Kurmanji's different position vis-à-vis other dialects (or languages) that are also called "Kurdish," this chapter will leave them aside for future researchers to pursue. On the linguistic classifications of Kurmanji, Sorani, Gurani, and other languages referred to under the umbrella of Kurdish, see Garnik Asatrian, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds," *Iran & the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009): 4–6. According to Philip Kreyenbroek, "From a linguistic, or at least grammatical point of view, however, Sorani and Kurmanji differ as much from each other as English and German, and it would seem more appropriate to refer to them as 'languages.'" See Philip G. Kreyenbroek, "On the Kurdish Language," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (New York: Routledge, 1992), 55, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203993415-6>. On Ottoman era Kurdish language reformers, see Janet Klein, "Proverbial Nationalism: Proverbs in Kurdish Nationalist Discourse of the Late Ottoman Period," *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 14, no. 1/2 (2000): 7–11; see also Kamal Soleimani, *Islam and Competing Nationalisms in the Middle East, 1876-1926* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 119–20, 178, 221–22. On Kurmanji in education and Islam, as well as its relationship to Arabic, see Yüksel, "Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia," 183.

¹⁶² His full name was Kuşçu-zâde 'Alâ'uddin Ebü'l-Kâsım 'Ali b. Muhammed. On Ali Kuşçu's linguistic works, see Musa Yıldız, "Ali Kuşçu'nun *Risâle Fi'l-İsti'âre*'si [Ali Kuşçu's *Treatise on Borrowing*]," *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 3 (1999): 215–34.

¹⁶³ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 203.

places of mythical origins – for Turks, Central Asia – for insights about how to order their disorderly languages.

Attempts to write a new Ottoman grammar began in the decades after the throne passed onto Mahmud II's successor Abdülmecid I (*r.* 1839-61). In 1850, an Ottoman Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Encümen-i Daniş*) was formed, and it included many key figures of the *Tanzimat* reform era (1839-76): the Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha, the chief religious authority (*Şeyhülislam*) Arif Hikmet Bey, and others who would go on to play prominent roles in the Ottoman government, like Ali Pasha, Fuad Pasha, and Cevdet Pasha.¹⁶⁴ The Academy's founding statutes outlined goals that included spreading "civilization," which required the spread of "diverse kinds of knowledge." The statutes dismissed contemporary Ottoman, whose "abstract terminology" concealed the pearls of "the ocean of science."¹⁶⁵ To recover these pearls, the Academy promoted "a single style and fitted to the needs of popular intelligence," which would be used for publishing of scientific works.

What changes did they envision to suit the minds of the masses? The work of two major *Tanzimat* authors and statesmen, Cevdet Pasha and Fuad Pasha, provides some indications, since they were assigned to write the book on Ottoman grammar, *Kavaid-i Osmaniye (Ottoman Grammar)*.¹⁶⁶ The text's introduction outlined how difficulties learning Ottoman arose because "the foundational principles of Arabic and Farsi" had entered Turkish. This made Ottoman different from other languages, which were "based on an accumulation of ancient languages" that were the "mother" of their present forms, like Arabic. Ottoman, on the other hand, had

¹⁶⁴ Mardin, 226–28.

¹⁶⁵ Mardin, 226–27; this division of the world between concrete knowledge and "abstract terminology" is akin to the distinction that Timothy Mitchell outlines in Egypt, where the division of the world into "physical reality" and its more abstract "representation" became crucial for colonial power there. For his summary of this point, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1988), xii–xiii.

¹⁶⁶ Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 226.

strayed from its mother language: “Our Turkish language is originally a branch of Chagatai [*Çağtay*], which is a language of quite orderly rules and principles.”¹⁶⁷ The text highlights how Ottoman had strayed from its “orderly” mother tongue by adopting words, phrases, grammatical principles from foreign languages.¹⁶⁸ In this way, the text highlights the contrast between kinship with Chagatai and separation from Arabic and Persian.

Edward Said’s distinction between *filiative* and *affiliative* relations works well to read these contrasting relationships. Said compares *filiation*, the “linear, biologically grounded process, that which ties children to their parents,” with *affiliation*, the “creeds, philosophies, and visions re-assembling the world in new non-familial ways.”¹⁶⁹ Cevdet and Fuad characterize Arabic as a language that had maintained its *filiative* ties with its “ancestor,” or “mother” languages. Ottoman, on the other hand, had developed *affiliative* ties with other languages and “re-assembling” pieces of those languages into a hybridized Turkish. The result, Cevdet and Fuad wrote, was that learning Ottoman was “disorderly” (*na-mazbut*) and “quite difficult” (*hayli düşvar*).¹⁷⁰ By highlighting Ottoman’s deviation from its “mother,” Chagatai, Fuad and Cevdet’s grammar blamed their language’s difficulties on its *affiliation* with Arabic and Persian. The text thus provides details about what language reform – and the broader reform process – actually sought: the identification of linear, vertical paths into the deep past where original systems could

¹⁶⁷ Mehmed Fuad Pasha and Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, *Kavaid-i Osmaniye [Ottoman Grammar]* (Matbaa-ı Medaris-i Mısriye [Schools of Egypt Publishing], 1874), 2–3, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015024708482>.

¹⁶⁸ Mehmed Fuad Pasha and Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, *Kavaid-i Osmaniye [Ottoman Grammar]*. “Yalnız müfredat alınıb kavaid ve usul-ı terkibiye alınmamışdır.”

¹⁶⁹ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Morningside (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), xiii.

¹⁷⁰ Mehmed Fuad Pasha and Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, *Kavaid-i Osmaniye [Ottoman Grammar]* (Matbaa-ı Medaris-i Mısriye [Schools of Egypt Publishing], 1874), 2–3, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015024708482>. “Osmani’de ise Arabi ve Farsi’den alınan kelimeler temellik olunmayarak şive-i aslıları ile istimal olduğundan başka Arabi ve Farsinin baz-ı usul terkibiyesi dahi alınmış olduğundan gerek elfaz ve luğâtı ve gerek kavaidi cihetiyle üç lisandan yani Arabi ve Farsi ve Türki’den mürrekeb olmağla.”

be unearthed. For Ottoman Turkish, this meant searching for *filiation* with Chagatai’s “orderly principles” to dismiss the centuries of *affiliation*, or horizontal ties, with Arabic and Persian.

We can find similar views about Ottoman Turkish’s relationship to Arabic and Persian expressed in the press, as well. A major Ottoman political and literary figure of the same generation, Ziya Pasha, wrote about the Ottoman language in a journal he edited with fellow literary luminary Namık Kemal called *Hürriyet (Freedom)*.¹⁷¹ In an 1868 article called “*Şiir ve İnşa*” (“Poetry and Prose”), Ziya Pasha dismissed as derivative poems composed by Ottoman poets of the 15th and 16th centuries. He said they created “a mongrel thing” (*melez bir şey*) through their imitation of Arabic and Iranian poetry.¹⁷² This dismissal echoed the views expressed by the Imperial Academy and *Kavaid-i Osmaniye*, insofar as Ottoman’s *affiliation* with Arabic and Persian presented a problem.¹⁷³ Ziya Pasha describes such poetry as a deviation from Ottoman’s “natural state” (*hal-ı tabiisinden*), and he underscores the importance of maintaining consistent patterns from the past. “If a nation’s language [*milletin bir lisanı*] is not held constant,” then it would deteriorate and people would “follow whatever they please.”¹⁷⁴ Just as *Kavaid-i Osmaniye* condemned deviation from a “mother” language that resulted in “disorder,” so too did Ziya Pasha’s article condemn deviations from the language’s “natural

¹⁷¹ His given name was Abdülhamid Ziyaeddin, but he used the pseudonym Ziya Pasha.

¹⁷² Ziya Pasha, “*Şiir ve İnşaat*,” *Hürriyet*, no. 11 (September 7, 1868): 4–7; for a transcription, see İsmail Hikmet Ertaylan, *Ziya Paşa: Hayatı ve Eserleri [Ziya Pasha: His Life and Works]* (Istanbul: Kaanat Kütüphanesi, 1932), 159. “*Zira görülüyor ki bu nazımlarda Osmanlı şaireleri şuarayı İrana ve şuarayı İran dahi Arablara taklid ile melez bir şey yapılmıştır.*”

¹⁷³ Worthy of note is how Ziya Pasha’s writing draws on this “mongrel” aspect of Ottoman to enhance the contrast it draws between Ottoman and non-Ottoman poets. The text uses Turkish linguistic forms to describe “Ottoman poets” (*Osmanlı şairleri*), with a Turkish plural ending (*-ler*) and the Turkish possessive construction. To describe Iranian poets (*şuara-yı İran*), the text uses an Arabic plural form (*şuara*) and the Persian possessive construction (*-yı*). By using Turkish linguistic forms for the “Ottoman poets” and Arabic and Persian forms to describe non-Ottoman poets, the text underscores the linguistic boundary Ziya Pasha is trying to enforce. Perhaps the author intentionally employed these different constructions and word forms to demonstrate the potential confusion that could arise from Ottoman’s hybridity. Ironically, however, the language of the text also underlines how Ottoman’s hybridity offered creative ways to communicate. In this case, Ziya Pasha author could draw subtle contrasts using a repertoire of Turkish, Persian, and Arabic structures.

¹⁷⁴ Ziya Pasha, “*Şiir ve İnşaat*,” 5.

state,” which he suggested would have a similar effect. These authors all appealed to the importance of a stronger vertical, linear relationship to parent languages considered to be the pure origins of Turkish. The language’s historical ties to the deep past would provide the organizing principles for creating a modern print vernacular. Horizontal, affiliative relations with Arabic and Persian had caused confusion, and adherence to older, filial ties was the antidote. Whether it was songs and stories or words and phrases, the deep past held systems to organize, order, and regulate the disorder of hybridity.

These Ottoman reformers were not alone in highlighting the spread of knowledge and the favoring of “mother” over “mongrel” tongues. During the same period, debates about the Armenian vernacular gave rise to similar claims about how the vernacular should disseminate scientific knowledge. These conversations featured depictions of a fallen mongrel vernacular and the need to model reforms on its imagined mother languages. In 19th century texts published for Ottoman Armenian readers, authors also emphasized the importance of spreading knowledge among a mass audience. By that point, Armenians within and outside the Ottoman Empire had already been debating whether Classical Armenian should continue to predominate or whether a print vernacular could be created.¹⁷⁵ The prospect of creating one was daunting, because Armenian publishing was a multi-sited arena. It stretched from presses in India run by Esfahan’s Armenian émigrés, to Venice, where the Armenian Catholic Mkhitarist brotherhood ran a prolific press on the island of San Lazzaro.¹⁷⁶ In the 19th century, Istanbul and Tbilisi also

¹⁷⁵ Nichanian, *Mourning Philology*, 42.

¹⁷⁶ For more on the Mkhitarists of Venice and publishers in Madras, as well, see Nichanian, “Enlightenment and Historical Thought,” 94–96.

became centers of Ottoman- and Russian-Armenian printing, contributing to a global Armenian press with multiple registers, dialects, and conventions.¹⁷⁷

Armenian printers also shared with the Ottoman authors cited above their valorization of vertical, *filial* ties to mother languages from the past.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the preface of an Armenian hand dictionary (*ardzern pargirk*) published by the Mkhitarists in 1846 foregrounded its aim to encourage “the enlightenment of the Armenian multitude” by spreading knowledge of “the patrimonial language” (*hayreni parparoyñ*).¹⁷⁹ Qualifying Armenian as the “patrimonial” (*hayreni*) language underscores this *filiative* relation, similar to the Ottoman reformers’ references to “mother” tongues. This *filial* theme appears in other Armenian texts, which linked the language to an imagined Armenian “fatherland” around Mount Ararat and a mythical progenitor of the Armenian people, their mythical progenitor and “great patriarch,” Noah.¹⁸⁰ References to the “patrimonial” language, the “fatherland,” and the “great patriarch,” all underscore the linear parent-child relation that was to be maintained. This paternal motif is important because it became a way to dismiss “foreign” or *affiliative* linguistic elements. Instead, authors emphasized the “patrimonial” aspects of the vernacular.

We can find these sentiments toward foreign tongues in the press run by Armenians in Van, one of the most densely-Armenian areas of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸¹ The journal, *Eagle of*

¹⁷⁷ On Tbilisi, Istanbul, and Venice, see Nichanian, *Mourning Philology*, 42; on the late eighteenth century Armenian publications of Madras founded by émigrés of the Armenian colony of New Julfa in Esfahan, see Sebouh Aslanian, “From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: Circulation and the Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa/Isfahan, 1605-1747” (Ph.D., New York, Columbia University, 2007), 376–409.

¹⁷⁸ Marc Nichanian has shown how the Mkhitarists sought to spread knowledge to empower Ottoman Armenians, their belief that “Enlightenment, the propagation of knowledge, and contact with Europe could be instruments of emancipation.” See Nichanian, “Enlightenment and Historical Thought,” 96.

¹⁷⁹ Mgrdich’ Avkerian, *Ardzern Pararan Haygaznean Lezui [Portable Dictionary of the Armenian Language]* (Venice: Dbarani Srpayn Ghazaru, 1846), [not numbered, see preface].

¹⁸⁰ Kapriēli Avedik’ian, Khach’adroy Siwrmēlian, and Mgrdich’ Avkerian, *Nor Paṙkirk’ Haygazean Lezui* (Venice: Dbarani Srpayn Ghazaru, 1836); Srvandziantz, *Mananay*, 6.

¹⁸¹ Census data in the Ottoman Empire is a fraught topic. For an excellent treatment during the 19th century, see Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question (1878-1918)* (Transaction, 2011); in any case, Van was one of the few districts where even government census data indicated that Armenians

Vasburagan (*Arzui Vasburagan*), was printed in 1855-64 at Varak monastery just outside of Van on Mount Erek (Arm. *Varaka Ler*). It was started by Mkrditch Khrimian (1820-1907), a native son, charismatic lecturer, and recently-ordained celibate priest.¹⁸² *Eagle of Vasburagan's* first issue included a piece called “On Classical and Vernacular Language [*Krapar ew Ashkharhapar Lezuin Vray*],” in which an unsigned author ardently defends and praises Classical Armenian, calling it “sweeter and more satisfying” than the vernacular. The piece emphasized the importance of preserving *filial* links to classical forms and avoiding the foreign *affiliative* aspects of the vernacular. The article chastised contemporary Armenian writers as “polyglots” who would “easily slip into the styles of European or Turkish languages.” Texts with foreign flourishes did not impress the author, who likened them to “a foolish bird decorating itself with foreign feathers.” Contemporary authors, the article said, sullied Armenian’s “elegant appearance” with “foreign dyes.” Those who translated Classical Armenian, on the other hand, used only “natural Armenian colors.”¹⁸³ By targeting the “foreign,” namely “Turkish and European languages,” the article echoes the sentiments of Ottoman reformers against *affiliation*. Even the concepts deployed were parallel: Ziya Pasha’s article advocated for a return to Turkish’s “natural state,” and this author for “natural Armenian colors.” For both languages, reformers advocated for stricter linguistic boundaries based on *filiation*. This would halt or reverse the trend of their mother tongues becoming mongrel tongues.

These prescriptions about language were also intended to change the ways people spoke.

We can find an early example of such intentions in the work of Hagop Baronian (1843-91), a

outnumbered Muslims. See Kemal H. Karpat, “Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82–1893,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 2 (May 1978): 237–74, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800000088>.

¹⁸² Khrimian would later become the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul (1869–73) and Catholicos of All Armenians (1892-1907).

¹⁸³ “Krapar Ew Ashkharhapar Lezuin Vray [On Classical and Vernacular Language],” *Arzui Vasburagan* 1, no. 1 (June 1855): 13.

notable Istanbul-based satirical author, playwright, and educator. In 1876-78, he published a children’s edition of his periodical, *Theater (T’adron Paregam Mangants’)*.¹⁸⁴ The first issue’s preface outlined the paper’s goals to teach history, language, and literature. It also made clear the periodical’s intentions to alter word choice: “There are many among you who use words that are unsuitable for a learned child for the Armenian words that you do not know. . . . It is a great shame for an Armenian lad when, not knowing the Armenian *senyag* [“room”], he says *odayin* [Tur. “room”].”¹⁸⁵ This article and those in later issues continued to provide Armeno-Turkish notes for words in Armenian that might have been unfamiliar.¹⁸⁶ By highlighting the use of Turkish words as “a great shame” and “unsuitable,” and by providing Armenian substitutes, the text shows Baronian’s desire to alter this co-mingling of Turkish and Armenian words on the tongues of young Armenians.¹⁸⁷ His children’s magazine shows how language reforms aspired not only to change print guidelines but also to change daily speech practices. The periodical also shows how the systems for transforming language were to be found through *filial* links to pure origins: replacing the Turkish words with Armenian counterparts and thereby enforcing boundaries between native and foreign elements.

Reformers’ reactions to the hybridities of languages paralleled their reactions to the hybridities of shared stories, songs, and spaces. A widely held logic of reform applied to both.

¹⁸⁴ The journal ran from 1876-78. For more on it, see Kevork Bardakjian, “Hagop Baronian’s Political and Social Satire” (Oxford, UK, Oxford University, St. Anthony’s College, 1978), 14–15. For more on Baronian generally, this dissertation is an excellent English-language resource.

¹⁸⁵ Hagop Baronian, “Gosdantnubōlis [Constantinople],” *T’adron Paregam Mangants’ [Theater: Children’s Edition]* 1, no. 2 (January 1, 1876): 2.

¹⁸⁶ For example, in the second issue’s article on Istanbul, he used the Armenian word for bridge (*gamurch*) but provides a note with the Turkish word in Armenian characters (*köprü*, “քուրիի”). See Baronian, “Gosdantnubōlis [Constantinople].”

¹⁸⁷ This seemed to be the case in Izmir, as well. For Elias Riggs, who was based in Izmir from 1838 to 1853, the co-mingling of Armenian and Turkish caused him enough confusion that he created a dictionary of Turkish, Greek, and other loan words that he encountered in the process of learning Armenian but could not find in Armenian lexicons. See Elias Riggs, *A Vocabulary of Words Used in Modern Armenian But Not Found in the Ancient Armenian Lexicons* (Izmir: W. Griffitt, 1847).

That logic did not condemn hybridity as being stuck in the past, but condemned it as a deviation from pure origins. Songs and stories had morphed because performers and audiences had not adhered to “original texts.” Prayer and practice among Alevi had become hybridized because they “lacked prayer books” and therefore “well-founded religions.” Ottoman authors had deviated from the “orderly” principles of their “mother tongues,” and Armenian authors were no better, foolish birds decorated with “foreign feathers.” In all of these examples, reform relied on an imagined pure origin that would yield systems for organizing, ordering, and regulating the lives of imperial subjects. It is this shared vision, this chapter argues, that explains why the reforms of the Tanzimat brought with them a powerful impetus to segregate and define communities, languages, and practices and uphold boundaries among them. The antidote to “mongrel” languages and practices would be the “ancestor,” “patrimonial,” or “mother” languages and practices these reformers imagined. This was the grammar of reform.

Foolish Birds, Modern Feathers

The purity of deep origins presented a powerful imaginary, but implementing it brought great difficulty. Cutting off foreign influences did not make vernaculars simpler or more intuitive, and the process of creating a modern Turkish separate from Ottoman in the half of the 20th century shows this.¹⁸⁸ Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, the government debated language reform policies that aimed to simplify Ottoman Turkish through the Romanization of the script and elimination of “foreign” words, phrases, and structures. The movement produced a language that initially confounded its listeners. In 1934, the president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, gave a

¹⁸⁸ For overviews of the Turkish language reforms of the early Republic, see İlker Aytürk, “The First Episode of Language Reform in Republican Turkey: The Language Council from 1926 to 1931,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18, no. 3 (July 2008): 275–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186308008511>; İlker Aytürk, “Politics and Language Reform in Turkey: The ‘Academy’ Debate,” *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* 98 (2008): 13–30; and Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

speech in the newly-concocted language, and it was scarcely understood by the audience (or even the speaker): “the ‘revolutionized Turkish’ was as unintelligible to the man on the street as the high Ottoman language once had been.”¹⁸⁹ Purity was not intuitive or simple. Only after much research, coercive re-education, and top-down disciplinary action was a modern Turkish forged, shorn of its many Arabic and Persian elements. Purity was not pure, either. Even the invented modern Turkish adopted elements, consciously, from foreign languages like French.¹⁹⁰

In 1922-24, the Armenian language, too, underwent a series of reforms intended to simplify language learning and literacy. The Soviet Union had rolled out language reforms based on the principle “to write the way one speaks,” changing not only officially-sanctioned spellings but also morphology and syntax.¹⁹¹ Similar to the Turkish experience, the initial attempts to purify and simplify Armenian brought with them a host of complexities. In 1940, a second set of reforms was introduced to modify some of the perceived faults of the first reforms. In the end, at least some Armenians claimed the reforms had resulted in a “heavy burden,” since the changes drove a wedge between what would become the two major vernacular dialects spoken today, Eastern Armenian (spoken in former Russian and Iranian domains) and Western Armenian (spoken in former Ottoman domains).¹⁹² These examples are not to dismiss the ways that Armenian and Turkish language reforms may have, eventually, simplified the process of learning these languages by systematizing grammar. Rather, these examples show how the goal of recreating the supposed “purity” of the deep past was fraught. Tracing filial lines back to the

¹⁸⁹ Aytürk, “Politics and Language Reform in Turkey,” 17.

¹⁹⁰ When the language reform project searched for a Turkic adjectival suffix to replace the Persian suffix (-î) but was unable to, it settled on introducing a French suffix, instead, *-sel*. Those striving to create a “pure” Turkish, unable to find what they needed in Central Asia and unable to stomach the idea of maintaining Persian or Arabic, turned to French, instead. See Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, 101.

¹⁹¹ A closer comparison of these reform projects would provide more nuanced contrasts. For more on the Armenian language reform (in English), Irina Marchesini, “Russian (1917-1918) and Armenian (1922) Orthographic Reforms: Assessing the Russian Influence on Modern Armenian Language,” *Studi Slavistici* xvi (2017): 171–73.

¹⁹² Marchesini, 171–73.

“ancestor” or “patrimonial” languages did not in practice provide clear guidelines for creating simplicity or eliminating perceived hybridities. Instead, it created confusion and introduced new elements from other foreign languages. Languages that had mingled so closely for so long would not be not easily segregated.

Whatever the results of these linguistic reforms, that the efforts were ever carried to fruition demonstrates the force of the widely shared belief that purity had existed once in the past and needed to be revived. It was against this pure imaginary that shared practices could be judged as corrupt. As a result, hybridity could be conflated with ignorance, as reformers sought to segregate communities along the clearly demarcated ethnic and religious lines that they imagined to have existed in the deep past. The widespread impetus to segregate the empire into discrete constituent communities would have grave consequences for communal relations and the forms of politics practiced in later periods. The next chapter turns to the roles of Ottoman spiritual and political authorities in effecting these visions of reform in the Ottoman East. With resources and political authority from Istanbul invested in their projects, they founded and revitalized institutions in the Ottoman East like schools, monasteries, Sufi lodges, churches and mosques. As they spread, these agents of reform blended spiritual and state authority to preach faith in the *Tanzimat*, and in so doing, spread their corresponding visions of well-defined and less porous boundaries between Christians and Muslims or Armenians, Kurds, and Turks.

Chapter 2: Faith in the State

Partners in Reform and Resistance

This chapter follows how the Ottoman Palace and Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul expanded their authority into the Ottoman East during the *Tanzimat* reform era (1839 to 1876). I borrow the term Ottoman East to refer to areas south of the Black Sea, north of the Levant, and east of Ankara, areas that today are called Eastern Anatolia, (Western) Armenia, and (Northern) Kurdistan.¹⁹³ Reforms in these regions gained momentum following the promulgation of the 1839 Gülhane Edict (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerif*). This decree announced reforms under three headings: securing “life, honor, and property,” establishing a uniform tax system, and implementing military conscription for the new army (*nizamiye*).¹⁹⁴ These changes would intensify Istanbul’s direct control over provincial revenues, lives, and political appointments.

The Gülhane Edict was one step in a broader move toward concentrating more decision-making power in Istanbul during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. During the rule of Selim III (*r.* 1789-1807) and his nephew Sultan Mahmud II (*r.* 1808-39), the Palace worked to create a new army of peasant conscripts (*Nizam-ı Cedid*) and embarked on a series of centralizing reforms. In 1839, Sultan Abdülmecid I and his Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha issued the Gülhane Edict. The document has inspired much analysis and debate,¹⁹⁵ but for the provinces, the provisions on re-organizations of administration and taxation are crucial, since these declared the government’s intentions to intensify its direct control over revenue channels and armed

¹⁹³ Cora, Derderian, and Sipahi, *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century*, 1–2.

¹⁹⁴ The text quoted here is from Halil İnalcık’s translation in Hurewitz, “The Gülhane Decree and the Beginning of the Tanzimat Reform Era in the Ottoman Empire, 1839.”

¹⁹⁵ Roderic H. Davison, “Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 59, no. 4 (July 1, 1954): 847, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1845120>; Abu-Manneh, “The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript.”

forces. The government sought to eliminate customary and autonomous regimes and appoint its own officials to each province. These included Istanbul appointees to carry out the reorganization of land ownership, conscription, and tax collection. Revenues derived from land were the bedrock of Ottoman economic life, and changes to land ownership announced in an 1858 caused significant upheaval subsequent decades across the empire.¹⁹⁶ From the Balkans to Egypt, these reforms precipitated major transformations in economic and well as social relations.

Still, the execution of reforms varied from place to place. In the Ottoman East, key aspects like direct taxation and conscription for a regular army faced the obstacle of reticent Kurdish emirs (Kur. *mir*, pl. *miran*). These emirs presided over tribal confederations across what is now eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and northern Syria and included Botan (Bokhti), Baban, and Soran. Prior to the 1830s, the Kurdish emirs of the Ottoman East had been nearly independent, except for some powers they ceded to Istanbul like the appointment of Islamic jurists (*kadi*) and some dues they allowed Istanbul to collect on local products. Their dynasties had ruled the region since at least the Ottoman-Safavid Wars (1523-1639), when key families joined the Ottomans against the Safavids and, in return, secured for themselves significant autonomy and privileges. They taxed their sedentary subjects and negotiated relations with confederations of nomadic tribes.¹⁹⁷ Emirs also played a crucial role in mediating conflicts

¹⁹⁶ Although intended to empower small-holders, the new land laws in practice had uneven effects. In some areas, small-holders and communal holdings continued or were established, but in others, local notables enlarged and consolidated their land holdings. As I will discuss later in this section, the Ottoman East seems to have seen much more of the latter. For more on the land reforms during this period, see İnalçık and Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:871; Martha Mundy, "Village Authority and the Legal Order of Property (the Southern Hawran, 1876-1922)," in *New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East*, ed. Roger Owen and Martin P. Bunton (Harvard CMES, 2000); Martha Mundy and Richard Saumarez Smith, *Governing Property, Making the Modern State: Law, Administration and Production in Ottoman Syria* (I.B.Tauris, 2007), especially 68-73.

¹⁹⁷ Martin Van Bruinessen, "The Ottoman Conquest of Diyarbekir and the Administrative Organization of the Province in the 16th and 17th Centuries," in *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbekir*, ed. Hendrik Boeschoten and Martin Van Bruinessen (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 26.

between local tribal and other factions, preventing violence and, importantly for the Ottomans, putting a stop to any disorder that might invite interventions from across the Iranian border.¹⁹⁸

Alongside the emirs, a cross-confessional patchwork of autonomous authorities ruled the Ottoman East. Sharing their power were Armenian, Syriac Christian, and Kurdish notables, dynasts, and tribal leaders, who continued to rule smaller areas within these regions. For instance, “Among the chief pillars of the self-government of the *Pashalik* of Mush [Muş] were the Kurdish *derebeys* [literally “valley lords”] and the Armenian princes [Arm. *ishkhan*] of Sasun and Khuyt, who had never seen a Turk until modern times,” according to Arshak Safrastian (b. Van 1886, d. London 1958), a Van Armenian who became a Dragoman for the British consulate in Bitlis in the 1910s.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, near Hakkari, the East Syrian Patriarch of Qudshanis presided over a confederation of Christian tribes who were often mistaken for Kurds.²⁰⁰

While not always friendly, relations were intimate among Armenian, Kurdish, Syriac Christians (or Assyrians), and others. They formed alliances, entertained each other, and maintained close relations. Boghos Melikian, a priest of the Armenian Aghtamar Catholicosate located on an island in Lake Van, maintained such intimate relations with the Haydaranlı tribe’s leaders that locals gave him the epithet of “sheikh with an Armenian name” (*hayanun sheykh*).²⁰¹ One of the tribe’s leaders, Ali Ağa, reportedly addressed Melikian in Armenian as “my father” (*hayr im*), and in return Melikian addressed him in Kurmanji Kurdish as “my heart” (*dilê min*)

¹⁹⁸ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 229–30; Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian*, 51–85; Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 57–61.

¹⁹⁹ These areas also included Armenian and Kurdish hereditary families in Kars, Doğubeyazıt, Erzurum, Erzincan, Bitlis, and Muş at various points since the 16th century. See Arshak Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Harvill Press, 1948), 47–48; for some of Safrastian’s personal details, see W. E. D. Allen, “Arshak Safrastian,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (New Series)* 91, no. 1–2 (April 1959): 93–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0035869X0011812X>.

²⁰⁰ Adam H. Becker, *Revival and Reawakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 57.

²⁰¹ Antaramian, “In Subversive Service of the Sublime State,” 131–37.

and “my son” (*kurê min*). According to a notable Armenian abbot at Muş, Karekin Srvandztiants, theirs was “an authentic father-son relationship.”²⁰² Intimate though that relationship may have seemed, these anecdotes should not imply that sectarian relations were always warm: outbreaks of sectarian violence occurred periodically, as when an 1840s dispute over tribute payments escalated to Kurdish tribes massacring Syriac Christians. Neither should these intimate cross-sectarian relationships paint rosy pictures of either figure: both Melikian and members of the Haydaranlı tribe featured extensively in reports of extortion and murder. Instead, these examples suggest that, preceding the Tanzimat, ethnic or sectarian difference did not inhibit the formation of intimate cross-confessional relationships among provincial notables in the Ottoman East.

By the 1830s, Ottoman forces had already begun banishing provincial notables who resisted relinquishing their privileges.²⁰³ During the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War (1839-1841), incursions into the Ottoman East paused, but by the mid-1840s they had restarted.²⁰⁴ The Palace deployed its newly-formed, German-trained conscript army to defeat resisting provincial forces with considerable success.²⁰⁵ In correspondence between Ottoman governors (*vali*) and the Grand Vizier during this period, there are ample descriptions of the regular army crushing provincial forces, even when outnumbered.²⁰⁶ Overpowered militarily, notables who refused to

²⁰² *Ambastanut 'iwn Vanay Pōghos Vardapetin Vray* (Istanbul, 1874), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015041471213>; I was directed to this source by Richard Antaramian's dissertation, which offers an excellent section on Melikian. See Antaramian, “In Subversive Service of the Sublime State,” 131–32.

²⁰³ Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse University Press, 2006), 54–55.

²⁰⁴ Cabir Doğan, “Bedirhan Bey İsyanı: Tanzimat'ın Diyarbakır ve Çevresinde Uygulanmasına Karşı Bir Tepki Hareketi [The Bedirhan Bey Rebellion: A Reactionary Movement Against the Implementation of the Tanzimat in Diyarbakır Province],” *Journal of Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences* 12, no. 2 (2010): 18–22.

²⁰⁵ For some observations from a German officer who worked with the Ottomans in Kurdistan, see Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 53, note 2.

²⁰⁶ For examples, see CDA, İ.MSM 50/1266, 4, 17 Apr 1847 / 1 Cemaziyelevvel, Vali of Baghdad Mahmud Necib Pasha to Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha: “*Bir de mir-i merkum her nekadar cemiyetli bulunsa dahi avn-ı bari ve kuvve-i kahire hazret-i şehiyariyle asakir-i nizamiye ile mukavemete muktedir olamayacağını merhum Reşid Pasha zamanında tecrübesi münasebetiyle* [However many troops the Mir has, he cannot resist the power of the Nizamiye troops, as he has experienced with Reşid Pasha].” See also İ.MSM 50/1266, 6/2, 9 May 1847 / 23 Cemaziyelevvel

relinquish their privileges were disempowered and exiled, removing the figures whose personal ties had stitched together this cross-confessional patchwork of autonomous areas.²⁰⁷

As is still the case today, however, military victory does not always translate to popular compliance with a new regime. In the Ottoman East, provincial notables had collected taxes and raised armed forces for centuries. In their absence, how did the Istanbul-based institutions convince provincial subjects to comply with the Tanzimat reorganizations of taxation and conscription? How did forces based in Istanbul cultivate faith in their Tanzimat state-building project? This chapter examines how religious brotherhoods, both Christian and Muslim, played key roles in expanding Tanzimat reforms into the Ottoman East, and how, in the process of carrying out these reforms, these brotherhoods also tried to reorganize politics along the ethno-confessional boundaries they envisioned. They accomplished this maintaining a blurry boundary between the Ottoman Palace and the will of God, on one hand, and cultivating more rigid boundaries among the regions ethnic and religious groups.

As emirs and princely families faced disempowerment and banishment, both the Palace and the Armenian Patriarchate cultivated faith in their authority and state-building project through members of religious brotherhoods. Ottoman governors appointed to the region maintained close ties to influential sheikhs to spread support for the reform project and keep the

1263, Vali of Erzurum to Grand Vizier, “*Altı tabur asakir-i nizamiye ile bir kuta top istisvab ederek karye-i mezbureye vusulunde binden mütecaviz suvari ve piyade ekrad mukavemet tab-aver-ı taharri olamayarak* [He gathered six Nizamiye units and an artillery piece and when they arrived, more than 1000 Kurdish infantry and cavalry could not resist].”

²⁰⁷ For example, at Lice, in the mountains between Diyarbakır and Muş, Sultan Mahmud II dispatched forces to the region in the 1830s under the command of a former Grand Vizier (r. 1829-33) and experienced general, Reşid Mehmed Paşa, then serving as governor of Sivas. After Reşid Paşa died of cholera in 1836, the Vali of Diyarbakır, Çerkes Hafız Paşa continued the campaign. See Suavi Aydın and Jelle Verheij, “Kaynayan Kazan: Diyarbakır Vilayetinde Etnik-Dini Gruplar, Yerel Güçler ve Osmanlı Devleti Üzerine Birkaç Not (1800-1870),” in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbakır, 1870-1915*, ed. Jelle Verheij and Joost Jongerden (Brill, 2012), 32–34; for a more detailed narrative of the dismantling of Kurdish emirates in the 1830s and after, see Michael Eppel, “The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations on Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (March 1, 2008): 237–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200701874883>.

peace between feuding tribes.²⁰⁸ At the same time, the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate appointed clergymen to impose the Patriarchate's decisions on autonomous priestly brotherhoods and cultivate faith in the Tanzimat state among provincial Armenians. In 1860, the Patriarchate promulgated an Armenian National Constitution (Arm. *Azkayin Sahmantrut'awn Hayots'*, Ott. *Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyan*), a document whose first words are a claim to its continuity with the Tanzimat.²⁰⁹ In 1863, the Palace issued its approval of the document, and clergymen were dispatched to the provinces to begin setting up the systems of rule it imagined. These Palace and Patriarchate appointees blended appeals to the Sultan's authority and their own authority as holy men to convince provincial subjects to obey the Sultan and believe in the benefits of reform. In the process, these Istanbul-supported proxies also worked to define and uphold the ethno-confessional boundaries that their religious brotherhoods represented.

A number of scholars have used social networks to visualize changing power relations in autonomous areas of the empire. Karen Barkey's model of early Ottoman imperial power describes the structure of Ottoman power as a hub-and-spoke without a wheel. The Palace arranged itself as the central node in a network of relations in the Empire, like the center of a wheel and its spokes. If one spoke wanted to relate the others, that relationship was mediated through the Palace.²¹⁰ This sort of tie was "vertical" because provincial notables had to appeal upward to the authority of a superior. By positioning themselves as the central node in a vast network of spokes detached from each other, the Ottomans cemented their political authority, acting as a middleman or broker for important relationships among provincial notables. This model sustained the dynasty's power as long as the hub-and-spoke remained without a "wheel."

²⁰⁸ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 227–43.

²⁰⁹ The document opens, "According to the order of the Imperial Reform Edict," (Ott. "*İslihat Ferman-ı Alisi hükmünce*," and Arm. "*Paregargkut'eants' verapereal Gayseragan hrovardagë bahanchē*").

²¹⁰ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 28–65.

That is, it worked as long as the various peripheral actors did not develop their own relationships, independent of the central hub. If such relations developed to evade the brokerage of the Palace, then these deeper “horizontal” ties could facilitate coalitions that, with their combined power, might effectively resist the Palace’s authority.²¹¹

Similar to Barkey, Martin Van Bruinessen visualizes changing imperial power structures through networks, though his work focuses on how imperial bureaucracy during the Tanzimat penetrated networks of tribal power among predominantly Kurdish tribes in the Ottoman East. Prior to the reforms, the Sultan’s appointees interacted with an emir, who in turn presided over a loose confederation of tribal chiefs (*ağa*). By 1851, the government had replaced the last of the emirs with its own governors and, with time, Ottoman bureaucrats penetrated into increasingly local positions. At first provincial governors replaced the emirs, the very top of the hierarchy, but then district governors came to replace the middling positions of local tribal leaders. Yet, Kurdish emirs commanded the respect of multiple tribes, forming their own provincial hub-and-spoke power structure without a Palace intermediary.²¹² These sets of dense ties in the provinces formed something akin to Barkey’s “wheel.” Replacing emirs with provincial governors atomized tribes, fostering vertical ties and separating them into “spokes.”

Like Van Bruinessen, Richard Antaramian examines the Ottoman East during the Tanzimat, but instead of Kurdish tribal power, he focuses on relations between Armenian provincial notables and the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate.²¹³ Antaramian draws on Barkey’s model to describe how the Patriarchate, like the Palace, was trying to break up autonomous priestly brotherhoods in Van, Cilicia, and Jerusalem. The dense relations among them, as well as

²¹¹ Barkey, 28–65.

²¹² Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 192–96.

²¹³ Antaramian, “In Subversive Service of the Sublime State,” 7–8 and 118–22.

between them and tribal leaders, allowed these provincial priestly brotherhoods to maintain their autonomy. They appointed their own bishops without the Istanbul Patriarchate's approval, and they claimed shares of local revenues. In this way Van Bruinessen and Antaramian tell similar stories to Barkey's about the Tanzimat in the Ottoman East: it relied on the exiling or disempowering locally-connected notables and replacing them with loyal, vertically-integrated proxies.

These models provide useful metaphors for visualizing how the Tanzimat rearranged power relations in the Ottoman East, but what was the basis of these vertical "ties"? How did the Palace and Patriarchate vertically re-organize them? This chapter examines the spiritual authorities that both the Porte and Patriarch relied on to carry out the reforms they envisioned. Each invested authority and resources in religious brotherhoods of sheikhs and clergymen. Sultanic orders, claims to local revenues, and grants from the treasury not only connected these holy men to Istanbul but also empowered them to build sacred spaces, educational institutions, and loyal followings. The process was one of simultaneous boundary-making and boundary-breaking. On one hand, empowering members of these brotherhoods brought the empowerment of forces engaged in boundary-making projects. They sought to define and police ethnic and religious boundaries. As discussed in Chapter 1, this was a region filled with Christians, Muslims, and myriad communities who defied or straddled the boundaries across these divides. Shared rituals, practices, and beliefs could be found across different localities, defying easy divisions between Christian and Muslim or Armenian and Kurd. The priests and sheikhs conscripted to the project of reform worked to enforce boundaries whenever they found such sharing, casting it as the result of a dangerous ignorance. Taking up two examples of these brotherhoods, Armenian Apostolic priests and Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikhs, this chapter shows

how members of these spiritual brotherhoods, whether they claimed the mantle of Islam or Christianity, shared ideas about the purity held in the deep past. Members of these spiritual brotherhoods decried shared practices, beliefs, and languages wherever they encountered them, and they sought to introduce ways to police the ethnic and religious boundaries they envisioned, like those between Muslim and Christian or Armenian and Kurd. To their minds, Zaza songs had no place in Armenian funerals, and Armenians had no place in Nakşibendi spiritual ceremonies.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first examines the political ascent of the Nakşibendi-Halidi Sufi brotherhood and its influential sheikhs in the Ottoman East. The second focuses on the correspondence of a member of that brotherhood, Hayreddin Pasha, who was appointed to the governorship of Diyarbakır province during the key year of 1847, when Ottoman forces were trying to remove the head of the influential Kurdish dynasty and leader of the powerful Botan emirate, Bedirhan Bey. Hayreddin Pasha blended spiritual and political authority to convince Nakşibendi sheikhs in Botan to abandon Bedirhan Bey and pledge obedience to the Sultan. The third section looks at how the Armenian Patriarchate supported the Palace's efforts to expand its rule in 1847, and how, similar to the Palace, the Patriarchate relied on spiritual authorities to preach acceptance of an expanding Sublime State. In 1847, the Patriarchate called on the region's prelates to rally Armenians in support of the campaign against Bedirhan Bey, and its clergymen later wrote about how Armenians took up arms and embraced the promises of Istanbul's increasing presence. Finally, the fourth section examines how these changes empowered sheikhs and clergymen alike to enact their visions of well-defined communal boundaries. It examines how these holy men sought to segregate shared practices, spaces, and beliefs, attacking them as dangerous signs of ignorance. The actions of at least a handful of sheikhs provoked tensions between Christians and Muslims. At the same time,

Armenian clergymen sent to the region to support the reform project also sought to define and uphold spiritual and linguistic boundaries between Armenians and their neighbors. Together, these sections show how the advent of the Tanzimat in the Ottoman East empowered forces that relied on a blurred boundary between the authority of God and the Ottoman dynasty, one hand, and increasingly rigid boundaries between ethnic and religious communities. In this way, the processes that the reform project triggered gave rise to a political arena increasingly defined by communal divides.

The Sublime State and the Nakşibendi-Halidi Brotherhood, 1811-47

How did the authorities in Istanbul establish their authority over autonomous Kurdish emirates in their Iranian and Russian borderlands, an area that had for centuries been run by local dynasties presiding over tribal confederations? And once the old regime had been swept away, how did Istanbul authorities come to collect taxes, conscript soldiers, and enforce their rule? Past studies of the Ottoman East have convincingly shown that, after the removal of the last major Kurdish emirs in 1847, the two most widespread Sufi brotherhoods in the region, the Nakşibendi and Kadiri (Ar. *Naqshbandī* and *Qādirī*), participated in trans-tribal organization as well as occasional rebellions. These works all describe a similar chronology: the Ottoman army dismantled the Kurdish emirates of northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey, like Botan (1847) and Baban (1851). Starting in the 1850s, Sufi sheikhs, and especially those of the Nakşibendi-Halidi (Ar. *Naqshbandī-Khālidi*) and Kadiri brotherhoods, came to fill some of the roles the ex-Emirs used to play: mediating tribal conflicts, facilitating revenue extraction, and assisting in conscription.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 210; Itzhak Weismann, *The Naqshbandīyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (Routledge, 2007), 86; Garo Sasuni, *Kürt Ulusal Hareketleri ve 15. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Ermeni Kürt İlişkileri* (Istanbul: Med Yayınevi, 1992), 141–42.

This section offers a revised chronology. While dismantling the Kurdish emirates created a power vacuum and facilitated the growing authority of Sufi sheikhs, these holy men were powerful not only after but also before and during the dismantling of the Kurdish emirates. This revision may seem minor, but it is in fact crucial for understanding the overlapping nature of three seemingly discrete forces: the Ottoman state, Kurdish emirs, and Sufi sheikhs.²¹⁵ Presuming the existence of a coherent agency called the state is problematic, not the least because the concept of the state has shifted greatly over time and because political theorists still debate shifting meanings and multiple definitions (see Chapter 4).²¹⁶ What is more, key powerholders in the Ottoman East during this period were people who embodied those ambiguities. They maintained close relationships with people in Istanbul’s direct chain of command, and may have themselves, at times, also been in that command chain. Focusing on the activities of Ottoman officials, Kurdish emirs, and Sufi sheikhs – who could be one and the same people – this section shows how power arose from ambiguity. To showcase the power of ambiguous positions, this section examines the dismantling of a single but important Kurdish emirate, Botan, and focuses on the letters of the Diyarbakır governor Mehmed Hayreddin Pasha. Istanbul appointees like Mehmet Hayreddin Pasha orchestrated the banishment of the emirs not only with military might or official commands emanating from Istanbul, but also with spiritual authority, which they used drum up faith in Tanzimat state-building project.²¹⁷

Before moving ahead, a few words are due on the background of the Nakşibendi-Halidi Sufi brotherhood in Kurdistan. The brotherhood was founded by Mevlana Ziyaeddin Halid-i

²¹⁵ These were the three categories of choice for the doyen of Kurdish studies in English, Martin Van Bruinessen, whose book was correspondingly named *Agah, State, and Shaikh*.

²¹⁶ Mitchell, “The Limits of the State”; Quentin Skinner, “From the State of Princes to the Person of the State,” in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 368–412.

²¹⁷ On the role of spiritual authority and the sharia in the promulgation of the Tanzimat more generally, see Abu-Manneh, “The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript.”

Bağdadi (1776-1826).²¹⁸ Born in the Baban Kurdish principality (centered on Sulaymaniyah, Iraq), Bağdadi visited Mecca in 1805-1806 and afterward sought spiritual instruction in India. There, he studied in the Delhi Sufi lodge (Ar. *khānqāh*) of an important Nakṣibendi-Müceddedi (Ar. *Naqshbandī-Mujaddadī*) sheikh named Ghulām ‘Alī.²¹⁹ When Halid-i Bağdadi returned to Ottoman lands in 1811, he created a sub-group of the Nakṣibendi-Müceddedi brotherhood and named it after himself: the Nakṣibendi-Halidi, or just Halidi.²²⁰ Authors have offered several theories on why the order quickly gained popularity so quickly. One relates to how the Halidi brotherhood anointed leaders through a training process, not hereditary lines, allowing the Halidis to spread faster than the hereditary Kadiri order, for example.²²¹ From his 1811 return until his death in 1827, Halid appointed over sixty deputies (*halife*) across the Middle East, as many as half of whom were sent to Kurdistan.²²² Others have suggested that Bağdadi’s introduction of new elements to old spiritual practices like *halvet* (or *khalwa*, spiritual seclusion) and *zikr* (or *zīkr*, a form of group prayer) also helped the movement gain popularity.²²³ Finally, some have pointed out that the movement gained even more momentum with the displacement that came with Russian imperial conquests of the Caucasus and campaigns against Muslims there, especially in 1854-1914. These emigres arrived and settled in the Ottoman East, importing sheikhs and constituencies to a region that already had homegrown communities of adherents.²²⁴

²¹⁸ Alternatively, Diyā’ al-Dīn Khālīd al-Shahrazūrī.

²¹⁹ Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 22, no. 1/4 (1982): 15–16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1569796>.

²²⁰ Abu-Manneh, 3–6.

²²¹ Martin Van Bruinessen, “Religion in Kurdistan,” *Kurdish Times; New York* 4, no. 1/2 (Summer 1991): 16–18.

²²² Van Bruinessen, 16–18; there are discrepancies in the literature on the precise number of deputies as well as the proportion of them sent to Anatolia. Akot, for instance, writes that Halid appointed 90 deputies, 18 of whom were sent “various parts of Anatolia.” See Bülent Akot, “Seyyid Sibğatullah Arvāsī (ö. 1287/1870) ve Bazı Tasavvufi Kavramlara Yaklaşımı [Seyyid Sabatullah Arvasi and His Approach to Some Mystical Concepts],” *Ekev Akademi Dergisi* 18, no. 58 (Winter 2014): 252.

²²³ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 85–86.

²²⁴ Karpat, *Politicization*, 111–12.

Whatever the reasons, the order spread quickly among commoners, high-level officials, and other spiritual leaders. After Halid Bağdadi returned to Ottoman Iraq, he won adherents among key officials like Davud Pasha, who would go on to become a key reformist governor in the region in 1816-1831.²²⁵ The Halidi brotherhood also gained followers among regional spiritual and political rulers, including Sheikh Taha of Nehri and Bedirhan Bey, the Emir of Botan, whom this chapter will discuss later.²²⁶ After Halid Bağdadi's death, his order cultivated ties with other influential Sufi brotherhoods in Kurdistan and Syria, namely the Kadiri brotherhood, and came to gain spiritual prestige among the many tribes of the region.²²⁷

In addition to spreading quickly and winning important adherents in the provinces and provincial administration, the Halidi brotherhood, along with its broader grouping, the Nakşibendi-Müceddedi, had also by the 1840s come to occupy important positions of power in the Ottoman palace. In the capital, Nakşibendi-Müceddedi adherents occupied positions close to the Sultan. Şehri Hafız, the tutor of Sultan Abdülmecid, his mother, Bezmi-Alem, were both Müceddedis. In fact, Bezmi-Alem followed Sheikh Muhammad Jan, a South Asian sheikh who studied under Ghulām 'Alī, the same Sheikh in Delhi who initiated Halid-i Bağdadi. Sources also indicate that Bezmi-Alem cultivated a close and influential relationship with Abdülmecid, her only son, before and after his ascent to the throne.

As Sultan, Abdülmecid appointed or maintained Nakşibendi adherents to key posts like Şeyhülislam, Grand Vizier, foreign minister, and – most importantly for this section – the

²²⁵ Halkawt Hakim, "Mawlānā Khālid et Les Pouvoirs," in *Naqshbandis: Cheminements et Situation Actuelle d'un Ordre Mystique Musulman [Historical Developments and Present Situation of a Muslim Mystical Order]*, ed. Marc Gaborieau, Aleandre Popovic, and Thierry Zarconne (Istanbul, Paris: Isis Press, 1990), 367.

²²⁶ Bedirhan's descendants later downplayed or denied the Emir's affiliation with the Halidi brotherhood, presumably to present his uprising as an early episode of Kurdish nationalism. See Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 135–36; Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 208.

²²⁷ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 86.

Ottoman governor of Diyarbakır from October 1846 to November 1847, Mehmed Hayreddin Pasha.²²⁸ Although posted there hardly a year, Hayreddin Pasha's tenure as Diyarbakır governor was a crucial turning point in the region because it was the year that Bedirhan Bey, the Emir of the largest and most powerful of the Kurdish emirates at that time, had finally come into open conflict with the Palace's taxation and conscription policies. Hayreddin Pasha's correspondence with the Grand Vizier during the conflict with Bedirhan shows how the Ottomans benefited from Hayreddin's credentials as a Halidi sheikh. It was his position as both under the command of Istanbul and a member of the Halidi brotherhood that played a critical role in removing Bedirhan Bey.

Mehmed Hayreddin Pasha, the Nakşibendi-Halidi, and Bedirhan Bey, 1846-47

Before moving on to Hayreddin Pasha's correspondence, a few words on Bedirhan's revolt are in order. In 1846, Ottoman authorities attempted to enforce conscription in Bedirhan Bey's emirate of Botan and split it between two provinces, Mosul and Diyarbakır. Bedirhan Bey resisted these changes, and called together other Kurdish notables in the region, including Han Mahmud, Mustafa Bey, and Nurullah Bey.²²⁹ In the spring of 1847, the Ottomans sent a force of its newly-formed regular troops (*nizamiye*) to Botan under the command of Osman Pasha.²³⁰ On 30 June 1847, Bedirhan surrendered to Osman Pasha at Dergül (in Şirnak, Turkey). By the end of that year, he and his allies had been apprehended and sent into exile.²³¹

Convincing shiekhs of the Nakşibendi-Halidi brotherhood to support Istanbul's reform project was crucial to dismantling Botan. To win them over, Hayreddin Pasha drew on a

²²⁸ Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," 183–87.

²²⁹ Cabir Doğan, "Bedirhan Bey İsyanı [The Bedirhan Bey Rebellion]," 22–25; Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 71.

²³⁰ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 179–80.

²³¹ Cabir Doğan, "Bedirhan Bey İsyanı [The Bedirhan Bey Rebellion]," 32.

combination of political and pious authority. In his report addressed to the Grand Vizier dated 3 May 1847, Hayreddin Pasha explained the measures he was taking against Bedirhan. He tried to woo local tribal leaders, to mediate between feuding tribal groups, and to win over the sheikhs affiliated with them. In addition to these activities, however, Hayreddin Pasha wrote that he knew that the majority of people in Bedirhan's realms were Nakşibendi-Halidi adherents, so he thought it prudent send a message to four Halidi sheikhs in Botan. If he could convince these Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikhs to join the cause of the Sublime State, he thought, their followers would turn against Bedirhan. To this end, Hayreddin composed a letter in Arabic²³² and sent it to these four Halidi sheikhs in Botan named Salih, Azrail, Hamid, and Ibrahim, encouraging them to embrace the state and abandon Bedirhan.²³³ A copy of the original letter, an Ottoman abstract of the letter, and a report from Hayreddin Pasha reached the Grand Vizier that spring.

The letter's contents show how the Diyarbakır governor, himself having attained the qualifications of a Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikh, sought to conscript these sheikhs in Botan to the Sublime State's cause by positioning himself as both a spiritual and a political authority. Hayreddin Pasha's letter opens by claiming his Halidi spiritual pedigree, explaining that he has enclosed a copy of his certification to take on students (*icazet ve icazatname*) issued by the Halidi Sheikh Tosyevi Muhammad Arif Efendi. Hayreddin Pasha apparently believed it was important to foreground his pious qualifications, presenting himself to the four sheikhs not only as an Ottoman authority but also as a spiritual brother.²³⁴ The letter quotes a few verses from the

²³² Hayreddin Pasha did not say why he wrote in Arabic. Perhaps using Arabic would facilitate his citation of the Quran and Hadith, or perhaps he wanted to demonstrate his knowledge of the language, or perhaps he was not sure whether the sheikhs in this Kurdish- and Arabic-speaking area would read and write Ottoman.

²³³ Hayreddin Pasha describes the steps he took against Botan in a report addressed to the Grand Vizier, CDA, İ.MSM 50/1266, 5/2, 3 May 1847 / 18 Cemaziyevvel 1263. In the report, he included a copy of his Arabic letter to the four sheikhs, Sheikhs, Salih, İbrahim, Azrail, and Hamid, (İ.MSM 50/1266, 1/1, n.d.) The same folder also contained a summary of the letter in Ottoman (İ.MSM 50/1266, 2/1, n.d.), but the Ottoman summary omits Hamid, mentioning only three Sheikhs, Salih, İbrahim, and Azrail.

²³⁴ CDA, İ.MSM 50/1266, 2/1 n.d., "*Nispet-i ihvaniyet-i tarikat-ı iktizasınca.*"

Quran and Hadith about obedience (*itaat*) and pious advice (*nasihat*). It points out that Bedirhan Bey was also a follower of the Halidi brotherhood, so it was his duty – like any good adherent – to offer the Sultan his obedience.²³⁵ Accordingly, the letter said, the four sheikhs, as pious men, also had an obligation to offer Bedirhan pious advice, which should consist of the following: submit to the Ottoman authorities and any other representatives of the Sultan and Caliph, since to disobey these authorities would be a deviation from the righteous path.²³⁶ The letter draws on the example of the founder of their Sufi brotherhood, Halid-i Bağdadi, as an example: “From the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, until now, have you ever heard of Nakşibendi saints or Mevlana Ziyaeddin Halid disobeying the Sultans of their eras?”²³⁷ Should Bedirhan reject their pious advice and refuse to submit, the letter said, the four Sheikhs should abandon Bedirhan Bey and gather their own followers to support Ottoman forces.²³⁸ The letter blends authority from the Sultan and from God, making Hayreddin Pasha’s position at once spiritual and political. By opening with his spiritual qualification (*icazet*), by underlining his association with the Halidi brotherhood several times in his message,²³⁹ and by presenting the conflict in terms of Quranic concepts like pious advice (*nasihat*) and evil consequence (*vebal*),²⁴⁰ the letter highlights the governor’s spiritual relationship to the recipients. At the same time, the message is clearly one

²³⁵ CDA, İ.MSM 50/1266, 2/1 n.d., “*Mir-i muma-ileyh dahi tarikat-ı Nakşibendiye'ye dahil olduğu mesmumdur ve tarikatımızda sünnet-i müslimin ve müeyyid-i din-i mübin Sultan Abdülmecid Han.*”

²³⁶ CDA, İ.MSM 50/1266, 2/1 n.d.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid. “If he [Bedirhan] doesn’t listen to your advice, go away from him . . . and your students and followers should stay away from him [*Mektubuma itimad ve mir-i muma-ileyhe pend edin, . . . ve eğer pendinizi dinlemez ise kendusinden çekilin . . . mürid ve muhlisleriniz oralardan ayrılıb*].”

²³⁹ Ibid. The text is peppered with phrases like “according to the relation of the brotherhood of the order [*nispet-i ihvaniyet-i tarikat-ı iktizasınca halisen*],” and “the relation of brotherhood [*münasebet-ı uhuvvet*],” and “the necessity of the cause of the brotherhood [*ilca-ı ğayret-i tarikat*].”

²⁴⁰ The corresponding Arabic words are *ijāza*, *naşīha* and *wabāl*.

from a loyal servant of the Sultan, claiming to make pronouncements the Sultan's behalf and showering the monarch with praise.²⁴¹

The reported effects of the letter pleased the Diyarbakır governor, the Grand Vizier, and even the Sultan. Hayreddin Pasha's report to the Grand Vizier claims that the letter was quite effective in recruiting the Sheikhs and their followers to the state's cause: "Upon reading the contents of my letter, they [the four Sheikhs] thought that it was a religious necessity (*farz*) to join us and obey the state." According to the report, the sheikhs wrote to Bedirhan urging him to surrender, and threatened him if he persisted in resisting state forces: "There are 20,000 of followers of our Nakşibendi brotherhood in this area, and [if you do not surrender] we will have them to join the side of the Sublime State. Get your act together [*aklını başına topl*]. You can count on us no longer [*bizden size faide yokdur*]."²⁴² The Diyarbakır governor Hayreddin Pasha, himself qualified as a Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikh, was well-placed to justify obedience to the Sultan at this crucial moment. Hayreddin Pasha's letter shows how there was no clear boundary between state and sheikh. It was in fact a sheikh, in the service of the Sublime State, whose politico-spiritual appeal helped break popular support for Bedirhan Bey's revolt.

There are several possible motives for Hayreddin Pasha to have exaggerated the effectiveness of his letter. Perhaps he was trying to ingratiate himself with the central authorities, or perhaps he was trying to protect his brotherhood from shame. Still, a copy of a later letter suggests that the Hayreddin's report was not just talk. Sent from the office of the Grand Vizier to Hayreddin Pasha and dated 2 June 1847, the letter confirms the receipt of Hayreddin Pasha's

²⁴¹ Ibid. Examples include: "I promise on the Sultan's behalf [*Padişahım Efendim tarafından taahüt ederim*]," and "In our religion and our order it is incumbent upon every Muslim to obey the order of the Padishah, Protector of Islam, Sultan of all Muslims, Imam of the Monotheists, and Representative of the Lord of the Universe [*şariat ve tarikatımızda Sultan ül-müslimin ve imam ül-muvahhidin ve halife-i rabb ül-alemin olan padişah-ı islam-penahın emrine ittiba her müslime vacibdir zira hakk teala kuran-ı kerimde*]."

²⁴² CDA, İ.MSM 50/1266, 2/1 n.d.

report and a copy of the governor's letter to the four sheikhs. The Grand Vizier office's response mentions separate intelligence indicating that Hayreddin Pasha's attempts to sway the sheikhs had worked well and brought Bedirhan "into a state of hopelessness." The Sultan himself was pleased, the Grand Vizierate's letter said, and the Palace gave Hayreddin Pasha permission to continue such policies as he saw fit.²⁴³ These statements show that the Hayreddin's attempts to convert the Halidi sheikhs to Istanbul's cause were effective, at least in the eyes of the Sultan and Grand Vizier. Importantly, the Grand Vizierate's letter to the Sultan only mentions and praises Hayreddin's efforts among "the trust-worthy and reliable sheikhs of the Halidiye." It makes no mention of Hayreddin Pasha's other activities, like wooing local strongmen or mediating tribal conflicts.²⁴⁴ We can speculate that the letter only mentions Hayreddin Pasha's work among the sheikhs because the Palace was most pleased with this measure or because it was perceived to be the most effective.²⁴⁵

This correspondence between Hayreddin Pasha, the four sheikhs, and the Grand Vizier's office demonstrate a few important points. It shows how the Ottomans could rely members of the Nakşibendi-Halidi to preach obedience to the Istanbul government and abandon their support for autonomous regional strongmen like Bedirhan Bey. It is difficult to tell whether the Palace intentionally appointed a Diyarbakır governor with a qualification (*icazet*) from a Halidi sheikh, but the correspondence discussed above shows how Hayreddin Pasha, the Grand Vizier, and presumably the Sultan all believed that co-opting the four sheikhs furthered the cause of the

²⁴³ CDA, A.MKT.MHM 2/61, 2 Jun 1847 / 17 Cemaziyelahir 1263.

²⁴⁴ CDA, A.MKT.MHM 2/61, 2 Jun 1847 / 17 Cemaziyelahir 1263.

²⁴⁵ It is important to mention here the Ottoman archives contain two letters CDA, AM 6/49 (9 May 1849) and MVL 234/19, 3 (1 Aug 1850) sent to the authorities by Halidi Sheikhs named Azrail and Salih asking for modifications to the terms of their exiles. Assuming these are the same Sheikhs contacted by Hayreddin Pasha, the letters suggests these two received sentences of exile after Ottoman forces forced Bedirhan's surrender. Further research could reveal more about the fates of the other two Sheikhs, Ibrahim and Hamid, and more details of whether and how followers of the Halidi brotherhood reacted to Bedirhan's ouster.

Sublime State. The correspondence also shows how Kurdish emirs, Ottoman state forces, and influential sheikhs were not three separate actors. Followers of the Halidi participated on all sides of this conflict. Bedirhan Bey himself was part of the brotherhood, and he kept its sheikhs as his advisors until Hayreddin Pasha, also a Halidi adherent, encouraged those advisors to join the cause of the state. This point is important because if we treat emirs, state forces, and sheikhs as separate categories, we miss how actors like Hayreddin Pasha could command powerful positions precisely because they straddled the boundaries of these purportedly separate actors. The Ottomans benefitted from spiritual authorities like Hayreddin Pasha, who themselves tried to define the boundary between permissible and impermissible according to Islam.

This section provided an overview of the conflict between the Kurdish Emir Bedirhan Bey and his allies against Ottoman military forces arriving from Diyarbakır, Baghdad, and Erzurum. It focused on the correspondence of the Diyarbakır governor Hayreddin Pasha, who brandished his own qualifications as a Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikh to convert fellow Nakşibendi-Halidi adherents to the Palace's cause. The 1847 surrender and exile of these two strongmen opened the way for the Palace to appoint its own officials to govern these regions. During this process, the Palace and its appointees cultivated ties with influential Sheikhs in the region. In so doing, the Palace and provincial governors were becoming increasingly closer to a group whose members upheld and provoked tensions across ethno-confessional boundaries. Before taking up those tensions, it is important to discuss the activities of the Armenian Patriarchate in these regions, to which the next section turns.

The Armenian Patriarchate and the Tanzimat, 1839-71

Bringing the Armenian communities of the Ottoman East into the story of Istanbul's expanding power is important because Armenians were an inseparable part of provincial life. In

certain regions, especially in areas around Cilicia (Adana) and Lake Van, Armenians formed a significant portion of the population. Any state-building project in the Ottoman-Iranian or Ottoman-Russian borderlands would need to also incorporate the sizable and influential Armenian community, and any such project would benefit greatly from Armenian representatives to co-opt or neutralize provincial Armenian notables. Examining Ottoman Armenian involvement is also important because of what it can tell us about forms of institutional power during this period. It shows how the Palace and its junior partner, the Patriarchate, both deployed spiritual authorities to drum up faith in the Tanzimat reform project.

The Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul was said to have been created in 1461 when Sultan Mehmed II brought the Bishop Hovagim from Bursa to Istanbul, placing Armenians (*Ermeni*) in Ottoman realms on a similar footing to the Greeks (*Rum*).²⁴⁶ An Armenian Patriarchate, a Greek Patriarchate, and a Chief Rabbinate were set up in the subsequent decades as communal representatives to the Sultan and mediators between their flocks and the Sublime State.²⁴⁷ Amidst the centralizing reforms of Sultan Selim III (*r.* 1789-1807), the Armenian Patriarchate took steps to transform itself from one of many into the highest authority over all Armenians in

²⁴⁶ Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia: Her History, Doctrine, Rule, Discipline, Liturgy, Literature and Existing Condition*, trans. G. Marcar Gregory (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1912), 77; the extent to which the patriarchate functioned as a significant institution, or an institution at all, is still debated. Benjamin Braude's book chapter questions whether the term "millet" was used to describe non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. See Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Arabic-Speaking Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982); for a response to Braude's argument and a summary of this debate, see Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 114–15; for a refutation of Braude's claims on the concept of "millet" and examples of that concept referring to non-Muslims, see Macit Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi: Mit ve Gerçek* (Klasik, 2004), 44–45; see also Carter V Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2010), 64–65.

²⁴⁷ Amnon Cohen, "On the Realities of the Millet System: Jerusalem in the Sixteenth Century," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Central Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, vol. 2 (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), 145; the Jewish millet's precise founding year is not clear, though it is unofficially recognized around the same time as the Armenian and Orthodox millets, see Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 132.

the Empire.²⁴⁸ Like the Ottoman dynasty, the Patriarchate sought to expand its authority by directly appointing its own agents to provincial areas, in this case clergymen instead of governors.²⁴⁹ And, just as Istanbul faced potential obstacles in the form of provincial notables, so too did the Patriarchate face potential resistance from autonomous holy sees within Ottoman realms: the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Catholicosate of Aghtamar (near Van), and the Catholicosate of Sis (near Adana).

A dense network of Istanbul-based elites connected this pair of centralization efforts in the Armenian Patriarchate and the Ottoman Palace. Key authors and bureaucrats of the Patriarchate's educational reforms and 1863 Armenian National Constitution were also advisors and officials behind the Tanzimat edicts of 1839 and 1856, as well as the 1876 Ottoman constitution. This generation of Armenian elites, like their Ottoman counterparts, received their educations in Western Europe, mostly Paris, some with Ottoman state support.²⁵⁰ These

²⁴⁸ These changes were also occurring in Greek Orthodox and Sephardi Jewish communal structures in roughly the same period. For a broad overview of reforms in these major non-Muslim communal political structures, see Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System"; Masayuki Ueno, "'For the Fatherland and the State': Armenians Negotiate the Tanzimat Reforms," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 93–109, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001274>; Roderic H. Davison, "The Millets as Agents of Change in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamín Braude and Bernard Lewis (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982).

²⁴⁹ Sometimes the reforms were made in cooperation with the government, and sometimes those involved in Armenian reforms encouraged similar reforms in the Ottoman government. Krikor Odian Efendi, longtime advisor and confidant of Midhat Paşa was a key figure in the drafting of both the Armenian and Ottoman Constitutions, for instance. The famous author Namık Kemal, also a drafter of the 1876 Constitution, said he looked to representative assemblies of non-Muslim millets as examples for the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies. See Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, 134–35; in 1828, when the Armenian Mother See at Echmiadzin (near Yerevan) came under the Russian control, it ceded its last remaining dioceses (like Izmir and Baghdad) to the Istanbul Patriarchate, and the Patriarchate established itself as Echmiadzin's permanent representative to Istanbul. Kevork B. Bardakjian, "The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Central Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), 89–100.

²⁵⁰ Aylin Koçunyan, "The Millet System and the Challenge of Other Confessional Models, 1856–1865," *Ab Imperio* 2017, no. 1 (June 2, 2017): 76, <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2017.0004>; Kevork Avedis Sarafian, *History of Education in Armenia* (La Verne, CA: Press of the La Verne Leader, 1930), 196–97, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b300506](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b300506); Rifat Vedat Yıldırım and Yesim Isil Ulman, "A Look at the Ottoman Social and Medical Modernization through the Life of Dr. Servicen," *Bulgarian Historical Review / Revue Bulgare d'Histoire*, no. 3–4 (2013): 142.

Armenians, who came to form an Istanbul political faction called the *Lusavoryal* (lit. “enlightened”) included Garabed Ütūjiyan, Serovpe Vichenian, Krikor Odian, Nahabed Rusinian, Nighoghayos Balian, Arakel Dadian, Haroutiwn Dadian, and Simon Dadian.²⁵¹ In addition to advocating for and drafting the Armenian Constitution ratified by the Sultan in 1863, these *Lusavoryal* Armenians also served as advisors and officials in the Ottoman government, joining the key architects of the Tanzimat and eventual 1876 Ottoman constitution.²⁵² Serovpe Vichenian (abbreviated Servichen), an author of the 1863 Armenian constitution, taught in the Imperial School of Medicine, edited Ottoman medical journals, and became the personal physician and confidant of key Tanzimat figures like Fuad Pasha (1814-1868), Mehmed Emin Ali Pasha (1815-1871), and Mehmed Reşid Pasha (1825-1876).²⁵³ Harutiwn Dadian (Artin Pasha Dadian, 1830-1901), a member of Armenian Patriarchate’s 1853 education council, served in the Ottoman translation department, finance ministry, and in 1875, as an advisor to the foreign minister, Mehmed Reşid Paşa. Likewise, Krikor Odian (1834-1887), an author of both the 1863 Armenian constitution and 1876 Ottoman constitution, was for years an advisor, confidant, and regular dining partner of Midhat Paşa, the Grand Vizier who announced the 1876 constitution.²⁵⁴ Figures like Servichen, Dadian, and Odian represent the intellectual cross-pollination among Armenian and Ottoman elites connecting the Palace and Patriarchate. This set of overlapping elites worked together toward many of the same goals, including the dilution of the power of hereditary provincial notables, some degree of representative governance, and vaguely-defined notions of equality before the law.

²⁵¹ Sarafian, *History of Education in Armenia*, 196–97.

²⁵² Aylin Koçunyan, “The Millet System and the Challenge of Other Confessional Models, 1856–1865,” *Ab Imperio* 2017, no. 1 (June 2, 2017): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2017.0004>.

²⁵³ Yıldırım and Ulman, “A Look at the Ottoman Social and Medical Modernization through the Life of Dr. Servicen,” 142–47.

²⁵⁴ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, 134–35.

In addition to interpersonal ties connecting these reformists, material links also connected centralizing changes in the Armenian community and the Ottoman government. The Palace's attempts to replace tax-farming with salaried tax collectors, for instance, disrupted the money-lending activities of Armenian notables (*amira*), thereby tilting the Armenian community's political balance in favor of reform-oriented *esnaf*, or artisans and petty business owners, within the Armenian community. Many *amira* forged close relations with provincial tax farmers, lending the upfront capital for them to bid on the tax collection rights.²⁵⁵ In Istanbul, attempts to eliminate tax-farming disrupted *amira* finances, making it necessary for the Patriarchate to look to tradesmen and guild members (*esnaf*) to fund Armenian communal institutions like schools, churches, and charities.²⁵⁶ Funding these institutions was important in Istanbul Armenian politics in part because it bought influence in Patriarchate decision-making processes. In this way, the Sublime Porte's drive to eliminate tax-farming opened a space for *esnaf* to take on a larger role within the Empire's Armenian institutions.

Many *esnaf*, however, supported the introduction of representative governance in the Ottoman Armenian community that might benefit them, embodied in their efforts to introduce a communal constitution. It was only after a group of *esnaf* protestors raided some Patriarchate buildings, for instance, that the Sultan approved the Patriarchate constitution for implementation.²⁵⁷ Thus, a major goal of the Ottoman government's Tanzimat reform plans – eliminating tax-farming – also created a space for a new generation of would-be elites in the Armenian community to advance their agendas. In 1863, the Sultan approved and the

²⁵⁵ Davison, 44–45; Vartan Artinian, “A Study of the Historical Development of the Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1863” (Ph. D., Brandeis University, 1970), 49–50; for a portrait of these evolving finance and trade relations among provincial Armenians during the same period, see Yasar Tolga Cora, “Transforming Erzurum/Karin: The Social and Economic History of a Multi-Ethnic Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century” (Ph.D., Chicago, IL, University of Chicago, 2016), 238–64.

²⁵⁶ Artinian, “The Armenian Constitutional System,” 27.

²⁵⁷ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, 123–24.

Patriarchate promulgated the Armenian National Constitution (Arm. *Azkayin Sahmanatrut'awn Hayots'*, Ott. *Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyan*).²⁵⁸

The constitutional arrangement introduced representative governance insofar as it diluted the Patriarch's personal power with various councils. Still, it concentrated more power in the hands of Istanbul notables, subordinating provincial Armenians to decisions and appointments made in the capital.²⁵⁹ More concretely, this power manifested itself in the ability to appoint spiritual representatives who would lead provincial communities and assist in tax collection. To this end, the constitution secured the Sultan's formal recognition of the Istanbul Patriarch as the single representative of all Ottoman Armenians.²⁶⁰ In practical terms, this meant that the Patriarchate gained a legal basis for encroaching on the appointment of clergymen in areas that had long been able to ignore Istanbul's will. In addition, the constitutional system vested power in the hands of Istanbul elites – those with financial and cultural capital – rather than in the provinces, where the vast majority of Ottoman Armenians lived. Just over 2,200,000 Armenians lived outside Istanbul, and 180,000 within it, according to one estimate.²⁶¹ Despite representing over 90% of Armenians in the Empire, provincial Armenians were allocated 14% (20/140) of the seats in the National Assembly.²⁶² With formal recognition from the Sultan and a system structurally tilted in favor of Istanbul elites, the Patriarchate set about expanding the uniform structures of its own rule. In the provinces, this meant the creation of provincial councils of five to twelve members charged with collecting taxes, aiding the poor, and maintaining churches and

²⁵⁸ I translate the Armenian *sahmanatrut'awn* as “constitution” here, although the Ottoman version's word *nizamname* more closely resembles “charter” or “regulations.”

²⁵⁹ For an English translation of the constitution, see Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*, 218–21; for some details on the changes in the political organization leading up to the 1863 constitution, see Ormanian, 92–93.

²⁶⁰ Bardakjian, “The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople,” 95–96.

²⁶¹ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, 124; Artinian estimates the total urban population was 20.4% of a population of 2.5-3m in Artinian, “The Armenian Constitutional System,” 5–6.

²⁶² Artinian, “The Armenian Constitutional System,” 105.

schools, as well as the settlement of disputes within the community.²⁶³ These efforts to spread the constitutional regime brought the Istanbul Patriarchate's power to bear on local centers of spiritual power like the Catholicosate of Sis in Cilicia (Adana) and the Catholicosate of Aghtamar in Van.²⁶⁴

Although the provinces were not well-represented in the National Assembly, the areas members of that assembly called Armenia (*Hayasdan*) and the people who lived there came to be of central interest. For some, this may have seemed to be the logical step following the consolidation of constitutional rule within Istanbul. For others, this interest in the provinces grew out of an evolving view of patriotism and collective belonging connected to an ambiguously-defined "fatherland" (*hayrenik'*), usually referring to the regions around Lake Van and Cilicia, under the control of Armenian dynasties at various points in pre-Ottoman Anatolia.²⁶⁵ There was also the fear that Armenians were slowly disappearing from that fatherland altogether, as higher wages attracted migrants to Istanbul and other cities. Labor migration rapidly increased during and after the Crimean War (1853-56), when economic activity fueled by state borrowing pushed up wages in the capital, and steamship lines on the Black Sea made migration faster and more affordable.²⁶⁶ The flow of Armenians from the provinces inspired fiction, newspaper articles, and debates about these émigrés (Arm. *bantukhd*).²⁶⁷ Whether out of a desire to reproduce structures

²⁶³ Harry Finnis Blossie Lynch, *Armenia, Travels and Studies*, vol. 2 (Longmans, Green, and Company, 1901), 450–66, especially 460.

²⁶⁴ Antaramian, "In Subversive Service of the Sublime State," 84–117.

²⁶⁵ Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (Transaction Publishers, 2004), 54–68; Dzovinar Derderian, "Mapping the Fatherland: Artzvi Vaspurakan's Reforms through the Memory of the Past," accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.houshamadyan.org/en/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/miscellaneous-scholarly-articles.html>.

²⁶⁶ On urban-rural wage disparities and steam-powered transportation corridors that enabled increased labor migration, see Christopher Clay, "Labour Migration and Economic Conditions in Nineteenth-Century Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 4 (1998): 1–32; for an example of discussions in the Armenian press about the issue of Armenian migration in particular, see Melik'zade, "T'urk'ia," *Mshak* 4, no. 2 (January 16, 1875): 3.

²⁶⁷ For an overview of the emigration phenomenon and the visual art it inspired, see Vazken Khatchig Davidian, "Portrait of an Ottoman Armenian Artist of Constantinople: Rereading Teotig's Biography of Simon Hagopian," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 4 (December 15, 2014): 158–59, <https://doi.org/10.4000/eac.648>.

of political rule in the capital or to ensure Armenians continued to people an elusive “fatherland,” interest in the affairs of provincial Armenians grew in the capital.

Like the Palace, the Patriarchate also faced resistance as it tried to spread the uniform structures of its own rule. After it declared its increased decision-making powers over the provincial flock, some of them, much like Kurdish notables, balked at relinquishing long-held privileges for political plans hatched in the capital. The Patriarchate’s answer to this problem, like the Porte’s, was to dispatch to the provinces spiritual authorities to drum up faith in the state project.

A Patriarchate-sanctioned history from this period describes how the Armenian institution supported the Palace’s removal of Kurdish Emirs in the Ottoman East by encouraging Armenians to support the Sultan’s armies against Kurdish emirs.²⁶⁸ During the 1846-47 conflict between state forces and Bedirhan Bey, the Armenian Patriarch at the time, Matteos Izmirlian, instructed the prelates of Diyarbakır, Paghesh (Bitlis), Palu, Garin (Erzurum), and Van, to direct people in these areas to “supply every type of aid and service to imperial forces and show their true allegiance to the sovereign.”²⁶⁹ In a bull he issued on December 9, 1847, following the defeat of Bedirhan Bey and his allies, Izmirlian likened the removal of the Emir to the Exodus from Egypt described in the Bible: “The freedom of the Israelites from Egyptian authority is an example for us,” since thenceforth Armenians of the region were also saved from these “savage Kurdish beasts.”²⁷⁰ Izmirlian’s bull made very clear the boundary between Armenians and Kurds. The bull’s use of words like “savage” and “beast” support the image of a brutal and disloyal Kurd, a foil to the implied image of a docile and loyal Armenian. Such language

²⁶⁸ Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 55–58; Antaramian, “In Subversive Service of the Sublime State,” 26–27.

²⁶⁹ Avedis Berberian, *Batmut’iwn Hayots’* (Istanbul: Bōghosi K’irishjian ew Ğng., 1871), 322.

²⁷⁰ Berberian, 323–24, “*Ōrinag ē mezi Israyelats’ wots’ azadut’iwnē Yekibdats’ wots’ terut’ enēn, nayets’ aw yergink’ en Hayots’ ashkharhin vray, or as vayreni K’rtats’ anasunnerun arōd ev jarag ēr yegher.*”.

conformed to the ways Ottoman officials tended to describe Kurds in the east, using imagery of animals and savagery.²⁷¹ Taken at face value, sources like Izmirlian's bull demonstrate how Istanbul Armenian elites, in step with other Ottoman elites, distanced themselves from allegedly backward, rebellious Kurds.

The author of the history in which Izmirlian's bull is copied, Avedis Berberian, also used such descriptions himself, celebrating the defeat of Bedirhan as "the freedom of our Armenian nation from the violence of the merciless barbarians."²⁷² Berberian's language shows that asserting a clear boundary between Armenians and Kurds continued to appear in the publications of Istanbul's Armenian spiritual elites decades after the defeat of the emirates (his history was published in 1871). According to Berberian, Armenians not only offered material support but also took up arms and attacked Bedirhan. They even, he claims, captured and delivered Han Mahmud, Bedirhan's Van-based ally, to the Ottoman army.²⁷³ Whatever the circumstances of their captures, Han Mahmud and Bedirhan Bey were in custody by the summer of 1847. In 1850, the authorities sent Bedirhan into exile in Crete.²⁷⁴ When the fighting was finally over, the Patriarch Izmirilian issued a bull lauding the Palace's defeat of the Botan emirate.²⁷⁵ There are other sources reporting that people in the region, especially Armenians and Christians, rejoiced at the removal of Bedirhan and his allies.²⁷⁶ This feeling of celebration seems plausible: some

²⁷¹ Nilay Özök-Gündoğan, "The Making of the Modern Ottoman State in the Kurdish Periphery: The Politics of Land and Taxation, 1840-1870" (Binghamton, NY, Binghamton University, State University of New York, 2011), 37-38; Deringil, "Nomadism and Savagery."

²⁷² Berberian, *Batmut 'iwn Hayots*, 323.

²⁷³ Berberian, 322.

²⁷⁴ On Bedirhan Bey's military defeat and capture, see CDA, İ.MSM, 50/1281, Attachment: 5; AD, n. 609, p. 23.; İ.MSM, 50/1281, Attachment: 5; AD, n. 609, p. 31; CDA, A.MKT.MHM, 2/70; on Bedirhan Bey and his family's exile from the Ottoman East to Istanbul and then Crete, see CDA, A.DVN.MHM, 4/A/68 and AD, 609, 37-38; all cited in Cabir Doğan, "Bedirhan Bey İsyanı [The Bedirhan Bey Rebellion]," 32.

²⁷⁵ Astourian, "Armenian-Turkish," 187.

²⁷⁶ Xavier Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage En Turquie et En Perse, Exécuté Par Ordre Du Gouvernement Français Pendant Les Années 1846-1847 et 1848* (Strasbourg: P. Bertrand, 1855), 493-95.

may have welcomed any change, and others may have had faith in the Sublime Porte and/or the Armenian Patriarchate's promises for a brighter future.

Still, we must bear in mind descriptions of Armenian and Kurdish difference like Izmirlian's and Berberian's were at best aspirational.²⁷⁷ There was no unanimity among provincial Armenians on whether expanding Istanbul's decision-making power in the provinces would be beneficial. While official histories like Berberian's tell us about the view from Istanbul, in the provinces themselves, ethnic and religious boundaries were not the battle lines of the conflict. The struggle to transform provincial revenue extraction provoked multi-confessional coalitions: the Patriarchate sided with the Porte and called on its Prelates to rally support for Ottoman forces, while some provincial Armenians, toilers and notables alike, joined (or were conscripted to join) Kurdish notables like Bedirhan, Han Mahmud, and their allies. In the 1830s, when Mahmud II dispatched troops to Lice (between Diyarbakır and Lake Van), they faced a joint force of Kurds and Armenians under the command of Hacı Zilal Ağa, one of the Kurdish Beys set for removal.²⁷⁸ James Brant, the British Consul at Erzurum who was in the region at the time, was struck by how Armenian peasants were conscripted and armed to fight against the Ottoman army: "The Armenian peasants carried arms and fought with the Mohammedans;" he wrote. "[T]hey were treated by their masters on an equal footing."²⁷⁹ That Armenians were armed and served beside Muslims was not typical of the Ottoman regular forces, which collected an exemption tax from Christians in lieu of conscription.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ In the 1850s and 1860s, upholding the boundary between Armenian and Kurd became a technique for disciplining Armenian subjects into following beliefs and practices prescribed by the Patriarchate. See Derderian, "The Image of Kurds, 1860s."

²⁷⁸ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 54–55; Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 53.

²⁷⁹ James Brant and A. G. Glascott, "Notes of a Journey Through a Part of Kurdistan, in the Summer of 1838," *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 10 (1840): 360, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1797846>.

²⁸⁰ On Armenian debates over conscription during the Tanzimat, see Ueno, "Fatherland," 101–2; on the limited cross-confessional participation in the army during the 1870s, see Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31–33; on

During the 1846-47 conflict between Botan and the Sublime Porte, meanwhile, cross-confessional alliances played important roles on all sides of the conflict. Some groups sided with Bedirhan Bey when he called Kurdish, Armenian, and Syriac Christian notables furnish supplies and fighters.²⁸¹ Bedirhan Bey's personal bodyguard and most loyal fighters were reportedly made up of Armenians from Çatak (in northwestern Iran, next to Hakkari) and Dehok (northern Iraq). They were said to be drawn from some of the few remaining Armenian nomadic pastoralists (Arm. *koch'arner*) in the region.²⁸² If there is any truth to these examples, it would mean that some Armenians fought and died under the banners of Kurdish emirs, the “beasts” and “barbarians” described by Berberian and Izmirlian. At the elite level, as well, at least, some Armenian notables threw their lot in with the Kurdish emirs. Berberian's history claims that Armenians rose up and captured Bedirhan Bey's Van-based ally Han Mahmud. His history fails to mention, however, that when Han Mahmud petitioned the Sultan to preserve the old system of tax farming, the note contained the seals of not only muftis, beys, and other Muslim notables but also those of their Armenian counterparts. Just over a quarter (14) of the 49 signatures at the bottom of the document were Armenian.²⁸³

The example of Armenians and Syriac Christians reportedly fighting alongside the troops of Kurdish emirs and of Armenian notables signing Han Mahmud's petition demonstrate how, throughout Istanbul's attempts to dismantle the Kurdish emirates, the politics surrounding the Tanzimat re-organizations of taxation and conscription were hardly sectarian: multi-confessional forces faced off against each other on the battlefield, and multi-confessional groups of notables

Armenian efforts to recruit soldiers for the Ottoman Army during the First World War, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *“They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else”*: A History of the Armenian Genocide (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 220–22.

²⁸¹ Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 56–58.

²⁸² Hofmann and Koutcharian, “The History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman Empire,” 11.

²⁸³ CDA, İ.MSM, 50/1266, 3, n.d.

negotiated between the Porte and the provinces. These episodes demonstrate how we can only take Izmirlian's bull or Berberian's history as expressions of the views of a portion of the community, the Istanbul-based portion that desired more authority for Istanbul-based institutions.

What these official discourses can tell us is how the Patriarchate, much like the Porte, looked to appointees with spiritual prestige to drum up support for the project of central rule. For the Porte, it was a governor-sheikh like Hayreddin Paşa who could sway Nakşibendi-Halidi subjects to abandon their support for Bedirhan. For the Patriarchate, it was its clergymen in the provinces whose job it was to encourage Armenians in these regions to embrace state-led reforms. By 1851, state forces dismantled the last Kurdish emirate, Baban, near Suleimaniyah in northern Iraq. In 1856, the Armenian Patriarchate dispatched clergymen like Mkrditch Khrimian and Hagop Edesian to the provinces to take control to drum up faith in the state project and shut down areas of autonomy within its own domains.²⁸⁴

Following the promulgation of the Istanbul Patriarchate's 1863 constitution, the mission of such clergymen became more explicit: implement the constitutional regime in the provinces. The constitution called for forming local councils, collecting communal taxes, and operating schools and spiritual institutions.²⁸⁵ One of Mkrditch Khrimian's students, Karekin Srvandzants, was tasked with these duties in Muş, where he was appointed to be abbot of a 4th century monastery called Surp Garabed, an important site of pilgrimage where a relic of John the Baptist was said to be held.²⁸⁶ There, he faced the challenge of trying to convince local notables

²⁸⁴ Antaramian, "In Subversive Service of the Sublime State," 138–45.

²⁸⁵ Lynch, *Armenia, Travels and Studies*, 2:450–66.

²⁸⁶ On the history of Surp Garabed, see James R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1988), 199–205; on Surp Garabed's veneration by Muslims and Armenians alike, see Theo Maarten van Lint, "The Gift of Poetry: Khidr and John the Baptist as Patron Saint of Muslim and Armenian Asiqs -- Asuls," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam*, ed. Jan J. Ginkel, Hendrika Lena Murre-van den Berg, and Theo Maarten van Lint (Peeters Publishers, 2005), 353; on Surp Garabed's veneration by Armenians and Zazas, see Garnik Asatrian and Victoria Arakelova, "The Yezidi Pantheon," *Iran & the Caucasus* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 2004): 238.

to accept that forces in Istanbul would, in his words, uphold their rights (*hakki*). In some of Srvandztiants's personal papers now held in Yerevan, a translation of a letter dated 11 July 1871 describes in detail the sorts of challenges he faced in convincing provincial Armenians to have faith in the Sublime State. The letter describes a quarrel between a presumably Armenian tailor and an Ottoman police lieutenant, and local Armenian communal representatives' reactions to the event. The episode illustrates how the Patriarchate's proxies tried to position themselves as representatives not only of Armenian spiritual authorities but also of the Sultan and his government. It also highlights the tenuous position of the Patriarchate's proxies, who sometimes struggled to convince locals to trust and obey the newly-expanding Tanzimat state.

The Armenian vicar (*murahhas*) in Muş, Krikoris, had sent his coat to the unnamed tailor to be repaired. There, a police lieutenant (*mülazım*) named Arapkirli Yusuf Efendi arrived and said his uniform should be given priority. An argument broke out between the tailor and Yusuf Efendi (*lisan ile niza*), and Yusuf Efendi had the tailor thrown in jail. After finding out about the altercation, Krikoris called on the Armenian priests of Muş to lock the churches and gather the keys. The letter itself does not say why Krikoris had the churches locked, but at the top of the letter a note summarizes its contents and says that closing the churches was “for protest” (*poghok'i hamar*). Perhaps locking the churches protested the tailor's imprisonment, though there may have been other politicking afoot. Perhaps Krikoris or others in the Muş council wanted to make Srvandztiants, the police lieutenant, or someone else appear ineffective. Whatever the reasons, the churches of Muş were apparently locked, and the next morning one of Srvandztiants's household servants was surprised to receive a bundle of black cloth containing the keys.

Srvandztiants responded by calling on community leaders to respect the orders of the Sublime State and trust in its and the Istanbul Patriarchate's ability to protect Christian subjects. He summoned the priests and community council (*papaslar ile millet meclisi*) of Muş and berated them for locking the churches: "What is this closing of community's monasteries, built by the grace of God, and preventing the people from worshipping because of a quarrel at the tailor's shop?"²⁸⁷ Preventing the community from worshipping, he continued, contradicted the orders of the Sultan (*fermanlarına muhalif*) granting Ottoman Christians the right (*hakki*) to worship.²⁸⁸ By questioning why they would lock the churches in response to the altercation at the tailor's shop, Srvandztiants tries to link the Sultan's authority to Christian worship. Ottoman Christians enjoyed the "right" to practice their faith by Sultanic order, and, his response implied, an Armenian tailor's quarrel with a police lieutenant should not interfere with those rights. The community council members and priests were not convinced. According to his letter, Srvandztiants returned the keys to the priests and instructed them to open the churches, and although the priests politely accepted the keys, they left the churches locked on the following Sunday.²⁸⁹

Displeased, Srvandztiants summoned Krikoris to a meeting, where he tried to convince the vicar of his authority emanating from both the Palace and the Patriarchate. First, he pointed out that locking the churches was a rejection of the blessings of the Sublime State (*Devlet-i Aliye'nin nan u nimetini red etmek*) and that it was "against the justice of the times" (*şu zaman adalet karşısında*). Whether in protest, fear, or some combination, the priests had no business

²⁸⁷ GAT Srvantsdeani Fond 728-29/2, 1878-89. "Bu ne haldır umumun Allah rızası için bina etmiş oldukları bir su-i lisan için kapmak ve halkı ibadetden alı koymak nedir?"

²⁸⁸ GAT Srvantsdeani Fond 728-29/2, 1878-89. "Kiliselerde umum-ı Hristiyanın hakkı bulunması ve bu kadar nüfüsün icra-yı ayından kalmasını murahhas-ı muma-ileyh kail ise de sultanat-ı seniyyenin tebaaları hakkında . . . ayın eylemeleri hakkında olan fermanlarına muhalif düşeceği."

²⁸⁹ GAT Srvantsdeani Fond 728-29/2, 1878-89. "Kiliseleri açın, dedim. Naz ile alıb gittiler. Yine pazargünü dahi açmamışlar."

rejecting Sublime State's blessings. Yet, Krikoris questioned Srvandztians' power by motioning to the power of the district governor (*mutasarrıf*), a military officer: "Have the district governor tell me to open the churches, and I'll have them opened."²⁹⁰ Krikoris seems to have thought that for all of Srvandztians's claims to represent Istanbul and the will of the Sultan, the abbot did not in fact hold much sway over matters in Muş or with its district governor.

Srvandztians also relied on his position as a representative of the Patriarch to try to convince Krikoris to re-open the churches. Even leaving the state out of it ("*devletimden ihtiraz ederim*"), the abbot said, locking the churches was a provocation that went against Patriarchate-mandated efforts to maintain peaceful sectarian relations.²⁹¹ Positioning himself as not only a representative of the Sultan but also of the Patriarchate, he accused Krikoris of contradicting the Istanbul Patriarchate's wishes. In response, Krikoris rejected Srvandztians's interpretation of the Istanbul's orders: "The Patriarch told me to get along well with the government for a year, so I did. He didn't say get along *that* much" – that is, so much as to leave the churches open after an altercation between an Armenian businessman and a police lieutenant.²⁹²

Srvandztians's attempts to re-open the church illustrate how he, like Hayreddin Paşa, tried to preach obedience and faith in and obedience to the newly-increasing authority of the Sublime State in the Ottoman East. Srvandztians, like Hayreddin Pasha, tried to position himself as a representative of dynastic and spiritual authorities as he preached faith in the "blessings of the Sublime State." By positioning himself as a representative of both the Sublime State and the Istanbul Patriarchate, he tried to convince the priests and Krikoris to re-open the churches and

²⁹⁰ GAT Srvantsdeani Fond 728-29/2, 1878-89. "*Murahhas-ı muma-ileyh su-yı acizime haber gönderdi ki mutassarıf bu işi bana söylesin ben açtırırım dedi.*"

²⁹¹ GAT Srvantsdeani Fond 728-29/2, 1878-89. "*Devletimden ihtiraz ederim beynlerini ısındırdığım millet beynine bu derecede ilkaat eylemek laiksizdir.*"

²⁹² GAT Srvantsdeani Fond 728-29/2, 1878-89. "*Patrik Efendi bana bir sene ol hükümetle güzel geçin dedi. Ben de güzel gecindim. Şimdi bir emir geldi güzel geçin demiş isem bu derecede değil buymuş.*"

support the Patriarchate's attempts to maintain warm relations between Christians and Muslims in the provinces. Still, unlike Hayreddin Pasha, Srvandztiants met resistance he apparently could not overcome. The vicar, Krikoris, and the local priests questioned Srvandztiants's orders to re-open the churches, and even questioned his authority as a representative of the Palace and Patriarchate's orders. That failure notwithstanding, both Hayreddin Pasha's and Srvandztiants's efforts demonstrate how the Patriarchate, like the Palace, relied on appointees who occupied ambiguous positions, straddling the authority of the Sultan and of God. Their simultaneous appointments from the Palace and from religious brotherhoods placed them well to intervene in the local faith practices and to preach obedience and faith in the Tanzimat.

Boundary-making

Whatever the results of the Tanzimat project, an important topic, one to which this section turns, is how exactly these proxies used their positions in religious brotherhoods and the powers and resources Istanbul invested in them. One way they did, this section argues, was to define and uphold ethno-confessional boundaries. Examples of Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikhs and Armenian clergymen demonstrate how the growing power of Istanbul appointees brought ethno-confessional boundaries to the forefront of provincial politics.

The exile of Kurdish dynasts left a power vacuum, because these families had maintained peaceful relations among the predominantly Kurdish tribes in the region.²⁹³ In the place of the emirs, the Ottomans came to rely more on the sheikhs of brotherhoods like the Halidi and Kadiri to keep the peace. As others have pointed out, some influential sheikhs in the Ottoman East were able to act as mediators, making them indispensable to the governor-appointees in these newly-

²⁹³ On this rivalry and later reconciliation between the two groups, see Christoph Herzog and Barbara Henning, "Derviş İbrahim Paşa: Views on a Late 19th-Century Ottoman Military Commander," *Occasional Papers in Ottoman Biographies* 1 (2012): 120–27, <http://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-bamberg/solrsearch/index/search/searchtype/series/id/>; Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 87.

incorporated Ottoman realms.²⁹⁴ In later years, after the fall of Botan in 1847, newly-appointed Ottoman officials in Kurdistan also tried to cultivate ties with Nakşibendi Sheikhs. In 1850, for instance, the governor of Hakkari wrote his superiors in Istanbul that they could win the favor of the influential disciple of Halid-i Bağdadi, Sheikh Taha of Nehri (d. 1853), by paying to build a mosque there.²⁹⁵

The removal of emir dynasties and empowerment of brotherhoods of sheikhs also meant, however, that the Ottoman Palace and its governors came to rely on a group whose power was based on upholding boundaries across ethno-confessional boundaries. The Nakşibendi-Halidiye sub-order's teachings actively discouraged sharing of sacred spaces, practices, and beliefs. Instead, they upheld strict boundaries and even antagonisms between themselves and outsiders. Examples of these stances are evident in the teachings of the Nakşibendi-Halidiye founder, as well as in the actions of his disciples. For the final prayers of religious ceremonies, Halid-i Bağdadi, instructed his disciples to pray that God “annihilate (*ahlik*) the Jews, Christians, fire worshippers (*majis*) and the Persian Shiites (*rawafid al-Ajam*).” In a letter to his followers in Diyarbakır, Bağdadi encouraged them to pray for the success of Muslims and failure of Christians and Persians, and in a treatise on “association” (*al-Rābiṭa*), he encouraged his followers to “pray for the survival of the exalted Ottoman state upon which depends Islam and for its victory over the enemies of religion, the cursed Christians and the despicable Persians.”²⁹⁶ These texts were published at a time when the Ottomans had suffered a string of military defeats

²⁹⁴ Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 180–81 and 228–30.

²⁹⁵ Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian*, 81; other sheikhs received stipends in later years, as well. Some officials saw these men as assets because they could, for instance, raise troops for wars. At other times, they viewed spiritual authorities as potential threats. In case of the latter, stipends were also suggested as a way to fund opposing forces. For these examples, see Deringil, *Well-Protected*, 63–64.

²⁹⁶ According to Abu-Manneh, later published versions of the letter and the treatise omitted these passages. See footnotes 74 and 75 in Abu-Manneh, “The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century,” 14–15; for a discussion of the translation and alternatives to “annihilate” see footnote 41 in Christoph Herzog and Barbara Henning, “Derviş İbrahim Paşa,” 39.

at the hands of Christian rebels and their (Christian) Great Power allies, so public statements against foreign infidels are not surprising. What was unique about the Bağdadi's condemnations, however, was their targeting not only of foreign Christian powers but also of the non-dominant communities within Ottoman realms as well.²⁹⁷

A number of Bağdadi's disciples in the Ottoman East also upheld the boundary between themselves and the “the enemies of religion,” against whom they took antagonistic stances. Sheikh Taha of Hakkari came to lead the Halidi brotherhood after the death of his teacher, Bağdadi in 1827. His leadership moved the order northward out of Sorani Kurdish-speaking northern Iraq and into the Kurmanji Kurdish-speaking areas of Anatolia, which contained larger populations of Armenians and Syriac Christians.²⁹⁸ Sheikh Taha had a reputation for stoking tensions between Muslims and Christians. Austen Henry Layard, a British traveler and amateur archeology enthusiast, and, in 1877-80, Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, wrote about an encounter with Sheikh Taha from the late 1840s. While Layard was traveling in southeastern Anatolia, he wrote, Taha had fallen ill and asked the British traveler to help him find medicine. Layard offered his help at first, but he withdrew the offer because Sheikh Taha allegedly refused to meet “face to face, an unbelieving Frank, and as he wished to have a remedy without going through the usual form of an interview with the Doctor.” Layard was also convinced that Sheikh Taha was “the main instigator of many atrocious massacres” of Syriac Christians in Bedirhan's Botan emirate in 1843.²⁹⁹ These examples demonstrate that one of the first and most influential

²⁹⁷ Abu-Manneh, “The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century,” 15.

²⁹⁸ Metin Atmaca, “Three Stages of Political Transformation in the 19th Century Ottoman Kurdistan,” *Anatoli. De l'Adriatique à La Caspienne. Territoires, Politique, Sociétés*, no. 8 (October 1, 2017): 51–52.

²⁹⁹ Austen H. Layard, *Nineveh and Babylon with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), 324–25; Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 230–31.

disciples of Mevlana Halid had at least the reputation of upholding strict boundaries and antagonism between Muslims and others.³⁰⁰

Whatever Taha's role in the massacres of Syriac Christians, his own disciples also provoked tensions across ethno-confessional lines. Taha died in 1853, but he had by that point already sent several disciples to different parts of the Ottoman East, as well as into bordering areas, like northwestern Iran and the Caucasus.³⁰¹ His disciple Sibğatullah Arvasi and his son Ubeydullah, also provoked complaints from the areas' non-dominant groups when the two acquired large landholdings in the wake of the 1858 Land Reform.³⁰² Sibğatullah, a member of the prestigious Arvasi family, spread Nakşibendi-Halidi teachings around the Hizan region, just south of Lake Van, and allegedly took control of large tracts of land there.³⁰³ Garo Sasuni (1889-1971) who grew up and went to school in nearby Muş, drew on the example of Sibğatullah as a Sheikh who "used religion as a weapon" in the 1860s to expel Armenians from their land and keep some as landless serfs.³⁰⁴ Sheikh Ubeydullah, likewise, amassed famously large landholdings on both sides of the Ottoman-Qajar border.³⁰⁵ The issue of usurped lands provoked major discontent, and mounting Armenian complaints framed the issue in ethno-confessional

³⁰⁰ On Taha and the early spread of the Halidiyye in Kurdish areas, see Akot, "Seyyid Sibğatullah Arvâsi (ö. 1287/1870) ve Bazı Tasavvufi Kavramlara Yaklaşımı [Seyyid Sabatullah Arvasi and His Approach to Some Mystical Concepts]," 252.

³⁰¹ Hür Mahmut Yücer, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf (19. Yüzyıl) [Tasavvuf in Ottoman Society (19th Century)]* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2003), 328.

³⁰² İnalçık and Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:871; Mundy, "Village Authority and the Legal Order of Property"; Mundy and Smith, *Governing Property, Making the Modern State*, especially 68-73.

³⁰³ For more on Sibğatullah Arvasi, see Yücer, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf (19. Yüzyıl) [Tasavvuf in Ottoman Society (19th Century)]*, 329; for more on the Arvasi family in the Ottoman East, see Polatel, "Armenians and the Land Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1870-1914," 128.

³⁰⁴ The Turkish translation of Sasuni refers to Sheikh "Sabadullah," father of the famous "Sheikh Celalettin." Since Sibğatullah Arvasi's son was Sheikh Celeleddin, and the place and time of his life fit Sasuni's narrative, I am assuming Sabadullah is in fact a reference to Sibğatullah. See Sasuni, *Kürt Ulusal Hareketleri ve 15. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Ermeni Kürt İlişkileri*, 143-44.

³⁰⁵ Exactly how much land is difficult to pin down, but it was enough to catch the attention of the British consul at Tabriz, William Abbott, at the time, as well as enough for the descendants of Kurdish notables to comment on later, when asked about the Şemdinan clan in 1996. Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 73-77.

terms.³⁰⁶ In an 1877 dossier of provincial oppressions, the second of such dossiers the Armenian Patriarchate's National Assembly prepared for the Porte, land confiscation complaints made up just under one third of the total.³⁰⁷ In 1880, as well, the Armenians of Muş submitted a paper to Imperial Reform Commissioners, complaining of land dispossession and slave-like serfdom.³⁰⁸ These sorts of complaints continued under Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909), whose Kurdish tribal regiment leaders enriched themselves through such confiscations.³⁰⁹

It is difficult to judge the accuracy of claims that Christians were disproportionately targeted for dispossession, because the archives we have were created and compiled by authors sensitive to the plight of Eastern Christians. Since Armenians had more channels through which to express their grievances, it is often assumed that their own institutions, as well as those of American missionaries and British consuls in the region, lent more sympathetic ears to their suffering.³¹⁰ Accordingly, it is not possible given these sources to know whether this or that group suffered more. This difficulty notwithstanding, complaints over land demonstrate how the political and material ascendance of Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikhs in the region increased sectarian

³⁰⁶ Astourian, "The Silence of the Land," 64–65; Özök-Gündoğan, "The Making of the Modern Ottoman State in the Kurdish Periphery," 36–91.

³⁰⁷ Another third were about theft of other property, and the rest were divided among tax fraud, forced conversion, and violence against women. For an English translation of the report, see *Reports on Provincial Oppressions* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1877).

³⁰⁸ See heading No. 19 "Oppressions" in FO 424/106, 268/1, Précis of a Paper presented to the Imperial Commissioners by the Armenians of Mush, n.d. [enclosed in no. 268, dated May 25, 1880].

³⁰⁹ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 131–32; Kegham Der-Garabedian, *Hoghayin Hartsë Hayapnag Nahanknerow Mēch [The Land Question in the Armenian Provinces]* (Istanbul: Azadamard, 1911); after the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, as well, the unresolved land issue (euphemistically called the "Agrarian Question") became a wedge splitting Armenian political parties from the Committee of Union and Progress. See Suny, *Desert*, 176–77.

³¹⁰ For an example of this issue coming up at the time, see FO 424/145, 1/1 "Memorandum by Major Trotter on the subject matter of the Marquis of Salisbury's Despatch No. 264 (Reforms in Kurdistan)," Istanbul, 26 Dec 1887. In this memorandum, the British Consul Henry Trotter noted the problem that the plight of Armenians received "special attention" while "the sufferings of Rayah-Kurds, which were often greater than those of the Armenians," lacked similar attention but required it. Yet, "it would be impossible to get the other Ambassadors to unite" behind any resolutions about Kurds, "except as individuals from whom the Armenians were to be protected." The issue of Armenians' disproportionate access to authorities also came up regarding the Ottoman government. The Armeno-Turkish paper *Manzûme-i Efkâr* underscored this point in an 1876 article, suggesting that Armenians in the Ottoman East had a more direct channel to the Porte via the Patriarchate than their Muslim neighbors. See *Manzûme-i Efkâr*, no. 3136 (5 June 1876) cited in Ueno, "Fatherland," 98.

complaints coming out of the Ottoman East. That Sasuni, from a later generation in the same region, would call Sheikh Sibğatullah's use of religion a "weapon," and that land complaints would be consistently sent to Istanbul show how land complaints framed dispossession as a sectarian issue. The Armenian National Assembly's 1877 report, for instance, presents the (mostly Kurdish) sheikhs and Beys, along with corrupt (Muslim) officials, as the perpetrators and provincial (Christian) Armenians as the victims. The solutions to these problems, the National Assembly's document urged, could be found in the Tanzimat declarations of equal legal protections. The Porte should solve "the knotty question of Christian evidence" in sharia courts, and offer legal protections to "the provincial Armenian," who has "just as much right to enjoy the benefits of justice and equality as any other race, Mussulman or non-Mussulman."³¹¹ These reactions show how the political and material empowerment of sheikhs like Sibğatullah and Ubeydullah provoked claims on the government based on ethno-confessional categories. In the 1840s, provincial Armenians signed petitions with Kurdish notables to voice their concerns to the Palace. But in the years following the removal of the Emirs, many provincial Armenians claimed they were antagonized by newly-empowered proxies in the region, like Ubeydullah and Sibğatullah. So, they turned to the reform-oriented Patriarchate to voice complaints based on Tanzimat promises of equal legal protections.

Decades later, sources written by Christians in the region would also mention the presence of exclusivist Islamic spiritual leaders in their petitions and complaints. In the aforementioned paper submitted by Muş Armenians to the Imperial Reform Commissioners in 1880, they complained of "fanatic Moslem ecclesiastics, who preach hatred and persecution." Such complaints invite us to speculate on how the political ascendance of groups like the

³¹¹ *Reports on Provincial Oppressions*, 43–44.

Nakşibendi-Halidiye order would have encouraged such perceptions. In the 1830s and 1840s, Armenian peasants could be found fighting under Kurdish emirs. After the emirs' removal, the presence of multi-confessional coalitions waned in favor of issues framed along sectarian lines. By investing financial resources and political authority in sheikhs like Taha, Sıbğatullah, and Ubeydullah, the Ottomans empowered actors whose political visions and practices upheld and provoked tensions across ethno-confessional boundaries.

The Armenian Patriarchate's vision of reform also called for stricter segregation of spiritual institutions, and their spiritual leaders were also antagonistic to cross-confessional sharing. Srvandztiants wrote that he was trying to "acclimate the people of Muş to civilization."³¹² What sort of civilizational changes did he have in mind? One he seemed to share with the sheikhs of the Nakşibendi-Halidi brotherhood was policing of communal boundaries. Srvandztiants and other Patriarchate-appointed clergymen bemoaned and discouraged the spiritual creoles described Chapter 1 – shared participation in sacred rites, shared sacred spaces, and shared language and literature. They pointed to spiritual creoles as evidence of the local leadership's failure to protect tradition. In the Muş biweekly newspaper he edited, *Taron Eaglet* (*Ardzvig Darōnoy*), Srvandztiants published a July 1865 letter by Hovhannes Muradian, another Armenian reformer based in Van. The letter articulated its disdain for shared practices, describing "much disorder" (*angarkowt' iwn*) in Kurdistan, where Armenian priests, he wrote, were more like "sorcerers" (*gakhart*). In a village funeral procession, the letter describes the "violent wailing" of Armenians, Kurds, and Yezidis, who sang songs in Kurdish and decorated horses in a shared procession. The concluding sentence hardly masks his approbation for the absence of formal church ceremonies: "It is not typical to hold a church service for funerals."³¹³

³¹² GAT Srvandztiants Fond 728-29/2, 1878-89. "Medeniyete alıştırmğa çalıştığım Muş ahalisine."

³¹³ Hōh. V. Muradean, "Namag [Letter]," *Ardzuig Darōnoy* [*Taron Eaglet*], no. 45 (July 1, 1865): 81–82.

Other letters by Murdian were published in several issues of *Taron Eaglet*, and Dzovinar Derderian draws on them to demonstrate how the journal carried material that admonished the sharing of sacred spaces with displeased descriptions of Kurds and Yezidis venerating churches and monasteries and Armenians worshipping at trees, bodies of water, and shrines.³¹⁴

Depictions of spiritual creoles provided fodder for criticizing local leaders and allowed reformers to position themselves as the solution to provincial Armenians' woes. The clergyman Boghos Natanian, who in the 1870s traveled to collect information for the Patriarchate about the Armenians in the eastern provinces, published a report in 1877. Like Srvandziant's *Taron Eaglet*, Natanian's report presented shared practices as the dangerous products of ignorant leaders. Also like *Taron Eaglet*, Natanian's work highlights ambiguity as treachery and shared practices as backwardness, the results of inadequate spiritual leadership. His introduction describes how "Ignorance, disunity, and sneakiness suck the blood of Armenians"³¹⁵ Again drawing on the blood-sucking metaphor, he describes Armenian provincial notables as leeches (*sülük gibi*), sucking the blood of the Armenian community with the help of Kurdish and Turkish notables. He calls these Armenian notables "Kurdish-Armenians." Thus, those whom he accuses of cooperating with Kurdish and Turkish oppressors are themselves not fully Armenian but a mixture, "Kurdish-Armenian."

The issue of "Kurdish-Armenians" also appeared in the reformist mouthpiece and one of the most widely read Ottoman Armenian newspapers, *Masis*.³¹⁶ The issue demonstrates how

³¹⁴ For more on contemporary Yezidi and Armenian sharing of sacred spaces, and for the translation of "ziarat" to shrine, see Hamlet Melkumyan, "Informal Shrines and Social Transformations: The Murids as New Religious Mediators among Yezidis in Armenia," in *Sacred Places, Emerging Spaces: Religious Pluralism in the Post-Soviet Caucasus*, ed. Tsypylma Darieva, Florian Mühlfried, and Kevin Tuite (Berghahn Books, 2018), 180.

³¹⁵ Yarman, *Palu-Harput 1878 Raporlar*, 2:81–82.

³¹⁶ For a short description of *Masis* in the context of the Armenian press of this period, see Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century* (University of California Press, 1963), 52.

ambiguous subjecthood was a source of anxiety for the Patriarchate and its appointees. An 1880 article discusses efforts to integrate into the Armenian community (*azk*) ambiguous subjects it also called “Kurdish-Armenians” (*K’rtahayk’*), which it defines as “those Armenians for whom Armenian-ness consists of religion alone, who day by day Kurdify [*ōr ěst ōrē gě k’rtanan*].” These populations, the article said, were living in areas like Van, Bitlis, and Diyarbakır.³¹⁷ The article’s proposed solution was to the spread of educational programs propagating “Armenian language and Armenian doctrine [*Haygagan lezu ev Haygagan usmunk’*].” Decades after the Patriarchate’s attempts reproduce the structures of its constitutional regime in the provinces, subjects like Kurdish-Armenians still defied the ethno-confessional boundaries the Patriarchate sought to uphold. Like his reform-oriented colleagues, Natanian also stressed that education could solve the problem of the Kurdish-Armenian.³¹⁸ Only by repairing existing schools and opening new ones, he wrote, could Armenians unite behind the “examples in the Bible” and in bonds of joy.³¹⁹ Across these texts produced by reformers, then, we can identify two motifs: equivocating ambiguous subjects with ignorance and treachery, and offering the solution of new, reform-oriented institutions under their leadership. These institutions would teach the “language” and “doctrine” of Armenian-ness, and, presumably, construct subjects who clearly fit within the boundaries of their conception of Armenian.

Boundaries of a New Order

This chapter has argued that the reorganization of imperial power in the Ottoman East empowered groups of Muslim and Christian holy men who sought to define and uphold ethno-confessional boundaries. The existing order in the region had revolved around a patchwork of

³¹⁷ “K’rtahayk’ [Kurdish-Armenians].”

³¹⁸ Yarman, *Palu-Harput 1878 Raporlar*, 2:81–82.

³¹⁹ Yarman, 2:158.

autonomous areas held together by Kurdish dynasties. After militarily dismantling it, Palace and Patriarchate tried to establish themselves through proxies they appointed to the region. One such proxy, Mehmed Hayreddin Paşa, drew on his position as both a Nakşibendi-Halidi sheikh and an Ottoman governor to convince other sheikhs of his brotherhood to abandon their allegiance to Bedirhan Bey and support the cause of the Palace. Likewise, the Armenian Patriarchate appointed clergymen to the region who positioned themselves as representatives of the Sublime State and the Patriarchate. One such appointee, Karekin Srvandztiants, tried to convince Muş Armenians to have faith in the spiritual protections and “blessings of the Sublime State.” As the example of Srvandztiants showed, these attempts to re-order the provincial order were not linear, and often they achieved only temporary and partial successes in subordinating provincial actors. In the territories of the Kurdish emirates in the 1870s and 1880s, tribal leaders and sheikhs rose to power in the areas of the dismantled emirates. At times they resisted paying taxes or offering conscripts, and, at a few key moments, they led serious rebellions, as Sheikh Ubeydullah of Hakkari did in 1880. The Patriarchate’s efforts to subsume the autonomous brotherhood also had mixed results. In the Adana region, for example, efforts to subsume the autonomous Catholicos of Sis backfired. By the 1880s, a popular clergyman there came to lead the brotherhood and continued defying the Istanbul Patriarchate’s directives.³²⁰

Still, this “vertical” reordering of provincial ties seems to have been effective along ethno-religious lines. In the decades following the dismantling of the Kurdish emirates, these provincial upstarts seldom, if ever, formed cross-confessional coalitions like their predecessors. Thus, while the Ottoman government and Armenian Patriarchate were not successful in carrying

³²⁰ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 60–61, and see also FO 195/1521 Report on Vilayet of Bitlis, 30 Jan 1885, cited therein; see for example, the example of the Sis Catholicos K’ēfsizian in Avedis K. Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities in Syria under Ottoman Dominion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 242–49.

out reforms that would cement their unquestioned and direct rule of the provinces in the long term, their attempts to re-order networks of provincial elites did have lasting effects. By segregating those elite networks into ethno-confessional groups, they were empowering proxies who tried to define and uphold ethno-confessional boundaries in everyday life. Local senses of difference and belonging came under fire, as sheikhs and clergymen alike attacked them as hybrid, ignorant, and dangerous. The lines that separated an Armenian Christian and a Kurdish Muslim were becoming more rigid – it was no longer acceptable to temporarily cross or even dissolve those lines to share funeral rites and chants. Those lines were also becoming more active, as well. They were increasingly becoming the lines across which claims and disputes over property and taxation would take place. Later, as communal violence erupted, those lines would etch the divides separating safety from suffering. Fading were the cross-confessional coalitions making claims and raising arms against Istanbul. Instead, members of spiritual brotherhoods like Armenian monastic brotherhoods and Nakşibendi sheikhs were attempting to organize communal boundaries in the ways they saw fitting. What gave impetus to people in the Ottoman East to begin adopting those visions? Why did ordinary people there buy into the notion that communal boundaries were important to define and police? It is questions like these to which the next chapter turns.

Chapter 3: Shot of a Gun, Sound of a Stream

My ribs show. What have I eaten?

Lies and smiles.

– Sylvia Plath, “The Jailer”

The Time of Seductive Teleologies

Historians of imperialism have long tried to explain the political history of the twentieth century as the result of events in the nineteenth. This is how Hannah Arendt opens *Imperialism*: “The three decades from 1884 to 1914 separate the nineteenth century, which ended with the scramble for Africa and the birth of pan-movements, from the twentieth, which began with the first World War.”³²¹ Imperial politics, she goes on to explain, is crucial for understanding the development of totalitarianism and its genocidal violence in the twentieth century. While Arendt starts with 1884, historians of the Middle East turn to a different year, 1878, when Great Powers at the Congress of Berlin negotiated the terms that would end the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War. The conflict brought humiliation to the Ottomans, who saw Russian troops enter the outskirts of Istanbul. The loss also brought widespread suffering, economic collapse, and religious and national violence, which I refer to as ethno-religious violence.

Similar to Arendt’s linking of political events to the development of pan-movements, historians of the Middle East have drawn on the period surrounding 1878 and the dislocations it brought to explain the rise of Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism, and ethnic nationalisms in subsequent decades.³²² They point to demographic change, the activation of concepts like “majority” and “minority,” and Pan-Islamist policies to explain the increasingly contentious and violent relations

³²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 123.

³²² Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 48–50; see also Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2002), 379–82.

among the empire's various ethno-religious groups, not the least between Muslims and Christians or Armenians, Kurds, and Turks. The loss of predominantly Christian territories and an influx of hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees created for the first time an empire with a clear Muslim majority.³²³ At the same time, since at least the Serbian (1804-1817) and Greek (1821-1830) independence struggles, Ottoman territorial sovereignty had been under siege not only militarily but also politically, as purportedly humanitarian interventions by Great Powers continually supported Christian-led independence movements.³²⁴ In response, during this period around 1878 and thereafter, the beleaguered Sultan Abdülhamid II (*r.* 1876-1909) engaged in a Pan-Islamic "politics of unity" aimed at holding the empire together.³²⁵ The savvy Sultan postured as a pious ruler and made his Pan-Islamist appeals both within and outside the Empire.³²⁶ Within, he sought to stave off budding nationalist movements, which were developing among supposedly reliable Muslim communities like Albanians, Kurds, and Arabs.³²⁷ These attempts saw at least some success: while the Empire was on the brink of collapse when Abdülhamid II became Sultan in 1876, he gave it a new lease on life, going on to become the longest-reigning Ottoman ruler in over two centuries.

Still, as important as demographic change and a savvy Sultan may have been, they cannot alone explain hardening ethno-confessional boundaries across the empire and especially in the Ottoman East. Demographic realities and political concepts certainly played important roles, but

³²³ Karpát, *Politicization*, 356 and 402–3.

³²⁴ Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 38–45.

³²⁵ Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 2 (1973): 139–55; Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?," *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (January 1, 1973): 176.

³²⁶ Deringil, *Well-Protected*, 16–44.

³²⁷ Erik-Jan Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Kerem Öktem, Celia Kerslake, and Philip Robins, St Antony's Series (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 57–58.

this was not the first time the Ottomans suffered territorial losses and demographic changes, as the 1828-29 Russo-Ottoman War, the Crimean War (1853-56), and influxes of Muslim refugees from Russia showed. And while Sultan Abdülhamid may have made Pan-Islamist appeals, he is not the first Sultan to have taken such a course. As Chapter 2's discussion of Tanzimat reforms demonstrated, past Sultans like Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) and Abdülmecid I (r. 1839-1861) also made calls for unity based on religion, but these did not prove so effective. In 1848, for instance, the Kurdish Emir Bedirhan Bey, who postured as pious along with his Nakşibendi Sufi followers, led a rebellion against the Sultan's religiously-charged demands to submit to central rule. At that time, a pious Sultan's call for unity was not enough to stem the tides of rebellion, so why did Abdülhamid II's appeals seem to have more power than those of his forebears? Why did categories like religion and nation gain such political effectiveness and emotional importance during this period surrounding 1878?

Finding answers to these questions is possible only by stepping back from analyses of political events in Istanbul and other imperial metropolises to attend to the interactions of political, economic, ecological dislocations taking place in the provinces themselves. To that end, this chapter focuses on the Ottoman East, the areas bordering Russia and Iran variously called Armenia, Kurdistan, and Eastern Turkey. In 1878, this region was the site of transformative ethno-confessional violence, and such violence has continued in horrific bursts until the present.³²⁸ If we want to understand the salience of ethno-confessional appeals during the *fin de siècle*, we must consider why areas like the Ottoman East – areas that were bastions of resistance

³²⁸ The violent episodes that fell along ethno-confessional lines included but were by no means limited to: the Hamidian Massacres (1894-96), the state genocidal policies of killing and neglectfully removing Ottoman Christians (1915-1923), and the periodic suppressions and massacres of Alevi and Kurdish citizens of the Turkish Republic.

in the past – seemed to so easily self-organize along ethno-confessional lines in the late 19th century.

In addition to shifting our focus to sites of provincial resistance and violence, we can also better understand the growing salience of ethno-confessional appeals by shifting the temporality, or pace of the events, we choose to study. The forces mentioned above – demographic change, the advent of new political concepts, and the rise of pan-movements – all operated on the familiar temporality of human politics. Fernand Braudel, the doyen of Mediterranean Studies, would call this temporality “*social history*, the history of groups and groupings . . . economic systems, states, societies, civilizations” and how they interacted during “in the complex arena of warfare.”³²⁹ This temporality is the pace of human politics, a rhythm of events comprehensible from the pages of newspapers or history books. Historians and social scientists tend to privilege this temporality, which grew popular in the late 18th century and came to define their disciplines. Recent work has pointed to the ways that this temporality has served nation-building projects.³³⁰ Others have encouraged us to probe for alternatives to the temporality of human politics,³³¹ and how such probing allows us to unearth forces that, though powerful, we tend to miss or “unsee.”³³² Unsettling the hegemony of this human-oriented temporality is especially crucial for answering the question of how ethno-confessional categories came to gain such political salience in the Ottoman East. The population of this borderland region consisted primarily agriculturalists and pastoralists, and their daily, seasonal, and lifelong rhythms were dictated just as much by slow and cyclical timelines of ecology as by the comparably rapid pace of human politics.

³²⁹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds, vol. 1 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 20–21.

³³⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33–36.

³³¹ Shryock and Smail, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*, 4–15.

³³² I borrow the term “unsee” from China Miéville, *The City & The City* (New York: Del Rey, 2010).

In the period surrounding 1878, the forces operating on the temporalities of water systems and firearms interacted with the forces operating on the temporality of human politics. Famine struck the Ottoman East, here defined as the upper Tigris-Euphrates drainage basin and adjacent areas. During and after the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War, food production fell as agricultural laborers emigrated or entered the army, and consumption increased as armies requisitioned their needs.³³³ While the famine created thousands of victims, it also provoked powerful responses. Different groups suffered differently. Kurds, Turks, and nomadic pastoralists suffered more from famine than Armenians, according to many observers in the region. At the same time, cultivators and Armenians suffered more from the violence that arose with tribal conflicts and pillaging. This chapter consists of three sections that analyze these events by following three threads: animal mortality, disaster relief, and gun violence. Each of these threads has been interwoven with changes to forces operating on the three temporalities I mentioned above: the broad temporality of water, the familiar one of human politics, and the rapid one of combat. Forces operating on different temporalities transformed during this period, and these transformations combined to arrange material conditions in ways that divided the population along ethno-confessional lines.

The first section analyzes drought and animal mortality during this period, attending to the changes in the seasonal fluctuations of the Tigris-Euphrates water system. It takes a vantage akin to Braudel's environmental history, which he describes the human "relationship to the

³³³ Özge Ertem, "Eating the Last Seed: Famine, Empire, Survival and Order in Ottoman Anatolia in the Late Nineteenth Century" (European University Institute, 2012), 32–34. Stored food was available to sustain the population in Van, Erzurum, and Bitlis, at least, but higher prices and distribution obstacles prevented thousands from obtaining enough to survive. See FO 424/106, 171/1 [Captain William] Everett to [Major Henry] Trotter, 16 Apr 1880, and FO 424/106, 209/1 and FO 424/106, 47/5 [Captain Emilius] Clayton to Trotter, 16 Dec 1879, and FO 424/106, 243/1, Trotter to the [British Ambassador Sir A.H.] Layard, Diyarbakır, 13 May 1880, for British officials' optimistic assessments on the actual supply of food.

environment, . . . a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles.”³³⁴ The latter bit about repetition may need revision in light of current understandings of global temperatures. Still, there is some truth to the fact that some form of the Tigris-Euphrates river system has for at least millennia enacted a recognizable, seasonal transfer of snow melt and runoff from what is now the Armenian Highland of eastern Turkey through Kurdistan, Syria, and Iraq to the Persian Gulf. Those water supplies depend on many forces connected around the globe, including air pressure systems, trade winds, and ocean surface temperatures. And, as they occasionally do within a single human lifetime, those forces, those forces in the 1870s combined to disrupt rainfall and human agriculture around the globe. In the Ottoman East during this period, as well, water supplies went dry at key moments. Drought and a lingering winter brought struggles to the human and nonhuman lives that relied on snows to melt and rains to fall. The fluctuations in the broader timeline of the Tigris-Euphrates water system wrought devastating effects, palpable to human and non-human lives. Suffering arising from those effects tended to fall disproportionately on pastoralists and Kurdish tribes and, therefore, unevenly along ethno-confessional lines.

The second section analyzes changes on the familiar temporality human politics observable on the pages of a daily newspaper, or Braudel’s “*social history*.” Rather than focusing on the political decisions made in the metropolises of Berlin and Istanbul, it focuses on the famines that struck the Ottoman East in 1879-81 and the activities of relief agencies that responded to them. The famines killed as many as 10,000 – roughly equal to the number of Ottomans who died in battle on the nearby Caucasus front.³³⁵ These disasters, however, were less

³³⁴ Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 1:20–21.

³³⁵ Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1494-2000* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 209–11.

about grain supply than about rising prices – money famines more than grain famines. Thanks to an expansion of the telegraphs around the globe, money made global movements at a steady, daily pace. Relief agencies used electric signals carried on telegraph lines to move credit around the world, and that credit bought grain locally to stave off hunger. In previous chapters, I have outlined the arrival of crucial political agencies to the Ottoman East like the Ottoman officialdom and the Armenian Patriarchate. During the famines, these two provided relief in form of grain and money, and they were joined by other aid efforts, including those organized by American and British humanitarians. All four agencies drew on global networks of capital to stem the tides of hunger and scarcity. Still, the form and content of aid better served cultivators and Armenians – who themselves were mostly cultivators – and, thus, had the effect of unevenly distributing suffering along ethno-confessional lines.

The third section analyzes changes to the temporality of combat that also distributed suffering unevenly along ethno-confessional lines. This section analyses changes in what Braudel calls “*l’histoire événementielle*,” the history not of peoples but individual persons.³³⁶ Developing firearms technologies were continually increasing the number of shots possible in a given moment. In 1878, a single person could wield a portable, reliable repeating rifle capable of delivering anywhere from six to sixteen shots, each potentially fatal, and reload for a fresh round in a matter of seconds.³³⁷ The 1877-78 War brought to the region an influx of rifles that fueled violent clashes and small-scale rebellions. In the Balkans and the Ottoman-Iranian borderlands, regional upstarts challenged the Ottoman and Qajar governments, and the dislocations wrought by these clashes interacted with famine in devastating ways. As this third section will discuss,

³³⁶ Originally “not of man but of individual men.” See Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 1:20–21.

³³⁷ On the developments in breech-loading firearms in the 1860s and 1870s, see Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 97–99.

the exponentially increasing power of firearms transformed the dynamics of violence in the region.³³⁸ These changes altered a seemingly tiny temporality, but in the heat of combat, moments shorter than seconds determine who lives and who dies. The sectarian distribution of these modern rifles, meanwhile, served to highlight the existing ethno-confessional divisions arising from unequal conscription and the ability to bear arms.

The broad temporality of water systems, the familiar temporality of human politics, and the seconds it takes to fire and reload a rifle: transformations taking place on these three different time scales had intense and intertwined effects, and their joint results upended all lives in the Ottoman East, human and non-human. My aim in addressing the intersecting effects of changes on multiple temporalities is not to assert boundaries between them but precisely the opposite: changes in the forces that supply global water systems, provision human settlements, and propel bullets out of firearms affected and intensified each other. The overlapping effects of these transformations were most pronounced in rural, agrarian, and pastoral areas like the Ottoman East. It is only through an examination of these forces that we can understand why people of these regions were susceptible to the calls of various “Pan-” movements in the decades that followed.

Such an examination also carves out a space outside the seductive teleologies of nation and religion, a space from which we can observe the multiple and intertwined forces that conspired to radicalize and barricade the communal boundaries that make categories like nation and religion conceivable in the first place. These categories came to grow and thrive in history books written in the temporality human politics. We must break this monopoly of human time

³³⁸ For study of new military technologies like rifled barrels wielded by sub-state actors in the Ottoman Balkans, see Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, “Tools of Revolution: Global Military Surplus, Arms Dealers and Smugglers in the Late Ottoman Balkans, 1878–1908,” *Past & Present* 237, no. 1 (November 1, 2017): 167–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx034>.

and its seductive teleologies, or else we risk uncritically re-producing communal categories and ignoring the slower, faster, and non-human forces that made appeals to nation and religion so effective. For the Middle East during this key moment around 1878, we can unsettle the monopoly of human time by attending to forces acting on two vastly different time scales: the swelling and shrinking of streams and the cartridge-fed bullet propelled out the barrel of a gun.

Unseen Victims

The period 1877-81 immiserated regions the Ottoman-Russian borderlands. As one of the front lines of the 1877-78 War, the area suffered physical destruction, bore the burdens of requisitions, and quartered troops. Making matters worse, abnormal rainfall and snowfall in 1879 sapped food production in areas across the empire, including the frontline provinces of Erzurum and Van. Supplies of food and wealth, already low, dwindled further. In response, food prices spiked and reports of famine emerged. This section considers how changes in Tigris-Euphrates water system led to widespread suffering, but also how the unseen effects of water shortage – animal mortality – made that suffering especially acute for predominantly Kurdish pastoralists.

Precipitation and runoff feed the Tigris-Euphrates in mostly predictable, seasonal cycles. Each winter, snows in places like Erzurum collect, and, come spring, they melt, filling the rivers to their highest levels from March to May.³³⁹ In summer, rains taper and levels sink, bottoming out by September and October. In late fall, the rainy season begins and, from November through February, volumes pick up somewhat. Finally, spring brings the annual spike by unleashing the snowmelt, re-starting the cycle.³⁴⁰ This seasonal rise, fall, and rise again are the predictable

³³⁹ Mikdat Kadioğlu, Yurdanur Tulunay, and Yunus Borhan, “Variability of Turkish Precipitation Compared to El Niño Events,” *Geophysical Research Letters* 26, no. 11 (June 1, 1999): 1599, <https://doi.org/10.1029/1999GL900305>.

³⁴⁰ John F. Kolars and William A. Mitchell, *The Euphrates River and the Southeast Anatolia Development Project* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 3–7, 236.

aspect of the Tigris-Euphrates. But rain and snow are fickle. In some years, they fail, and in others they flood and destroy agriculture. Why do seasonal rains fail in some years and flood in others? The work of climate scientists points to global climatic forces, like El Niño, called atmospheric oscillation patterns.³⁴¹ Fluctuations in air pressure, trade winds, and ocean temperatures drive these atmospheric oscillation patterns, which disrupt the predicted weather by decreasing or increasing expected temperatures and precipitation.³⁴² It is not one but several of these patterns that may affect Anatolia, including the El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO), the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), and the North Sea-Caspian Pattern (NCP). Some studies have found that ENSO fluctuations can reduce or increase Anatolian precipitation,³⁴³ although other research suggests that NAO fluctuations exert more influence.³⁴⁴ Still, newer research highlights the effects of the newly-defined NCP.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Fatih Tosunoglu, Ibrahim Can, and Ercan Kahya, "Evaluation of Spatial and Temporal Relationships between Large-Scale Atmospheric Oscillations and Meteorological Drought Indexes in Turkey," *International Journal of Climatology* 38, no. 12 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.5698>; Heidi M. Cullen and Peter B. de Menocal, "North Atlantic Influence on Tigris–Euphrates Streamflow," *International Journal of Climatology* 20, no. 8 (June 30, 2000): 854–55, [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0088\(20000630\)20:8<853::AID-JOC497>3.0.CO;2-M](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0088(20000630)20:8<853::AID-JOC497>3.0.CO;2-M).

³⁴² Davis, *Late Victorian*, 1–16.

³⁴³ Kadioğlu, Tulunay, and Borhan, "Variability of Turkish Precipitation Compared to El Niño Events," 1599–1600.

³⁴⁴ Cullen and de Menocal, "North Atlantic Influence," 861–62.

³⁴⁵ H. Kutiel et al., "North Sea-Caspian Pattern," *Theoretical & Applied Climatology* 72, no. 3/4 (November 2002): 173–92, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00704-002-0674-8>; H. Kutiel and M. Türkeş, "New Evidence for the Role of the North Sea-Caspian Pattern on the Temperature and Precipitation Regimes in Continental Central Turkey," *Geografiska Annaler* 87, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 501–13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3676.2005.00274.x>.



Figure 1: The Tigris-Euphrates Watershed³⁴⁶

Did oscillation patterns influence temperature and precipitation in Anatolia in 1877-1880? We cannot answer this, because climatologists still debate how exactly these atmospheric oscillation patterns act on Anatolia.³⁴⁷ It is useful to note, however, that two of the three forces mentioned above, NAO and ENSO, *both* reached extreme years 1877-1880, according to historical data.³⁴⁸ During these same years, as well, reports about abnormal precipitation and temperatures in Anatolia fill the archival record. American missionaries attributed 1879 food shortages to “very scanty” rainfall over the previous winter.³⁴⁹ British diplomatic correspondence also noted abnormal rainfall,³⁵⁰ as did Ottoman.³⁵¹ These American, British, and Ottoman

³⁴⁶ Musser, Karl. 13 Sep 2005, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tigr-euph.png>.

³⁴⁷ Tosunoglu, Can, and Kahya, “Evaluation,” 2; on ENSO in Turkey, see Ercan Kahya and M. Çağatay Karabörk, “The Analysis of El Niño and La Niña Signals in Streamflows of Turkey,” *International Journal of Climatology* 21, no. 10 (August 1, 2001): 1231–50, <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.663>; on NAO in the Tigris-Euphrates, see Cullen and de Menocal, “North Atlantic Influence”; on NCP in Turkey, see Kutiel and Türkeş, “New Evidence.”

³⁴⁸ For ENSO data, see William H. Quinn et al., “Historical Trends and Statistics of the Southern Oscillation, El Niño, and Indonesian Droughts,” *Fishery Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (1978): 665–72; for NAO data, see Robert Marsh, “Modelling Changes in North Atlantic Circulation under the NAO-minimum Wind Forcing of 1877–81,” *Atmosphere-Ocean* 38, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 368–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07055900.2000.9649653>.

³⁴⁹ “Gleanings from Letters,” *The Missionary Herald* 75, no. 8 (August 1879): 306–7; “The Distress in Turkey,” *The Missionary Herald* 76, no. 6 (June 1880): 214.

³⁵⁰ On central and southern Anatolia, see FO 424/91, 132/1, 9 Oct 1879. On Tabriz, see BL, Western Manuscripts, Add MS 39027, ff. 1, 180.

³⁵¹ On Aleppo and Diyarbakır, see CDA, ŞD. 2216/6, 12 Sep 1879 and CDA, DH.MKT. 1334/7, 6 Jan 1881.

records demonstrate how the war coincided with ecological abnormalities. Given the coinciding historical data on the NAO and ENSO patterns, we can assume that something about the Tigris-Euphrates in 1877-1880 was out of joint.

This coinciding of human and ecological events is crucial for understanding the social outcomes of the war and famine. War devastated the region, but interacting with these human forces were the forces that controlled the waters of the Tigris-Euphrates. How did the simultaneous transformations of forces, political and ecological, affect life in the Ottoman East? Whatever suffering war and famine dealt to the people of Anatolia, it was even more intense for the region's livestock. Like their human owners, livestock suffered from food shortages and cold weather. Unlike their human owners, livestock were liable to be slaughtered for food. These reactions are not surprising: humans tend to prioritize their species over others. What may have been unexpected, however, were the ways that massive animal mortality distributed suffering along ethno-confessional lines.

Early observations from famine-stricken districts highlighted how rising food prices stretched village resources thin and put livestock on the chopping block. In January 1880, the Protestant missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), Robert Chambers, wrote a letter to the region's British Vice-Consul, Captain William Everett. At Karakilise (Ağrı), people were not yet starving, but 150 cattle had already died.³⁵² Even in areas that were relatively well off, animals suffered high mortality. The Vice-Consul Everett wrote that in one of the more "flourishing" of famine districts, half of the cattle and 70% of sheep had died.³⁵³ In both examples, as scarcity and high prices pressed villages, they slaughtered livestock.

³⁵² FO 424/106, 186, "Memorandum by Lord Tenterden on Distress in Asiatic Turkey," 21 May 1880.

³⁵³ FO 424/106, 213/3, Everett to Major Trotter, Erzurum, 21 May 1880. Everett's writings indicate similarly high animal mortality rates in eastern Erzurum province the following summer, as well. See FO 424/106, 260, Everett to Trotter, Erzurum, 11 June 1880.

Famine and its attendant animal mortality also struck Van province, immediately south of Erzurum. At Başkale, the largest town before the Iranian border, “only three or four of the richest households had any bread to eat at all; the remainder had slaughtered and salted their sheep, and were living on this meat without any vegetable diet whatever,” Captain Emilius Clayton, the British Vice-Consul at Van, wrote in February 1880. He gave similar reports about people slaughtering pack animals for food in the mountainous districts of Nurdüz and Çatak, about 90 km south of the city of Van.³⁵⁴ Across Van and Erzurum provinces, prices pushed food out of reach, so people turned to their flocks.

A lingering winter aggravated scarcity and added to animal mortality. In a typical year, the snowmelt increases the Euphrates flow starting in March and ramps up significantly in April and May.³⁵⁵ In addition to increasing the flow of the Euphrates, snowmelt is also crucial for grass and other fodder to begin to grow. In 1880, however, snow still sat on the ground in late March, and animals continued to starve. In a letter dated March 26, 1880, the ABCFM missionary Henry Barnum wrote that the lingering winter was driving more people to slaughter their livestock: “Normally the flocks go out to graze some weeks before this, but this year they must be fed, & to purchase the necessary hay is so expensive, that many, whose supply is exhausted, are constrained to kill many of their sheep and goats after keeping them all winter.”³⁵⁶ A combination of a late winter and high hay prices drove people to kill the winter’s surviving sheep and cattle. Eating livestock provided short-term relief, but it affected the region’s long-term provisioning. In the following April, Ottoman authorities in Van were optimistic about famine conditions easing as spring set in, Clayton wrote. They believed spring would bring an increase

³⁵⁴ FO 424/106, 186, “Memorandum by Lord Tenterden on Distress in Asiatic Turkey,” 21 May 1880.

³⁵⁵ Kolars and Mitchell, *Euphrates River*, 236.

³⁵⁶ ABC 16.9.7, Vol 3, Part 2, Reel 681, 626-32, Letter from H.S. Barnum to Dr Clark, Van, 26 Mar 1880.

in dairy and other animal food products to alleviate hunger. Clayton disagreed, because “the greater part of the animals have either been killed for food already, or have died for want of forage.”³⁵⁷

As the lack of affordable food forced some to slaughter and eat their livestock over the winter, others attempted to sustain theirs. Domestic animals provided labor, wool, and dung fuel, making them critical to human life, so only the truly desperate would have slaughtered their livestock. Different segments of the population relied on different strategies for protecting their livestock. Cultivators may have been able to feed and shelter their animals in sheds or even in their own homes.³⁵⁸ While nomadic pastoralists may have lacked permanent structures to protect their flocks, in previous decades they would have been able to move over a broader area to find pasturage. The porous borders between Qajar, Ottoman, and Russian realms were often traversed by pastoralists in the region, at least in the early 1850s. The major sub-groups of both the predominantly Kurdish Zilan and Celali tribes typically moved between the plateaus near Mount Aragats (Alagöz) on the Russian side of the border to the Ararat plain on the Ottoman side. Likewise, different subgroups of the same tribes based in northwestern Iran would move seasonally between areas around Maku on the Qajar side of the border and the Çaldıran plain on the Ottoman side in northeastern Van province.³⁵⁹ By the winter of 1879-80, however, increasing border controls provoked increasing diplomatic spats among the three empires.³⁶⁰ Cross-border

³⁵⁷ FO 422/106, 209/1, Clayton to Trotter, Van, 20 Apr 1880.

³⁵⁸ Animals were sometimes kept in dwellings to utilize their body heat during cold winters. For an example of this, see Charles Boswell Norman, *Armenia, and the Campaign of 1877* (London, Paris, and New York: Cassell, Peter, and Galpin, 1878), 31–33.

³⁵⁹ Mehmed Hurşid Paşa, *Seyahâtnâme-i Hudûd*, trans. Alâattin Eser (Istanbul: Simurg, 1997), 262–64.

³⁶⁰ See CDA, HR.SYS 1231/86, 2/1, 8 May 1882, a note sent from Erzurum province to the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, dated 20 March 1882. It urges Ottoman diplomats to ask their Iranian colleagues to prevent pastoralist tribes from their usual summer pasturage (*yaylak*) on the Ottoman side of frontier around Doğubeyazıt. The Erzurum authorities accused the tribes of using the pasturage as an excuse for pillage (*tecaviüz*). For other examples see CDA, HR.TH 35/48, 5, 23 Aug 1880, and CDA, Y.PRK.EŞA 2/73, 1, 22 Nov 1881 / 29 Zilhicce 1298. For a broader overview of this contentious boundary during and after the 1877-78 war, see Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian*, 199–201.

tribal movements sparked terse diplomatic exchanges and accusations.³⁶¹ Unfortunately for tribes and their livestock, these mobility restrictions may have only aggravated the pressure of fodder scarcity by preventing tribes from searching for greener pastures.

Under different circumstances, livestock imported from different areas may have been able to mitigate shortfalls, at least long enough for livestock populations to re-establish themselves. In 1879-80, however, livestock imports were not likely because of high animal mortality elsewhere. Neighboring areas in central Anatolia, northern Syria, and Iraq, as well as areas in western Anatolia also reported mass animal death. In January 1880, Consul Trotter wrote from Diyarbakır that food shortages and an “unusually severe” winter and sheep and cattle there had died in “enormous numbers.” Reports blamed a harsh and lingering winter in 1880 for increased animal mortality even farther west, in Konya and Bursa. The sheep and goat tax showed 25% and 60% losses of mohair goats in the two regions, respectively. Areas of modern Syria and Iraq, including Deir ez-Zor, Nehrwan, Mosul, Erbil, and Kirkuk, witnessed, 50-90% losses of sheep, cattle, and draught animals, according to a March 1880 report by Alphaeus Andrus, an ABCFM missionary. In May 1880, the Ottoman Interior Ministry forwarded a request to the Sublime Porte from the district governor (mutasarrıf) of Süleymaniye, asking that his district receive financial assistance from another local treasury. The sheep tax there, the district governor wrote, was so low compared to previous years that it would not raise enough money even to bury the gathering corpses in his famine-stricken district, let alone to support the army and police forces stationed there.

³⁶¹ See for example CDA, HR.TH 35/48, 5, 23 Aug 1880 on complaints about frontier tribes between Qajars and Ottomans. For similar complaints between the Romanovs and Ottomans, see CDA, HR.SYS 1231/86, 8 May 1882 and CDA, HR.SYS 1274/3, 1, 23 May 1883.

High animal mortality had wide-reaching effects. As shortages of food and fodder starved or compelled the slaughter of pack animals, the cost of transport rose. In Erzurum, the Provincial Governor (*vali*) wrote that he had grain stored in imperial granaries but no funds to transport them to the eastern parts of the province, where the lack of affordable food was most acute. Not surprisingly, the hungry populations were also “wanting in cattle,” so they were unable to obtain the aid they sought.³⁶² Animal mortality also crippled transport in Van. Transporting food and other necessary supplies would also be difficult, he said, because “almost all of the beasts of burden” had died, and there was “no corn or forage on the routes” to transport new animals.³⁶³ These transport difficulties apparently delayed the movement of grain from the relatively bountiful harvest on the western and northern shores of the lake to famine-stricken areas to the east and south.³⁶⁴

High animal mortality eliminated a key source of labor from transportation and agriculture, but it also appeared to have impoverished people who held their wealth in animals, especially pastoralists. Several reports from British officials and American missionaries in the region noted tribes along the Russo-Ottoman and Qajar-Ottoman borders were especially destitute. Of the communities from the Kurdish Cemedanlı tribe who normally spent part of the year in areas around Kars, around 380 families fled to the plain of Eleşkirt on the Ottoman side of the border during the war. Afterward, the Russian Empire annexed Kars province, and the Cemedanlı stayed on the Ottoman side.³⁶⁵ From 1879 to 1880, the Cemedanlı tribe’s flocks

³⁶² FO 424/106, 47/3, Everett to Trotter, Erzurum, 2 Jan 1880.

³⁶³ FO 422/106, 209/1, Clayton to Trotter, Van, 20 Apr 1880. Around the same time, Henry Barnum, another ABCFM missionary, noted increasing transport prices, which he blamed on the high cost of fodder. See ABC 16.9.7, Vol 3, Part 2, Reel 681, 626-32, Letter from H.S. Barnum to Dr Clark, Van, 26 Mar 1880.

³⁶⁴ FO 422/106, 209/1, Clayton to Trotter, Van, 20 Apr 1880.

³⁶⁵ Yakup Karataş and Eyüp Kul, “XIX. Yüzyılın Sonlarında Bayezid Sancağı’ndaki Aşiretler ve İskân Politikası [Tribes of the Sanjak of Bayezid and Settlement Policy at the Ends of Nineteenth Century],” *Journal of Turkish Research Institute* 48 (2012): 358, <http://e-dergi.atauni.edu.tr/ataunitaed/article/view/1020008312>.

collapsed from 18,000 to 200 sheep, according to Major Trotter. Having sold their tents and other possessions to buy food, they had “nothing left but to die.”³⁶⁶ Captain Everett, a British Vice-Consul in the region, also compared the abject state of the Cemedanli to the suffering of two other Kurdish tribes, the Celali and Zilan.³⁶⁷ Suffering was widespread, but it appeared most intense for those who held their wealth in livestock, including predominantly Kurdish tribes.

The Cemedanli, Celali, and Zilan were not the only ones whose intense poverty caught outsiders’ attention. Throughout the period 1879-81, American missionaries, British officials, and other foreigners in Erzurum and Van observed that food shortages seemed to harm Kurds and Turks more than Armenians. In February 1880, the ABCFM missionary Robert Chambers noted that “the Turkish villages” in Erzurum’s plain of Pasin were “in a worse condition than those inhabited by Christians.”³⁶⁸ In the same region, a few months later Major Trotter wrote, “At present it is the Turks and Kurds who are suffering the most.”³⁶⁹ Likewise, in areas outside of the city of Van, the Clayton reported that 98% of deaths were among Kurds.³⁷⁰ Near Ahlat, a town on the northern shore of Lake Van, Armenian villagers were reportedly “keeping alive destitute Kurds who were on the point of perishing in the cold and snow.”³⁷¹ In Karakilise (Ağrı), Turks were “dependent even for bread on their Armenian brethren.”³⁷²

Mass animal mortality helps explain why pastoralist nomads appeared to suffer more, but what about Kurds and Turks more broadly?³⁷³ It is important to note that the connotations of “Kurd” and “Turk” were more fluid than they are now. These terms could denote any

³⁶⁶ FO 424/107, 79/1, Trotter to Lady Strangford, Erzurum, 23 Jul 1880.

³⁶⁷ FO 424/107, 79/2, Trotter to Everett, Erzurum, 1 Aug 1880.

³⁶⁸ FO 424/106, 186, “Memorandum by Lord Tenterden on Distress in Asiatic Turkey,” 21 May 1880.

³⁶⁹ FO 424/106, 260, Everett to Trotter, Erzurum, 11 Jun 1880.

³⁷⁰ FO 424/107, 38/1, *Note Verbale* signed by Goschen, Tarabya, 21 Jun 1880.

³⁷¹ FO 424/107, 161/1, Vice-Consul Clayton to Trotter, Van, 20 Sep 1880.

³⁷² FO 424/107, 143/1, Vice-Consul Everett to Trotter, Thortum Kaleh, 7 Sep 1880.

³⁷³ See also, for example, Clayton’s description of how he distributed more aid to the more needy Kurds, FO 424/122, 69/3, “Distribution of Corn,” 28 Feb 1881.

combination of a language-speaking community (Turkish or Kurdish), a sect (Hanafi or Shafi, mostly), or an economic standing (rural Muslim peasant, nomadic tribesman). Still, whatever “Kurd” or “Turk” meant, it nearly always excluded Christians. So, these foreign observations suggest, at least, that these officers and missionaries noticed a sectarian distribution of famine suffering.³⁷⁴ Why, to these observers, did the suffering from famine seem lop-sided?

The Taste of Hunger

Massive animal mortality demonstrates one way famine wrought uneven suffering for particular segments of the population – namely those who held most their wealth in the form of livestock, and to a lesser extent those who relied on the labor or other products of livestock. In the Ottoman East, this had the effect of immiserating nomadic pastoralists. This section turns to how it was not only uneven effects *of* famine, but also the uneven responses *to* famine that made suffering seem so lop-sided. The content and pace of famine relief was conditioned by the infrastructure that could deliver it. By 1879-81, the Ottomans had recently finished a new form of infrastructure in partnership with the British, the trans-Ottoman telegraph line. Having started in 1855 and steadily expanded since, by 1868, the trans-Ottoman network reached from Istanbul to Basra and included local lines that covered key cities in the Ottoman East.³⁷⁵

The spread of the telegraph around the world enabled the steady rhythm of news from around the world making itself accessible every morning in newspapers and other media.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ This observation, it must be said, was a rare reversal, since typically British and American reports from the region described the disproportionate suffering of Ottoman Christians, the Armenian, East Syrian, and Greek Orthodox communities who appeared to suffer from inequality vis-à-vis their neighbors who were considered Muslims. See Chapter 2.

³⁷⁵ For more information about the advent of the telegraph in the Ottoman Empire, see Davison, Roderic H., “The Advent of the Electric Telegraph in the Ottoman Empire,” in *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History: The Impact of the West*, 1990, 133–67; Yakup Bektas, “The Sultan’s Messenger: Cultural Constructions of Ottoman Telegraphy, 1847-1880,” *Technology and Culture* 41, no. 4 (2000): 669–96.

³⁷⁶ Anderson describes something akin to this daily rhythm in his discussion of newspapers as an “extraordinary mass ceremony,” drawing on Hegel, who called reading the newspaper “the morning prayer” of realists. See

Information that could have taken weeks or months to arrive was suddenly available daily, and from far-flung corners of the globe. Telegraphs allowed not only news but also letters of credit to move far faster than a hand-carried letter. During the 1879-81 famines, actual food and physical currency faced physical difficulties exacerbated by the collapse of livestock populations. The rapid, global movement of electric pulses on telegraph lines far outstripped precarious caravans of material aid. And indeed, the most effective relief agencies responding the famines of 1879-81 relied on telegraphs to move credit, which was used to purchase and distribute grain locally. The different temporalities of food and credit during the 1879-81 famines determined what sorts of aid and which relief agencies would be more effective. The observations of uneven suffering in the previous section, this one argues, arose not only from uneven effects of extreme weather and collapsing livestock populations but also from newly-swift credit movements that, thanks to the telegraph, could zip around globally at a steady, daily pace.

Not all famines are the same, and to understand British and American observations of uneven suffering in 1879-81, it is important to consider the particular sort of famine that struck the Ottoman East. These were money famines, not grain famines. The conditions were not absolute shortage. The grain was there, it was just in shorter supply than usual, and it commanded prices too high for most people. “Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat,” Amartya Sen wrote in his seminal work on famine, “It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat.”³⁷⁷ In his work, Sen highlights how famine arises from “Failures of Exchange Entitlements,” the times when a large class of people cannot feed themselves from their money, labor, entitlements, or anything else they could exchange.³⁷⁸

Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33–36; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel* (Northwestern University Press, 2002), 247.

³⁷⁷ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 1.

³⁷⁸ Sen, 2–4.

Paying attention to exchange entitlements and their failures, says Sen, encourages studies of famine that take into account not only food availability but also physical and human assets, the productivity of those assets, and the prices of commodities and services (including, but not limited to food). Sen's model helps us understand why "some people" had less to eat than others during the famines that struck Ottoman East, thanks to dramatic changes in exchange entitlements.

Indeed, in 1879-81, the cost of food relative to exchange entitlements rose rapidly in the face of major forces: war, irregular weather, and animal mortality. The 1877-78 war drained able-bodies from agricultural laborer, ruined crops, and brought new mouths to feed in the form of Russian and Ottoman soldiers. The weather brought crop losses, too, as failures to predict the weather so often do. A linked, and more devastating effect of the weather, as the previous section argued, was the death of the livestock. Their absence removed necessary labor for plowing and carrying crops. These factors all sapped food supplies. Still, the Ottomans anticipated shortages and took steps preserve grain. In the summer of 1879, following consecutive seasons of little snow or rainfall in Anatolia³⁷⁹ and Syria,³⁸⁰ the authorities restricted grain exports.³⁸¹ The Sublime Porte banned cereals exports from Diyarbakır and Adana in July 1879.³⁸² In the following September, it issued a similar ban for Aleppo,³⁸³ and by November, the ban covered the whole the empire.³⁸⁴ These bans continued during the famines on the regional level as well,

³⁷⁹ "Gleanings from Letters"; "The Famine," *The Missionary Herald* 76, no. 5 (May 1880): 180.

³⁸⁰ CDA, HR.SYS 406/39, 4 Mar 1879.

³⁸¹ For examples from the sixteenth century, see Zafer Karademir, *İmparatorluğun Açlıkla İmtihani: Osmanlı Toplumunda Kıtliklar (1560-1660) [Testing the Empire With Hunger: Famines in Ottoman Society (1560-1660)]* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2014), 239–42; for an example from an 1864 drought in eastern Anatolia, see Mehmet Yavuz Erler, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Kuraklık ve Kıtık Olayları (1800-1880) [Episodes of Drought and Famine in the Ottoman Empire (1800-1880)]* (Istanbul: Libra, 2010), 127; Ertem, "Last Seed," 200.

³⁸² FO 78/2979, 57, Layard to Marquis of Salisbury, Tarabya, 31 Jul 1879.

³⁸³ CDA, ŞD 2216/6, 12 Sep 1879.

³⁸⁴ The empire-wide ban included important exceptions like the commercial ports of Adana and İzmir, as well as contracts signed before the ban. See FO 78/2979, 86, Layard to Marquis of Salisbury, Tarabya, 5 Nov 1879.

as in Bitlis in April 1880.³⁸⁵ Throughout the famine, reports indicated that tithes in grain, barley, and other produce were being collected in nearby areas, and grain was procurable and transportable – albeit sluggishly – to famine-stricken districts.³⁸⁶ In short, there was grain available, even if it was harder to move and in shorter supply than other years.

What failed was less grain supplies than Ottoman finances, crushed under the weight of a punishing system of global capital. One of the most important connections between local grain markets and global capital markets was the value of currency used to buy and sell grain. During this period, the Ottoman financial collapse devastated the provinces with currency devaluations at the worst possible moment – in the midst of famine that followed the war. In October 6, 1875, the Grand Vizier Nedim Paşa had announced that the government was suspending half of the interest payments on its mountain of foreign debt. Ottoman finances were in shambles with no clear way forward until December 20, 1881, when Istanbul reached settlement with its predominantly British and French bondholders.³⁸⁷ The suspension of debt payments cut Istanbul off from foreign credit, but the government desperately needed to raise money for military campaigns against Serbian and Bulgarian uprisings in 1875-76 and, soon after, the 1877-78 war with Russia. In August 1876, the government resorted to unbacked paper currency (*kaime*). Although the paper was introduced at parity with metallic *kuruş* (100 per lira), its trading value sank immediately and continued to drop during the war with Russia. By October 1878, one gold lira could buy 331 *kuruş* worth of paper *kaime* from moneychangers in Istanbul (see Figure 2).³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ FO 78/3113, 43, Layard to Marquis of Salisbury, Tarabya, 12 Apr 1880.

³⁸⁶ CDA, DH.MKT 1331/17, 6 May 1880; CDA, DH.MKT 1331/31, 8 May 1880; FO 424/106, 243/1, Major Trotter to Sir A.H. Layard, Diyarbakır, 13 May 1880; FO 424/106, 245/2, Vice-Consul Clayton to Trotter Van, 12 May 1880.

³⁸⁷ Donald C. Blaisdell, *European Financial Control in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 80–81.

³⁸⁸ Christopher Clay, *Gold for the Sultan: Western Bankers and Ottoman Finance, 1856-1881* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 344–51.

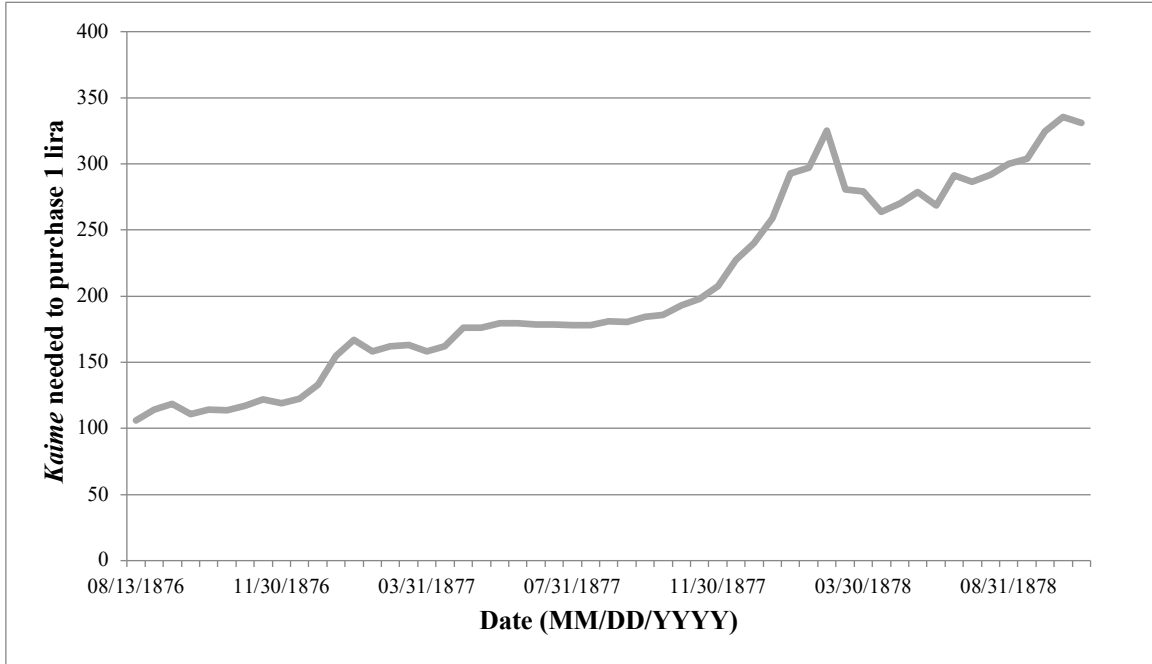


Figure 2: Kaime vs. Ottoman Lira in Galata, Istanbul August 1876 to October 1878³⁸⁹

Even after March 1878, when major hostilities with Russia had ceased, military expenditures dragged on. Although the cease fire was signed, there was no peace with Russia until February 1879, and until that date, the Ottomans had to pay to keep their enlarged armies on war footing.³⁹⁰ What is more, in 1880-81 conflict erupted with Greece over Ottoman border territories, meaning the Ottomans had to call up some of the same soldiers just eighteen months after the peace with Russia.³⁹¹ In short, the debt crisis, uprisings and a full-scale imperial war, and a drawn out peace process brought the Ottomans to their knees.

In the midst of these troubles, the Ottomans negotiated with their Paris and London creditors, and recalling the worthless paper money was a key issue in the negotiations. In March

³⁸⁹ Blaisdell, *European Financial*, 381–83.

³⁹⁰ Blaisdell, *European Financial*, 381–83.

³⁹¹ Article XXIV of the 1878 Berlin Treaty suggested that the Ottomans and the Greeks ought to “rectify” their border, but it offered no specifics on how that might happen. See “Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria,

1879, the government announced its supposed solution to the problem: repudiating the 1.5 billion of paper piasters it had issued.³⁹² This decision decimated people's wealth across the empire.³⁹³ The military had used paper to pay for supplies, so merchants and peasants near the fronts held higher concentrations of paper.³⁹⁴ Correspondingly, people in the Ottoman East, on the war's Caucasus Front, were left holding large amounts of repudiated currency. The results were devastating. British Consul Biliotti at Trabzon wrote of a liberated slave who had worked and saved for years but whose life savings became worthless. In despair, he went with a cutlass to the stairs of a government building and "deliberately cut open his belly," where "his intestines dropped on the ground, but he lived long enough to state the motive of his act of despair."³⁹⁵ Whatever the source of this gruesome anecdote, the Consul's choice to forward it to the Ambassador suggests the utter desperation that swept the Ottoman East. After suffering military defeat and poor harvests, people suffered even further thanks to financial decisions made in Istanbul, Berlin, Paris, and London.

Other scholars have shown how imperial infrastructure like railways could aggravate famine by facilitating profitable exports before and during famines.³⁹⁶ For other parts of the world more thoroughly integrated into globalizing commodity chains, this line of reasoning holds more promise. In the Ottoman East, however, the findings above suggest that it was not new railways but currency that stole food off people's tables. Telegraphs spread across the

France, Italy, Russia, and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East: Signed at Berlin, July 13, 1878," *The American Journal of International Law* 2, no. 4 (1908): 412, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2212670>.

³⁹² Clay, *Gold*, 408–9.

³⁹³ For examples of unrest caused by currency repudiations, see Ertem, "Last Seed," 87–95; see also Stephen Duguid, "Centralization and Localism: Some Aspects of Ottoman Policy in Eastern Anatolia, 1878-1908" (MA, Simon Fraser University, 1970), 143–45, <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/3033>.

³⁹⁴ Clay, *Gold*, 357.

³⁹⁵ FO 424/107, 26, 9 Jul 1880.

³⁹⁶ On cash crops and food exports during shortages in colonized areas, see Watts, *Silent Violence*, 300–304; Davis, *Late Victorian*, 26–28 and 50–53.

empire demanding provincial officials send funds to the capital.³⁹⁷ Officials, in turn, sold imperial grain and hounded famished peasants for taxes.³⁹⁸ “The drain of money to Constantinople is sapping the life-blood of the Empire,” Trotter wrote in October 1880. One official, asked to lighten tax-collection, responded “What can I do? . . . if I do not furnish a certain fixed sum on a certain day I shall be held personally responsible.”³⁹⁹

It was also during this period that the gold standard was being forced onto the Ottomans, as the US, France, Italy, and other countries joined Britain and Germany in backing their currencies in gold alone.⁴⁰⁰ The Ottomans, whose debt was owed to these gold standard countries,⁴⁰¹ also started forcing their subjects to pay taxes in gold (or in some cases silver). Copper traded as low as one-fifth its nominal value (500 piasters per gold lira), and this devaluation of non-gold metals only aggravated losses for the poorer classes who held their wealth in copper and the newly-worthless paper. Vice-Consul Clayton described their impossible position: “The people represent that they will be totally ruined if the taxes are demanded in gold or silver while they are only in possession of the depreciated copper currency.”⁴⁰² Clayton’s report underscores how the 1879-81 famines cannot be explained by war or weather alone. Sovereign debts and currency changes negotiated in imperial capitals were “sapping the life-blood” of the provinces. Crushed between immediate fiscal needs and foreign creditors, Ottoman officials shifted the burdens of taxes and debt onto people least able to bear them, like those in the Ottoman East.

³⁹⁷ FO 424/106, 171/1, Apr 1880; FO 424/107, 26, 9 Jul 1880; and FO 424/122, 56/1, 8 Feb 1881.

³⁹⁸ On imperial grain disappearing into private hoards: FO 424/106, 29/2, 2 Dec 1879; FO 424/106, 70/2, 30 Jan 1880; and FO 424/107, 148/2, 23 Sep 1880.

³⁹⁹ FO 424/107, 154/1, 2 Oct 1880.

⁴⁰⁰ Şevket Pamuk, *Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 217.

⁴⁰¹ Edhem Eldem, *A History of the Ottoman Bank* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Historical Research Center, 1999), 147–48.

⁴⁰² FO 78/2991, 34/1, 19 Aug 1879.

The most successful relief agencies found money to alleviate these troubles and buy grain locally. Provincial officials needed sound currency to satisfy Istanbul's needs, and in many areas their imperial granaries were stocked. Foreign currency was a quick and effective way to access that grain: quick, thanks to telegraph lines, and effective, because it avoided the floundering Ottoman lira. The four largest relief agencies were the Ottoman government, the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate, British consuls, and American missionaries. Armenian, British, and American relief agencies formed earliest. The Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate formed its Central Famine Aid Commission in January 1880 with provincial committees directed by clergymen and notables.⁴⁰³ Unlike Armenian relief efforts, British efforts had no central organization. Philanthropists in Britain raised donations, while British Consuls used that money for relief. Disbursements began as early as February 1880.⁴⁰⁴ Protestant aid also began in the first months of 1880, as well. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and Armenian Protestant converts in Istanbul also raised donations.⁴⁰⁵ The ABCFM began fundraising in January 1880, and by February 1880, the missionary Robert Chambers was distributing \$250 to villages around Erzurum.

Facing financial collapse and military defeat, the Ottoman government was slower to organize. In October 1879, six months before the formation of their Commission, British consuls had warned of impending shortages.⁴⁰⁶ The Erzurum governor downplayed the possibility at that time.⁴⁰⁷ Perhaps he feared highlighting troubles in the eastern provinces, where Western

⁴⁰³ *Deghegagir Sovelots' Khnamadar Getronagan Hantsnazhoghovoy [Central Famine Commission Report]* (Istanbul: Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, 1885), 4–5, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/43513941.html>.

⁴⁰⁴ FO 424/122, 69/2, 15 Feb 1881; FO 424/107, 79/1, 23 Jul 1880.

⁴⁰⁵ Minas Kevorkian, "Kahtzedegân İçin İane Komitesi [Committee for Famine Aid]," *Avedaper* 23, no. 11 (March 16, 1880): 3; "The Famine," May 1880; "The Famine," *The Missionary Herald* 76, no. 6 (June 1880): 227–28.

⁴⁰⁶ Ertem, "Last Seed," 139.

⁴⁰⁷ CDA, HR.SYS 78/4, 21/1, 20 Apr 1880.

humanitarians had been demanding European intervention on behalf of Christians. “Certain ill-disposed foreign Governments might make it [the famine] a pretext for insisting on the immediate formation of the protocols of the Treaty of Berlin,” Grand Vizier Said Paşa said in an April 1880 statement about founding the Ottoman Famine Commission.⁴⁰⁸ He was likely referring to Article 61 of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, which called for reforms aimed at protecting Armenians in the eastern provinces.⁴⁰⁹ Whatever the reasons, delays left little time to distribute money, food, and seed, and therefore little time before the planting season, rendering aid useless in some areas.⁴¹⁰

In addition to its early timing, the Armenian Commission also seems to have raised more money than the Ottomans, British, or Americans. Drawing on predominantly Armenian donors stretching from Manchester to Madras, the Commission raised 3.84m piasters in 1880-84. Other relief agencies raised tens or hundreds of thousands of piasters. Donations came from Tbilisi (418,768 piasters), Manchester (142,780), Paris (130,078), Moscow (110,631.50), Alexandria (90,944), and Marseilles (82,109.75). These donations, backed by foreign currencies (rubles, pounds, francs, etc.), likely boosted the Patriarchate’s efforts, freeing it from ongoing devaluations.⁴¹¹ Both British and Protestant efforts operated as a set of cooperating but separate institutions, so it is tricky to pin down precise numbers. Papers held in the National Archives and the British Library suggest British efforts raised the equivalent of 600,000 and perhaps up to 1,000,000 piasters.⁴¹² As for American aid, by May 1880, it totaled about 50,000 piasters

⁴⁰⁸ “The Famine In Asia Minor,” *The Times*, May 3, 1880, The Times Digital Archive.

⁴⁰⁹ “Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia, and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East,” 422.

⁴¹⁰ For an example of these delays, see FO 424/106, 260, 11 Jun 1880 and FO 424/107, 79/1, 23 Jul 1880.

⁴¹¹ *Deghegagir*, 118.

⁴¹² On calculations, see FO 424/122, 69/2, 28 Feb 1881 and FO 424/107, 79/1, 23 Jul 1880; BL, Western Manuscripts, Add MS39034, f. 259 William George Abbott, Consul at Tabriz: Letters to Sir A. H. Layard: 1877-1882. For more, see BL, Western Manuscripts, Add MS39033, f. 36-138.

(\$2200).⁴¹³ Additionally, Istanbul-based Armenian Protestants raised 26,446 piasters from their own donation campaign.⁴¹⁴ Turning to the Ottoman Commission's funding, it did mobilize significant funds, but a large part of those funds came from officials who donated their unpaid salaries. The Commission had created a registry for officials on government payrolls to make voluntary contributions, which initially reached 50,312 piasters, but only 10,000 in gold. The other 40,312 came from donated salary arrears.⁴¹⁵ These arrears, if ever paid, would likely have been paid as government promissory notes. It was not guaranteed that these promissory notes could be converted to cash, and even if they could, they could fetch as little as 45% of their nominal value.⁴¹⁶

Although the total sums may have been inflated, the Ottoman Famine Commission still distributed significant amounts of aid. An interior ministry dispatch from April 1880 notes that aid payments were made to bank representatives in Mosul (800 lira), Van, Bitlis, and Diyarbakır (400 lira each), totaling 200,000 piasters. Given that the dispatch mentions "Ottoman gold lira," we can assume that these dispatches were backed by specie, not salary arrears.⁴¹⁷ Even conservatively assuming these transfers were in fact only arrears-backed credit, at 45% of their nominal amounts, they still would have been comparable in size to British aid, if not larger. In the final assessment, then, the Ottoman Commission raised significant funds, but of the four agencies examined here, Armenian Patriarchate's aid efforts seemed to have raised the most money. While the Protestants, British, and Ottoman aid efforts raised the equivalent of tens or

⁴¹³ "[No Title]," *The Missionary Herald* 76, no. 4 (April 1880): 122; "[No Title]," *The Missionary Herald* 76, no. 5 (May 1880): 162; on conversions, see Pamuk, *Monetary*, 209.

⁴¹⁴ "Hankanagut' iwn Hantsnazhoghovoy Langayi Aved. Yegeghets'woyn Vasn Sovelots' Hayasdani [Contributions to the Vlanga Protestant Church for the Famine of Armenia]," *Avedaper* 33, no. 52 (December 28, 1880): 206.

⁴¹⁵ CDA, İ.DH 802/65028, 15 Apr 1880, in Ertem, "Eating the Last Seed: Famine, Empire, Survival and Order in Ottoman Anatolia in the Late Nineteenth Century," 141.

⁴¹⁶ On converting these promissory notes, see FO 424/107, 7/1, 3 Jul 1880.

⁴¹⁷ CDA, DH.MKT 1331/10, 29 Apr 1880. The dispatch says "yüzlük Osmanlı altun," and makes no mention of "havale."

hundreds of thousands of piasters each, the Armenian Central Famine Commission raised 3.84 million.

With its earlier start and larger base of funds, the Armenian Central Famine Commission was the relief heavyweight in the region. What is more, the Armenian Commission had a narrower mission. Its primary objective was to aid Armenians and, after, “according to suitability and ability,” aid “Turks, Kurds, and other communities.”⁴¹⁸ It is important to qualify this claim. Ottoman officials in some areas encouraged each community to take care of its own,⁴¹⁹ and the idea that Armenians, Greeks, and other communities (*millet*) should care for their own communities had precedents in earlier periods.⁴²⁰ Also, based on the aforementioned reports describing Kurdish and Turkish villagers relying on Armenians for survival, we can speculate that in several areas aid did in fact serve “Turks, Kurds, and other communities.” Finally, Armenians also complained that government aid flowed unevenly toward the Turks and Kurds.⁴²¹ Aid was always prone to disputes, and it is impossible to adjudicate those claims today. Still, understanding the power of the Armenian agency relative to the others is useful for understanding why foreign observers noticed Armenians suffering less from famine. There was more money earmarked for them, and, outside of the Lake Van region, Armenians were a minority.

In addition to its timing and funding, the content of relief may also have contributed to the appearance of uneven suffering. All four agencies focused responses on grain markets and agriculture – activities more helpful for cultivators than for pastoralists. Relief operated primarily

⁴¹⁸ *Deghegkir*, 6.

⁴¹⁹ FO 424/106, 186, 21 May 1880.

⁴²⁰ Yaron Ayalon, *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 110–27.

⁴²¹ FO 424/106, 13/1, 15 Nov 1879; FO 424/106, 13/2, 22 Nov 1879; FO 424/106, 29/2, 2 Dec 1879; FO 424/106, 207, 4 May 1880.

by purchasing food and seed. This focus on feeding the needy and planting fields is predictable; it would have been difficult to justify hay imports while people starved. The Armenian Commission, for instance, spent 70-80% of its funds for Van and Erzurum on grain or cash intended for grain.⁴²² The commission did devote about 6% of its budget (72,513 piasters) to purchasing oxen,⁴²³ but these were intended for cultivators to replace “those that have died, so agriculture may be carried on.”⁴²⁴ While this spending seems reasonable, these relief mechanisms highlighted the difference between pastoralists and cultivators. Food offered short-term relief for all the hungry, but attempts to distribute seed and rehabilitate agriculture were likely more useful for cultivators than for pastoralists.

Kurdish leaders around Van publicized these dismissive attitudes and their alleged negative effects in the Ottoman press. *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, a newspaper edited by the important Ottoman literary figure Ahmed Midhat Efendi, published a series of articles during this period about Kurds, Armenians, and Ottoman East.⁴²⁵ One anonymous letter, said to be written by Kurdish leaders in Van, claimed that in an official meeting about famine aid, someone had said, “Let’s not give aid to Kurds. They are wild and savage . . . let them taste hunger.”⁴²⁶ The same article accuses Armenian publications of deploying “a language of oppression to make foreigners hear.” The articles of *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* show how famine relief gave some Kurdish leaders the opportunity to reverse a common trope: Kurds as oppressors and Armenians as victims. It also provided an opportunity to accuse Armenians of crying “oppression” to foreign

⁴²² Relevant budget items equaled 451,051.12 piasters. A 50,040.75 piaster allocation was for both food and money, so I added half that amount (25,020.37). *Deghegaker*, 119.

⁴²³ *Deghegaker*, 120–21.

⁴²⁴ FO 424/106, 245/1, 7 May 1880.

⁴²⁵ “Yine Kürdistan! [Again Kurdistan!],” *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 591 (June 2, 1880): 3; “Kürdistan [Kurdistan],” *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 661 (August 23, 1880): 1; “Kürtlerin Bir Lahiyesi [A Report of the Kurds],” *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 591 (June 2, 1880): 3; “[No Title],” *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 674 (September 10, 1880): 3.

⁴²⁶ “Kürtlerin Bir Lahiyesi [A Report of the Kurds]”; Soleimani, *Islam and Competing Nationalisms*, 174–75.

powers for their own benefit. Unlike Kurds, Armenians were in a position to aid their flock, while aid was denied to the “wild and savage” Kurds. These sorts of messages must have resonated with readers suffering from the financial collapse and military defeat not only in the Ottoman East but also across the Empire. They show how the devastation of war, famine, and poverty found their way into expressions of difference and belonging in this crucial moment around 1878.

Thus, uneven flows of food and money, sent via telegraph, can help to explain observations that Armenians weathered famine better than their Kurdish and Turkish neighbors. The amounts and forms of relief on offer were better-suited for settled cultivators. Across aid agencies, efforts focused on grain and seed rather than restoring livestock populations. At the same time, Armenians benefitted disproportionately from the successes of the Armenian Famine Commission, which formed early, gathered the most funds, and worked toward a narrower mission. Finally, relief agencies expressed attitudes ranging from disdain to open opposition to predominantly Kurdish nomads. Acknowledging these factors is useful for understanding American and British observations that, generally, Armenians weathered the famine better than others. Underlying the Armenian Patriarchate’s aid effectiveness was its ability to tap the wealth of a far-flung diaspora, comparatively rich in foreign currency, and its ability to move that money swiftly along the Empire’s newly-built telegraph infrastructure. Kurds in the Ottoman East lacked any such access to global capital. So, when the Patriarchate commanded a disproportionately large sum of money for relief, it highlighted this major difference between those in the region considered Armenian versus those who were not.

The Shot of a Gun

While the uneven flows of humanitarian relief highlighted the differences between Armenians and others, so too did uneven flows of modern firearms. The question of who served as soldiers in the war was an important one during this period. Except for the janissary corps (recruited from Christian families but converted to Islam), the Ottomans “only rarely” accepted non-Muslims to fight in its land forces before 1909.⁴²⁷ Non-Muslims may have served as doctors or engineers but not as combat forces and certainly not as commanding officers.⁴²⁸ There were past attempts to conscript Ottoman Christians and Jews, but that practice was not widely adopted until 1909.⁴²⁹ Thus, the 1877-78 war, as many before it, highlighted the different obligations of different categories of subjects: Christians and Jews were required to pay an exemption tax, while Muslims were required to serve. In 1879-81, the continued violence of rebels and bandits radicalized these differences enforced by the state, like the obligation to serve in the army and the permission to bear arms.

This difference between Christians and Muslims was exacerbated because many of the predominantly Muslim men who fought on the Caucasus front kept their weapons afterward. Ottomans had conscripted soldiers and recruited irregulars from tribes in the region.⁴³⁰ Both of

⁴²⁷ Erik-Jan Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System, 1844–1914,” *International Review of Social History* 43, no. 3 (December 1998): 444–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859098000248>; on cross-confessional participation in the army during the 1870s, see Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 31–33; on Armenian efforts to recruit soldiers for the Ottoman Army during the First World War, see Suny, *Desert*, 220–22.

⁴²⁸ On the infamous “labor battalions” created from Anatolian Christians during the First World War, see Suny, *Desert*, 248–50.

⁴²⁹ There are a few plausible explanations for this, though more research could shed more light on this question. Many non-Muslims may have balked at serving, and many Muslims – even if they could accept the prospect of arming non-Muslims – may have balked at the idea of taking orders from a Christian or Jewish officer. For other authors broaching this topic, see Davison, “Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century,” 859; Ueno, “Fatherland,” 101–3; Stanford J. Shaw, “The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, no. 4 (1975): 431.

⁴³⁰ And, unlike the previous wars with Russia (1806-12, 1828-29 and 1853-56), the call for fighters was broadly answered with enthusiasm. See P.İ. Averyanov, *Osmanlı İnan Rus Savaşlarında Kürtler*, trans. İbrahim Kale (Istanbul: Avesta, 2010), 39, 54, 68, and 84.

these contingents were armed with modern rifles during the war, and afterward, reportedly, many did not return them.⁴³¹ These weapons turned up in descriptions of violence during the post-war famine years. Earlier, I mentioned the Zilan and other frontier tribes who, without their flocks, had “nothing left but to die.”⁴³² The Ottomans employed these same tribes as irregulars during the war, and it was also members of these tribes who, after the war, were reportedly roaming the region “still armed with the rifles,” robbing travelers and stealing livestock.⁴³³ Still, by 1878, there was nothing new about reports of violence between nomadic and settled populations; Christians and Muslims; and Armenians and Kurds.⁴³⁴ What was new in this period, however, was the tool of that violence, the repeating rifle. These modern rifles disrupted the pre-existing imbalance of power between those who had arms and those who did not. In the Ottoman East immediately after the war, as this section will argue, that imbalance fell along ethnic and religious lines.

Repeating rifles came to the Ottoman East during and after the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War.⁴³⁵ In the 1870s, purchasing surplus rifles after the US Civil War (1861-65), the Ottoman government began to arrange purchases from American arms manufacturers. By the start of the Russo-Turkish War, the Providence Tool company, the sole US producer of the Martini-Henry rifle, had signed contracts with the Ottomans for 600,000 rifles, about half of which were delivered by the start of the Russo-Ottoman war in January 1877.⁴³⁶ During the war, the Ottoman

⁴³¹ The Ottomans had contracts for 600,000 of this sort of weapon from the United States. See Jonathan A. Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money: The Global Arms Trade in the Age of Imperialism* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 23.

⁴³² FO 424/107, 79/2, Trotter to Everett, Erzurum, 1 Aug 1880.

⁴³³ FO 424/91, 43/1, Cpt Everett to Maj Trotter, Erzurum, 11 Oct 1879.

⁴³⁴ This violence came to be documented more thoroughly during the Tanzimat (1839-76). Sources from that period are full of examples of robberies and violence blamed on nomadic tribes. See for example, *Reports on Provincial Oppressions*; Ueno, “Fatherland,” 96–97; Astourian, “The Silence of the Land,” 58–60.

⁴³⁵ The Ottomans had contracts for 600,000 of this sort of weapon from the United States. See Jonathan A. Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money: The Global Arms Trade in the Age of Imperialism* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 23.

⁴³⁶ Jonathan A. Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money: The Global Arms Trade in the Age of Imperialism* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 23.

forces distributed these rifles to the irregular cavalry regiments comprised of tribal Kurds.⁴³⁷ The rifles also turned up in descriptions of violence against villagers.⁴³⁸ Episodes that received more attention at the time were massacres in Van, Eleşkirt, and Doğubeyazıt.⁴³⁹

The repeating rifles arriving to the region during the period around 1878 represented the culmination of several firearms technologies that increased the speed of those who had them in combat. The nineteenth-century saw a series such developments, including the switch from muzzle- to breech-loading, single shots to cartridges, gunpowder to smokeless explosives, and smooth-bored to rifled barrels. All of these changes contributed to more portable, faster-shooting firearms with longer effective ranges.⁴⁴⁰ These changes altered the temporality of combat. Increasing the rate of fire meant it took fewer moments to kill more. Increasing effective range meant some combatants could attack before their targets could respond. And increasing accuracy meant riflemen wasted less time with misfired shots. Modern repeating rifles like the Winchester and Martini-Henry represented the culmination of these developments: with one of these, a soldier could unleash up to 16 shots without reloading, and he could send those shots farther and straighter, threatening a potential foe without a rifle long before that foe could return the threat. The results of these technological developments were deadly, especially in the hands of forces facing foes who lacked modern rifles.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ Norman, *Armenia*, 27, 48, 114–15, 143, 189, 264–67.

⁴³⁸ Norman, 264–67.

⁴³⁹ Astourian, “On the Genealogy of the Armenian-Turkish Conflict, Sultan Abdülhamid, and the Armenian Massacres,” 73 For more on Doğubeyazıt [Bayazid], see United States Department of State, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, transmitted to Congress, with the annual message of the president, December 3, 1877, Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1877, 334, Maynard to Evarts, Istanbul, 31 Aug 1877. (<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=turn&entity=FRUS.FRUS1877.p0656&id=FRUS.FRUS1877&isize=XL>).

⁴⁴⁰ Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*, 101–2; Larry H. Addington, *The Patterns of War Since the Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 4.

⁴⁴¹ In the early 1870s, relatively small British and French colonial forces in Africa, for instance, used repeating rifles and new forms of artillery in deadly efficient ways, subduing much larger forces armed with older firearms and melee weapons. See Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*, 117–19.

This section analyzes transformations taking place in the narrow temporality of combat overlapped with the effects of famine and unrest during and after the 1877-78 war, when the Ottoman East saw an influx of such weapons. These weapons increased petty violence and facilitated Kurdish uprisings. Even small groups armed with modern rifles could overpower others lacking those weapons. Increasing the violent potential of many non-state groups in the region increased violence generally and radicalized the pre-existing difference between Ottoman Muslims and Christians, who neither served in the army nor could bear arms openly.

After the war, government rifles turned up in descriptions of violence across the region. Rifles and a “plentiful supply of ammunition” had apparently, for example, found their ways into the hands of highwaymen, who preyed on towns and travelers in İspir, along the Russian border in Erzurum.⁴⁴² In Kochannes, southern Van Province, Mar Shimun, the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, spoke sardonically about the appearance of the rifles in an interview with Emilius Clayton: “Before, the Kurds killed us unarmed, defenseless people with old six-shooters. Now they descend from the hills like a storm, having been equipped with the Martini and the amazing 16-shooter Winchester rifles.”⁴⁴³ Mar Shimun as well as Khrimian raised the question of whether officials in the region were intentionally arming local proxies. In June of 1880, Khrimian, wrote that he was convinced the authorities in Van were cooperating with a local proxy to form of a Kurdish league, which, he wrote, was “in possession of 4000 Martini rifles, 200 of which came from Persia and the rest of which came from Turkey.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² FO 424/106, No. 29/3, Everett to Trotter, Erzurum, 19 Dec 1879

⁴⁴³ Translation author’s own from transcription in Garo Sasuni, *Kürt Ulusal Hareketleri ve 15. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Ermeni Kürt İlişkileri* (Istanbul: Med Yayınevi, 1992), 155–56: “Şu halde Bay Konsolos, görüyorsunuz ki kendilerine bağlı Hıristiyan bütün halkların hepsini fark gözetmeksizin sürgün ettirmek, kırmak, git gide tamamıyla yok etmek Osmanlı Sultanlarının geleneksel siyasi niteliğidir. Kürtler önceleri bizler gibi silahsız, müdafaasız Hıristiyan halkları eski şeyhane tüfekleriyle öldürürlerdi, halbuki şimdi onlar tepeden turnağa kadar aynalı, Martin ve 16 darbeli harika Winçester tüfekleri ile donatılmışlardır. Acaba bu tür yeni Avrupalı son model silahları onlara kim verdi? Kim? Sultan Hamid’den başkası mı? Ve hangi amaç için? Zannederim bunu yanıtlamaya gerek yoktur.”

⁴⁴⁴ FO 424/107, 58/3, Letter from M. Krimian [Khrimian], Van, 20 June 1880.

While Khrimian claimed it was Ottoman authorities helping Kurds in the region, the British Ambassador to the Empire was more skeptical. Despite his skepticism, however, even the ambassador balked at a shipment of over 21,000 modern rifles to Baghdad in August 1880: “[T]he question arises, ‘Have they troops enough to require so large a number of rifles?’” He feared people would wonder whether “the destination of the rifles in question is to arm a number of Kurds,” in provinces like Mosul, Van, and Erzurum.⁴⁴⁵ Authorities of the Ottoman Sixth Army also reported that arms shipped to Basra were making their way to tribes elsewhere in Iraq. In October 1881, the Sixth Army in Baghdad sent an investigator to the port of Basra, where authorities had apparently failed to prevent – and possibly facilitated – the theft of six-shooter rifles to be illegally sold to tribes, according to a telegram sent from the Sixth Army Commander İzzet Paşa to the war ministry.⁴⁴⁶ British sources also suspected local authorities may have been allowing arms to flow to particular Kurdish groups, though they had no “positive evidence” to offer.⁴⁴⁷

It did not seem to matter whether Ottoman officials actively furnished Kurdish tribes with arms and ammunition, since tribes, bandits, and others showed they were quite capable of obtaining weapons on their own. In the fall of 1879, British authorities were notified of two arms raids, that both resulted in “considerable booty in the shape of arms and ammunition.”⁴⁴⁸ It was

⁴⁴⁵ FO 424/107, 58, Mr. Goschen to Earl Granville, Tarabya, 17 Aug 1880.

⁴⁴⁶ CDA, Y.PRK.ASK 9/8, 1/1, 4 Oct 1881 / 10 Zilhicce 1298. The investigation was needed because the Basra authorities were not, according to the telegram, taking care of this issue (“*bu hal Basra idaresinin bu dakika-yı nazar-ı itinaya almamasından münbais bulunmuştur*”).

⁴⁴⁷ While British consuls did not suspect a general arming of Kurds, one of them, Clayton, suspected the Nakşibendi Sheikh Ubeydullah may have benefitted from government arsenals. The British Consul at Erzurum, William Everett, wrote that there was “no truth” to the accusations of government involvement, but he did note that the Kurds had been “well-armed” since the war. Clayton, meanwhile, said he suspected that officials had furnished weapons to local proxies, but he underscored that he had no evidence: there were “strong grounds for suspecting the Turks gave arms to Obeydullah [Ubeydullah] in Autumn, but I have no positive evidence, nor have I heard of them being given directly to nomads.” See FO 78/3270, 355, Clayton to Goschen, 13 May 1881.

⁴⁴⁸ FO 78/3274, 150, St. John to Granville, 8 Feb 1881.

around this time that Sheikh Ubeydullah was also attempting to procure rifles and ammunition from an agent in Urmia in Iran, which the consul at Tabriz believed was at least somewhat successful, since he judged Ubeydullah's men appeared "to be well supplied with good rifles."⁴⁴⁹ Also, Ottoman soldiers and non-commissioned officers' salaries had been unpaid for years at that point. During the war, soldiers and police continually faced pay reductions and unpaid salaries.⁴⁵⁰ Afterward, as well, salaries went unpaid across the central and eastern Anatolian provinces.⁴⁵¹ In Aleppo province, one consul observed how soldiers would sell their remaining arms and ammunition to make a living.⁴⁵² It would not be surprising if ex-soldiers in Erzurum and Van, facing or anticipating higher food prices and the non-payment of their salaries, also sold their rifles and ammunition.

The war, then, brought rifles that disrupted a pre-existing sectarian arms imbalance. Christians, in general, tended to lack arms. If they did have them, they were a political liability and at risk of confiscation. Although aforementioned correspondence from Everett and Clayton was mixed regarding the active arming of Kurds or nomads, they were unequivocal in describing Christians bearing arms: Christians "seldom possess any" weapons and are disarmed "whenever found carrying them."⁴⁵³ Moreover, at that moment, ex-soldiers, former irregulars, and others who had been armed during the war, if they managed to hold on to their government rifles, were

⁴⁴⁹ FO 424/91, 39/1, Consul Abbott to Mr. R. Thomson, Tabriz, 25 Sep 1879.

⁴⁵⁰ Norman, *Armenia*, 55, 90.

⁴⁵¹ FO 424/91, 45/1, Wilson to Sir A.H. Layard, Sivas, 7 Oct 1879; FO 424/91, 43/1, Everett to Trotter, Erzurum, 11 Oct 1879; FO 424/122, 6/1, Clayton to Trotter, Van, 23 Nov 1880

⁴⁵² FO 424/91, 21/2, "Report upon the Gendarmerie and Police of Syria by Vice-Consul Jago," Damascus, 8 Oct 1879

⁴⁵³ FO 78/3279, 431, Plunkett to Granville, 30 May 1881. In later years the arms disparity was also noted by an Anglican missionary: "The Christians are numerically the weaker, and also worse armed than the Kurds. Since the Russo-Turkish war a large proportion of the Kurds are armed with Martini and other modern rifles; the Christians rarely possess any better weapon than the old flint-lock musket, swords, and light wicker targets or shields," in FO 424/145, "Memorandum by Mr. A. Riley ... , and the Residence of the Priests of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission in the Province of Hakkari, lately incorporated with that of Van" by Athelstan Riley, 1 Dec 1888.

likely armed with a superior weapon. As mentioned earlier, repeating rifles had been particularly effective for small groups against poorly-armed adversaries who outnumbered them. Even small groups armed with these rifles could pose a threat against, one might speculate, the resistance of an entire village.

Those without modern rifles could not rely on police forces to protect them, either. The influx of modern rifles into the region empowered their holders over police, further highlighting the difference between those who held arms and those who did not. By rendering police forces in many areas impotent, the influx of new and more destructive firearms exacerbated a longstanding difference Muslims and non-Muslims, the markers used to decide who served in the army. In Van in September 1879, Samih Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman Fourth Army on the eastern front during the war, wrote the interior ministry stressing the need for more troops and Henry-Martini rifles. Having sent army forces from Erzurum to southern Van province to address Sheikh Ubeydullah's uprising there, there were only police forces remaining to keep the peace in Erzurum. Police would be ineffective, he wrote, without modern rifles: "Given that the Henry-Martini rifles I requested have not arrived, it is as though there are no police in this area."⁴⁵⁴ Samih Pasha's claim that police without modern rifles were as good as no police at all underscores the perceived power of these modern firearms.

In neighboring areas, as well, reports indicated an arms imbalance between police forces and bandits with rifles. In Sivas, central Anatolia, the British military consul described how unpaid police armed with older flintlocks proved powerless against bandits brandishing modern equipment like "rifles and revolvers."⁴⁵⁵ In Erbil, northern Iraq, an American missionary noted

⁴⁵⁴ CDA, DH.ŞFR 112/89, 2/1, (9 Sep 1295 / 21 Sep 1879) "*taleb eylediğim Henry-Martini tüfenklerinin hâlâ gelmemesinden dolayı buranın asakir-i zabtiyesi yok hükmünde bulunduğu.*"

⁴⁵⁵ FO 424/91, 45/1, Wilson to Sir A.H. Layard, Sivas, 7 Oct 1879.

that banditry was also a problem there, but the “poorly armed” police were no match for the “more than 1000 Martini-Peabody rifles in the hands of the Kurds.”⁴⁵⁶ These stories suggest that officials or police forces who may have wanted to prevent theft and violence in famine-stricken regions could not – their forces were stretched thin and out-gunned. In this way, a long-standing distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims – conscription – manifested itself more intensely after the war and in the context of famine. Those who had served in the army could have had rifles handy – to defend themselves, to sell, or to resort to banditry to survive. Those without weapons needed to rely on impotent police power. Christians faced difficulties obtaining rifles, or arms at all, since they did not serve as soldiers and faced authorities who tried to disarm them.

Considering this uneven flow of arms in the context of the uneven flows of famine aid discussed in the previous section, some of the patterns of violence during the famine become clearer. During the famine of 1879-81, violence increasingly targeted cereals and flocks. In May 1880, the head of Armenian relief efforts in the region, Mkrditch Khrimian, claimed that Erciş, a town on the northern shore of Lake Van, could have fed the entire region with its food production. The Haydaranlı tribe, however, had “grazed their herds insatiably and violently” and “carried off a great quantity of beasts of burden” from the area. He made similar reports of the Şikak tribe in Van’s Elbak sub-district (*kaza*), on the border with Iran.⁴⁵⁷ In that same month, a petition was telegraphed to the Patriarchate mentioning the events in Elbak. An Ottoman copy of that petition was exchanged between the Justice Ministry and the Imperial Palace. In it, the six signatories describe how the “wild Kurds” had attacked five or six villages in Elbak, “looting the money and grain being given to the needy, destroying and preventing agriculture, and

⁴⁵⁶ FO 424/106, 177/1, “Tabular Statement on the Famine in the Mosul District, Sent By Andrus, American Missionary in the Region,” 30 Mar 1880.

⁴⁵⁷ CDA, Y.PRK.BŞK 3/15, 3, Mkrditch Khrimian to Nerses Varjabedian, Van, 21 May 1880.

committing murders and violent acts indescribable by pen.”⁴⁵⁸ Bearing in mind the high animal mortality, shortage of fodder, and relative lack of relief for flocks, we can begin to piece together a story that accounts for the multiple transformations occurring during this period. Perhaps the produce of Erciş could feed the entire region, but that was assuming everyone waited for harvest time. Perhaps these groups, the Haydaranlı, Şikak and others, did not think the remnants of their flocks would survive that long, so, in a bid to save their dwindling sheep populations, they grazed them on young crops and stole animals to replace those they had already lost.

In addition to enabling petty banditry, the influx of arms contributed to the flare up of the Kurdish revolts in the Ottoman East. The resulting conflicts pitted Sheikhs and tribal leaders against each other and against Ottoman and Qajar forces. The Nakşibendi Sheikh Ubeydullah raised a revolt that evolved into a complex cross-border event, one that stoked tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims and created a diplomatic incident involving Tehran, Istanbul, St. Petersburg and London.⁴⁵⁹ Ubeydullah’s revolt brought chaos to the famine zone, as well as misery to its many Kurdish and Armenian settlements. In August 1880, Ubeydullah’s followers crossed into Iran, joined by followers on that side of the border, together numbering as many as 15,000. With the declared reasons of stopping Shia religious impositions on Iranian Sunnis, they advanced into Iranian territory and took control of cities between present-day Mahabad and Urmia, Iran. Ubeydullah’s son, Abdülkadir, one of the commanders, reportedly ordered the

⁴⁵⁸ CDA, Y.PRK.AZN 1/20, 1, 11 Jun 1880 / 3 Receb 1297. “*Muhtacına verilen zehair ve nukud gasp ve ziraate telef ve mani ve kalemin tarifi gayr-i mümkün cinayet ve tediyatı olduğunu.*” In other areas of Van province, including Adilcevaz, Nurduz and Çatak [Shaddakh], British sources offer similar reports of tribes seizing grain and grazing their sheep on young crops. See FO 424/106, 209/1, Clayton to Trotter, Van, 20 Apr 1880; FO 424/107, 38/1, Note Verbale signed by Goschen, Tarabya, 21 Jun 1880.

⁴⁵⁹ Soleimani, *Islam and Competing Nationalisms*, 158–61; Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian*, 215–17; the sons of Bedirhan Bey also raised a significant revolt after leading Ottoman troops in the 1877-78 War. See Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 181. The Kurdish leader Bedirhan Bey led the Botan emirate (centered on the confluence of today’s Turkish, Syrian, and Iraqi borders), and he resisted but ultimately submitted to Ottoman centralizing measures in the 1840s. For more on Bedirhan and Botan, see Chapter 2.

mosques in captured cities to read the Friday prayer in the name of the Ottoman Sultan instead of the Shah, underscoring the Sunni-Shia overtones of the uprising. Ubeydullah's short-lived campaign into northwestern Iran ultimately failed in its goal of capturing the regional center of Urmia, where it faced resistance from Iranian Shia and tribes loyal to the Shah. Still, the uprising brought violence and chaos to the borderland region, forcing ambiguous groups to pick between the Shiism and Sunnism, the Shah and Sultan. Thousands of families reportedly fled northwestern Iran into Ottoman lands, escaping violence and feared sectarian reprisals.⁴⁶⁰ The rebellion shows how the war and famine provided occasion to stir up intra-Muslim sectarian tensions in the region.

Violent as they were, Sunni-Shia conflicts erupting in the region only exacerbated the inferior position of Christians and Jews on both sides of the border. Ottomans responded to uprisings by dispatching regular troops (*nizamiye*), like Samih Paşa's sent from Erzurum to Van because of Ubeydullah's uprising. All of these well-armed but poorly paid troops demanded provisions from the areas they were meant to protect.⁴⁶¹ "Poor soldiers, like hungry lions" descended upon villages "almost daily" across Van, an American Missionary wrote in December 1880; when one village headman refused their demands, troops beat him and took their needs by force.⁴⁶² Already suffering from wartime losses and a failed harvest, settlements now had to quarter the troops that were sent to protect them. Comparing sources from these two events also underscores how disorder and famine combined to unevenly distribute suffering along ethno-confessional lines.

⁴⁶⁰ Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian*, 219–20.

⁴⁶¹ FO 424/91, 2, Trotter to the Marquis of Salisbury, Erzurum, 27 Sep 1879; FO 424/91, 107/1, Consul Henderson to Layard, Aleppo, 30 Oct 1879; FO 424/106, 258, Clayton to Trotter, Van, May 18, 1880.

⁴⁶² FO 424/122, 45/2, Extract from letters received from Rev. R. Wahl, Kochannes, 8 Dec 1880.

In addition to creating misery, the Ubeydullah uprising highlighted the inferior position of Christians vis-à-vis making credible threats. In May 1881, Ubeydullah's son, Abdülkadir, wrote a petition in Persian to Sultan Abdülhamid II. The petition acknowledges the Sultan's order that "not a single person from the tribes of Kurdistan, from the refugees or anyone else, is allowed to execute attacks on the Iranian side of the border."⁴⁶³ Indeed, following Ubeydullah's 1880-81 winter campaign into Iran, the Ottomans instructed military officers in the region to distribute official announcements that the government forbade any other such cross-border incursions, which raised the threat of armed intervention from Britain or Russia.⁴⁶⁴ Despite these orders to restrain tribal pillaging, Abdülkadir pointed out that the tribes and refugees from Iran were in a miserable state, and "due to a lack of sustenance, after two months they will no longer be patient."⁴⁶⁵ Pleading his own powerlessness to stop the cross-border raids, Abdülkadir begged the Sultan not to hold him responsible if any from these miserable people resorted to violence. Abdülkadir's petition provides a point of comparison about how Armenians and Kurds petitioned Ottoman authorities, and that comparison highlights the broader power imbalance between Christians and Muslims in the region. In the Armenian petition from the Elbak sub-district mentioned above, Armenians begged the authorities to start paying attention to the violence that was bringing "near-annihilation of the community."⁴⁶⁶ The petition implied that without imperial action the community would be destroyed. Abdülkadir's petition, on the other hand, implies that even miserable refugees from Iran held the threat of violence. If not relieved, they would "no longer be patient" and continue their pillaging. This difference is important because it is

⁴⁶³ CDA, Y.PRK.TKM 4/14, 12 Mar 1881.

⁴⁶⁴ CDA, A.MKT.MHM 486/62, 2/1, 29 May 1881; see also FO 424/122, 95/2, Translation of Proclamation by Governor-General of Van, 10 Apr 1881.

⁴⁶⁵ CDA, Y.PRK.TKM 4/14, 12 Mar 1881.

⁴⁶⁶ CDA, Y.PRK.AZN 1/20, 11 Jun 1880, "*adeta milletin mahvına asla ehemmiyet verilmeyerek.*"

symptomatic of a broader imbalance in this region at the time – Ottoman Christians tended to lack the threat of violence of their Muslim neighbors.

In this chaotic period of famine and rebellion following the 1877-78 war, an influx of modern weapons into the region changed the temporalities in combat in ways that exacerbated an existing imbalance among sects, and especially between non-Muslims and Muslims. The influx of modern weapons brought three effects – increasing banditry, Kurdish uprisings, and disputes over troop quartering. In these effects we can trace a chain of unintentional consequences: Ottomans distributed arms to tribes during the war, but the weapons of war quickly became weapons of bandits and rebels, and the costs of Ottoman responses only exacerbated the misery. This increase in the violence brought by tribes and bandits and intensified by modern weaponry brought widespread troubles. Still, these difficulties were even more salient for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, since increasing violence radicalized pre-existing differences arising from uneven conscription and permission to bear arms.

Seeds of Division

Taking a step back from diplomatic or political histories, this chapter has argued, allows us to examine the ecological, financial, and technological forces that brought about disjunctures operating on distinct if overlapping timelines during the period after 1878. Diversifying the forces that we examine offers a way to unsettle the monopoly of human time typical of histories written during and about this period at the end of the 19th century. That human time, the pace of events observable from the pages of a newspaper or history book, is one in which communal categories like religion and nation have come to thrive. Rather than adopting those categories into our analysis, we can loosen their grip by looking to forces that operated on different timelines. Such a method allows us to historicize the evolution of categories like religion and

ethnicity and to question why they seemed so plausible to communities where such divides were not always so potent for coalition-building (see Chapters 1 and 2).

To unsettle that human time, this chapter has taken up changes that led to disjunctures on multiple timelines in the Ottoman East during this crucial period after the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War. These multiple disjunctures, created by water, famine relief, and firearms, provided multiple avenues by which communal boundaries became more pronounced. This chapter took up three overlapping temporalities: the seasonal ebbs and flows of Tigris and Euphrates, the steady electronic pulses carrying credit along telegraphs, and the rapid-fire moments of combat. None of these forces remained on a single, separate temporality. They were all linked. Still, examining this combination of forces is important as a heuristic. It encourages us to shake off the monopoly of human time and instead examine the multiple forces behind the social and political shifts taking place in the Ottoman East. As a theater of war, site of famine, and a host to a rebellion, it was a region susceptible to changing amounts of precipitation, speeds of capital, and rapidity of gunshots. It was also a region where ethnic and religious boundaries would become increasingly contentious and increasingly active as the lines across with violence would take place.

Other explanations of intensifying communal boundaries have done much to uncover how political figures forged and spread concepts of difference and belonging to shore up their power.⁴⁶⁷ Whether they were Armenian revolutionaries, Pan-Islamist authors, or the Sultan himself, these figures demonstrate how movements centered on pan-ethnic or pan-religious

⁴⁶⁷ On top-down attempts to shape a Turco-Islamo-Ottoman identity, see Deringil, *Well-Protected*, 10–11, 32, and 48; on Sultan Abdülhamid II's views of Islamism, the Caliphate, and Ottoman foreign policy, see Karpat, *Politicization*, 172–82.

solidarity only grew under Abdülhamid's reign after 1878.⁴⁶⁸ Demographic shifts, the development of concepts like "majority" and "minority," and the calls of major political figures also contributed to the increasing salience of ethnic and religious boundaries. Yet, while those appeals, concepts, and demographic changes may suggest why such boundaries for difference and belonging were available and even legible, they cannot explain why they were adopted by a critical mass of Ottoman subjects. We cannot assume that political entrepreneurs could use calls of pan-ethnic or pan-religious unity to achieve the results they desired.⁴⁶⁹ Previous Sultans like Mahmud II and his son Abdülmecid I called on the faithful to unite behind their rule, but people in the Ottoman East did not accept religious boundaries as critical to political coalition building. In fact, a cross-confessional coalition of Christians and Muslims fought back, and it took a decades-long struggle for these self-styled pious Sultans to force regions of the Ottoman East to submit to their rule (see Chapter 2).⁴⁷⁰ Why did these later calls to rally around religion and ethnicity seem to have such powerful effects? This chapter has argued such calls on pan-ethnic and pan-religious solidarity were enabled by brutal facts of life in the provinces, where unequal suffering, unequal aid, and unequal firepower conspired to barricade ethno-confessional boundaries and encourage violence across them.

As the next chapter will examine, suspicion and mutual distrust across ethnic and religious lines did indeed flourish in the decade and a half that followed 1878. That violent crescendo exploded in the sectarian outbreaks known as the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-97, a series of anti-Armenian, anti-Christian, and anti-Western riots and massacres that left many tens

⁴⁶⁸ On competing Pan-Islamist visions under Abdülhamid II, see Soleimani, *Islam and Competing Nationalisms*, 125–33; on Armenian revolutionary parties drawing "new boundaries of belonging" under the reign of Abdülhamid II, see Ketsemanian, "The Hunchakian," 739.

⁴⁶⁹ Duguid, "The Politics of Unity."

⁴⁷⁰ Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript"; Abu-Manneh, "The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century."

of thousands dead. Violence of this kind and on this scale had not been seen in the Ottoman East. Surely, something about ethnic and religious boundaries was changing. Examining the uneven effects of diminished streamflows, rapid communications, and faster-firing rifles allows us to chart the human and nonhuman interactions that reinforced communal divides like those between Christian and Muslim or Armenian, Kurd, and Turk.

Chapter 4: Indeterminate Criminal

*I die with variety —
Hung, starved, burned, hooked.*
— Sylvia Plath, “The Jailer”

Red Flags and Red Herrings

In the fall of 1894, the governor-general (*vali*) of the Ottoman province of Bitlis, Hasan Tahsin Paşa, notified Yıldız Palace that Armenian mountaineers outside the village of Sasun were staging a rebellion. The Palace responded with orders to crush the “bandits” and leave behind a legacy of “extraordinary terror.”⁴⁷¹ The resulting massacre marked what many consider to be the beginning of the Hamidian Massacres, the anti-Christian and anti-Armenian violence that erupted across the Ottoman Empire in 1894-97. They would leave many tens of thousands dead, many more wounded, and come to bear the name the Sultan of that time, Abdülhamid II (*r.* 1876-1908).⁴⁷² Blood spilled most in the densely-Armenian Ottoman East, in places like Trabzon, Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Diyarbakır, Urfa, and Antep.⁴⁷³ For Haroutune Aivazian, born a decade after the violence in Marash, the legacy of the violence was still palpable to him as a child. In a 1993 oral history testimony, he described how, growing up there, he noticed that the massacres re-organized how people spoke about the past. “Massacre was point of reference, in a way, a landmark. They would say, for example, so-and-so was born two years before the Great

⁴⁷¹ Ertuğrul Zekâi Ökte, *Osmanlı Arşivi, Yıldız Tasnifi, Ermeni Meselesi [The Ottoman Archives, the Yıldız Collection, the Armenian Question]* (Istanbul: Historical Research Foundation and Istanbul Research Center, 1989), 160–61, cited in Owen Miller, “Rethinking the Violence in the Sasun Mountains (1893-1894),” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (March 30, 2018): 107.

⁴⁷² Attacks disproportionately affected Armenians and other Christians, though Muslims and others perished as well. About 88,000 Armenians and other Christians and 1,300 Muslims perished during the outbreaks and reprisals, according to the German missionary and Orientalist Johannes Lepsius’s numbers. See J. Lepsius, *Armenia and Europe: An Indictment*, ed. J. Rendel Harris (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), 320–31.

⁴⁷³ Suny, *Desert*, 113; Deringil, “The Armenian Question Is Finally Closed,” 351–55; Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55–56.

Massacre.”⁴⁷⁴ What gave rise to such a deadly power, one that killed so many and left a legacy of “extraordinary terror” potent enough to re-arrange time in the minds of its survivors?

Much of the scholarship on the 1894-97 Hamidian Massacres has played out as a trial of the Ottoman state, with works taking apologist or accuser positions.⁴⁷⁵ Apologists tend to exonerate Ottoman authorities, instead blaming the massacres on society-wide affective and economic forces. At the time, officials suggested that Muslim peasants had harbored widespread fears and resentments toward their Armenian neighbors, especially the revolutionaries among them, and that these emotions had “boiled over” into popular violence.⁴⁷⁶ More subtle apologists have turned to Muslim economic resentments to explain the outbursts. According to a British Vice-Consul near Urfa during the violence, “Many Mussulmans, especially villagers, were largely indebted to the town Armenians,” and so they rose up and attacked not only creditors, but

⁴⁷⁴ The Hamidian violence, he explained, came to be known as the Great Massacre, to distinguish from the 1909 outbreak in Adana, which, he said, they called the Small Massacre. See Haroutune Aivazian, interview by J. Michael Hagopian, May 12, 1993, AFF 399, USC Shoah Foundation: The Institute for Visual History and Education, <https://sfi.usc.edu/content/haroutune-aivazian-testimony>. I thank Mehmet Polatel for bringing this source and this archive to my attention in his talk, Mehmet Polatel, “Continuity, Escalation, and Local Actors: The Hamidian Massacres and the Armenian Genocide” (University of Southern California, April 13, 2020).

⁴⁷⁵ These lines are predictable for those familiar with debates about the Armenain Genocide. For some comparisons between these two episodes, and arguments against seeing the former as a prelude to the latter, see Ronald Grigor Suny, “Empire and Nation: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire,” *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 17–51; Selim Deringil, Boris Adjemian, and Mikaël Nichanian, “Mass Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire: A Discussion. An Interview with Selim Deringil,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 11 (October 15, 2018): 95–104.

⁴⁷⁶ Such explanations were penned by Ottoman officials to describe events in a way that exonerated themselves and their colleagues, at least somewhat, and instead blamed Armenian provocateurs and easily-roused Muslim masses for the outbreaks. On the development of this “boiling over” narrative, see Gölbaşı, “Official Conceptualization,” on “boiling,” see 52-53, and on exonerating the state, see 60–61; some have also condemned the “Muslim masses” who seemingly automatically rose to the call when “Ottoman authorities invoked jihad to mobilize” them. For a recent iteration of this opinion, see Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey’s Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894–1924* (Harvard University Press, 2019), 5; for an older iteration, see Vahakn N. Dadrian, “The 1894 Sassoun Massacre: A Juncture in the Escalation of the Turko-Armenian Conflict,” *The Armenian Review* 47 (2001): 34–35.

Armenians in general.⁴⁷⁷ Still, accusers remain unconvinced.⁴⁷⁸ They blame the Ottoman authorities, even the Sultan himself, for failing to prevent the massacres and offering “covert support” in instigating, planning, or executing them.⁴⁷⁹ Hamidian police and military forces were more powerful than ever, but in several areas, they were noticeably absent as protectors and conspicuously present as perpetrators.⁴⁸⁰ Meanwhile, underhanded officials, tribal leaders, and other local notables reaped enormous wealth from the extortion and confiscation that accompanied the massacres.⁴⁸¹

Divergent though their analyses may be, apologists and accusers share a framing device, a state/society divide. Apologists have blamed society to exonerate the Ottoman state, while

⁴⁷⁷ “Many Mussulmans, especially villagers, were largely indebted to the town Armenians. . . . In fact, one of the features and results of recent massacres has been the veritable ‘seisactheia,’ as regards Mussulman debts to Armenians.” See Extract from Blue-Book No. 5, Turkey, Vice-Consul Fitzmaurice to Sir P. Currie, Ourfa [Urfa], 16 Mar 1896, cited in Lepsius, *Armenia and Europe: An Indictment*, 174; Donald Quataert has echoed that observation, as well, suggesting that the economic conditions of that period may have “caused the anti-Armenian violence.” He points out that, facing hard times and mounting debts, “Muslim peasants attacked Armenian money-lenders,” and those attacks widened to include Armenians in general. See İnalcık and Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:871.

⁴⁷⁸ Stephan Astourian, in response to Donald Quataert’s suggestion of economic motivations for the violence, has pointed out that such an approach fails to account for “the role of the state, especially the sultan.” See Stephan H. Astourian, “Testing World-System Theory, Cilicia (1830s-1890s): Armenian-Turkish Polarization and the Ideology of Modern Ottoman Historiography” (Ph.D., United States -- California, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), 602n147.

⁴⁷⁹ Deringil, “The Armenian Question Is Finally Closed,” 351.

⁴⁸⁰ Deborah Mayersen, “The 1895-1896 Armenian Massacres in Harput: Eyewitness Account,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (March 30, 2018): 168; David Gaunt, “Two Documents on the 1895 Massacres of Syrians in the Province of Diyarbekir: A Discussion,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (March 30, 2018): 163 and 194–97; see 199 for an example of a standoff between two military units, one acting as protectors, the other provoking plunder; the police and military were apparently absent as either attackers or protectors in Şirvan and Hizan in Bitlis Province. See Jelle Verheij, “‘The Year of the Firman’: The 1895 Massacres in Hizan and Şirvan (Bitlis Vilayet),” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 10 (March 30, 2018): 130 and 145.

⁴⁸¹ On Ottoman authorities’ seeming inaction during the violence, see Deringil, “The Armenian Question Is Finally Closed,” 351; see also Edhem Eldem, “26 Ağustos 1896 ‘Banka Vakası’ ve 1896 ‘Ermeni Olayları,’” *Tarih ve Toplum*, 26 Ağustos, 5 (Spring 2007): 66–67; on extortion and confiscation, see Astourian, “The Silence of the Land”; Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 152. For a sample of British consular correspondence describing this sort of violence from several different officials across several provinces in 1892-94, see FO 424/172, 22, Sir Clare Ford to the Marquis of Slaisbury, 9 Mar 1892; FO 424/172, 106, Consul Graves to Sir Clare Ford, Erzurum, 8 Oct 1892; FO 424/172, 113/6, Vice-Consul Devey to Consul Graves, Van, 9 Nov 1892; FO 424/172, 80/2, Acting Vice-Consul Boyajian to Consul Graves, Harput, 30 July 1892; FO 424/172, 22, Sir Clare Ford to the Marquis of Slaisbury, 9 Mar 1892; FO 424/178, 127/1, Consul Graves to Sir P. Currie, Erzurum, 1 May 1894; FO 424/178, 137/1, Report by Mr Eliot, Ankara, 23 May 1894; Polatel, “Armenians and the Land Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1870-1914,” 111–14.

accusers have blamed the Ottoman state, societal forces notwithstanding. Recourse to this state/society division should give us pause. First, any explanation of this period's violence will need to include both sides of this purported divide, both popular upswells and unsavory power-holders. Second, fixing a boundary between state and society has been notoriously tricky, and it is still unclear whether fixing one is even possible.⁴⁸² In his analysis of Hamidian tax collection, Nadir Özbek draws on debates concerning the state/society divide to dissect the Ottoman government and to show how contradictory forces within it gave rise to the period's violence. Hamidian attempts to organize tax collection only "exacerbated existing social and political antagonisms," and, ultimately, gave rise to "state terror, abuses, and massacres."⁴⁸³

Özbek's piece excels in linking the period's violence to the Hamidian state's incoherence, but his conclusions leave open who or what was actually acting. He disavows the idea of a unified state actor at first, but he closes by making reference to that very actor, "the Hamidian regime," whose failed attempts to impose order served to create the chaos "within which the 'Armenian Question' emerged."⁴⁸⁴ Who or what was creating the chaos and violence of the Armenian Question, if not the state? Özbek reaches this impasse in part because, to avoid a state/society binary, he adopts another binary, that between the abstract and the real. He suggests that to avoid ascribing coherence to state actors, we should study them through their "concrete and material effects."⁴⁸⁵ Here, I think, is where the difficulty arises. "The state cannot be dismissed as an abstraction or ideological construct and passed over in favor of more real, material realities," according to one of the authors with whom Özbek engages in the piece,

⁴⁸² Mitchell, "The Limits of the State."

⁴⁸³ Özbek, "The Politics of Taxation and the 'Armenian Question' during the Late Ottoman Empire, 1876–1908," 773.

⁴⁸⁴ Özbek, 796–97.

⁴⁸⁵ Özbek, 774.

Timothy Mitchell. In fact, that abstract/real binary, Mitchell suggests, could help us “grasp how the modern state has appeared.”⁴⁸⁶ Rather than trying to sidestep one binary (state/society) with another (abstract/real), we should look to these thorny binaries as red flags, clues that tell us about the appearance of a novel sort of power, one we could call modern (imperfect though that term may be).⁴⁸⁷

Modern power operates by convincing us we live in a world of abstract structures separate from concrete realities, a world split between “an unphysical realm of order that stands apart from the world of practice.”⁴⁸⁸ The modernization of the Egyptian army under Mehmed Ali (1769-1849), to borrow one of Mitchell’s examples, shows how this could work. Mehmed Ali systematized, organized, and re-presented bodies and weapons in such a spectacular way that the army “appeared somehow greater than the sum of its parts, as though it were a structure with an existence independent of the men who composed it.”⁴⁸⁹ Modern power works, then, by convincing us that the world is full of abstractions with their own laws and rules, which we too should learn and obey.

This power continues to organize our conceptions of the world, dividing it between abstract and concrete, between state and society – or between Ottoman state actors and society-wide resentments. Any explanation of violence in the Hamidian period will draw both on the decisions of state actors and society-wide forces. Those causes are entwined, because the division between them is neither static nor clear. In fact, it is our difficulty disentangling them that should serve as our red flag, signaling to us that the state/society binary is a red herring. We should avoid that distraction, as Özbek has shown. Still, instead of adopting another binary, we

⁴⁸⁶ Mitchell, “The Limits of the State,” 95.

⁴⁸⁷ Mitchell, 79.

⁴⁸⁸ Timothy Mitchell, “Everyday Metaphors of Power,” *Theory and Society* 19, no. 5 (1990): 571–72 and 574.

⁴⁸⁹ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, xii.

should ask what kinds of violence these divisions of the world could justify, conceal, or unleash. Attending to that question could help us reveal how novel forms of power during this period spread to seemingly remote areas like the Ottoman East. It could also reveal how these new forms of power wrought havoc in the region in the lead up to the Hamidian Massacres, both by enabling particular powerholders and by spreading society-wide misery and discontent.

To examine the slow build up to this violence in the Ottoman East, this chapter takes up the period preceding the Massacres, 1881-94, with a focus on financial and agrarian conditions. It takes up these arenas for three reasons. First, both saw major disruptions after 1881. The Ottomans entered a new era of European financial control, and significant droughts disrupted harvests and gave rise to hunger and mass pauperization across Anatolia. Second, agriculture was the lifeblood of Anatolia, and it was enmeshed with finance. About 75% of the total population were cultivators, but virtually everyone depended on the bounty of the harvests. And, in 1881 and 1908, agriculture made up 59% of the region's gross regional product and about half of the Ottoman Empire's total gross national product.⁴⁹⁰ Economy and ecology were inseparable. Third, and most importantly for this chapter, finance and agriculture are fields ripe with the kinds of binaries that concealed and unleashed this period's novel forms of power. Finance beckoned talk of a state divorced from society, masking the ways financial changes divided actors within an incoherent state and impoverished cultivators in the provinces. Likewise, failed harvests and subsequent famines presented themselves as a problem of Ottoman misgovernment, somehow separate from the demands of foreign creditors, no matter how much food and money those creditors drained from hunger-stricken regions. This chapter seizes on these separations that framed discussions about finance and agriculture. It uses them as signals to re-examine what

⁴⁹⁰ Quataert, *Social Disintegration*, 8.

kinds of violence they could conceal and unleash. And, it suggests that these novel forms of violence were devastating Anatolia after 1881. They empowered unsavory individuals, spread society-wide discontent, and made possible something as dramatic and tragic as the Hamidian Massacres.

The first section, *Precarities of Plenty*, begins by providing historical background for the post-1881 period and foregrounding one of its seeming contradictions, a government at once flush with foreign cash and scraping by on half-pay. Other accounts have focused on the Ottoman state's negotiations with foreign creditors to underscore its changing position in global systems of power and capital, but these accounts have glossed over the seeming contradiction of precarity and plenty during the post-1881 period. This section suggests we seize on that contradiction to uncover how the new financial regime worked both by impoverishing parts of the empire and enriching others. Access to foreign capital created these wealth differences by insulating some spending priorities from otherwise dismal financial and ecological conditions. To illustrate this, the section takes up Istanbul's borrowing activities during the famines that struck Anatolia in 1887-88.

The second section, *Cheap Acts of Charity*, examines Ottoman relief efforts during the 1887-88 famines to show how foreign debt entanglements unleashed the "silent violence" of hunger on Anatolia.⁴⁹¹ It takes up the conceptual divide between Ottoman tax collection and Ottoman foreign debt payments. Separating internal and external revenue collection masked the violence of the latter. Western observers blamed famine suffering on Ottoman tax collectors, who personified a regime they deemed to be brutal and backward. Yet, separating Ottoman tax

⁴⁹¹ Michael Watts calls famine a form of "silent violence" in British colonial Nigeria. The violence he identifies is a "structural relationship between famine and the political economy of colonialism." The silence he identifies refers to "the absences and neglect that mark the history of famine in northern Nigeria." See Watts, *Silent Violence*, xii-xiii.

collection from continuing foreign debt service payments conveniently exonerated foreign creditors and a globalizing financial system, whose exactions were just as prolific, if not more so, in stealing food off people's tables.

The third and final section, Lending Support, turns to Ottoman famine relief policies from the next major famine in the region, 1892-94. It shows how the desperation of famine created an avenue for Istanbul to impose a separation between abstract property rights and concrete lands. Separating abstract rights from the property itself, as others have shown, introduced a new threat, that of dispossession.⁴⁹² This section shows how famine relief became a vehicle for registering lands and for enabling their potential confiscation in the Ottoman East. During this period, the government blocked nonstate relief agencies and replaced its own grants of aid with loans. The needy were left with little choice but to accept Istanbul's loans, which required information about themselves, their wealth, and their lands, so that they could be given up as collateral. Registering lands appeared to be the execution of a seemingly universal right – that of private property – but extending that supposed right in fact imposed an increased threat of dispossession.

Together, the sections suggest that dividing our analysis into state and society, revenue collection into internal and external, or human relations with the land into the abstract and real concealed and enabled novel forms of power, and their violence wrought havoc on the Ottoman East in the post-1881 period. Examining the operation of this power across the entwined arenas of agriculture and finance can show us how such divisions of the world enticed and enabled historical actors, but we need not buy into those binaries ourselves. Instead, we can attend to the

⁴⁹² Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 56–75; Huri Islamoğlu, “Property as a Contested Domain: A Reevaluation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858,” in *New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East*, ed. Roger Owen and Martin P. Bunton (Harvard CMES, 2000), 26–34.

red flags they provide to identify the appearance of these new kinds of power, and with them, the violence of pauperization, hunger, and dispossession. It was these combined forces, this chapter suggests, that enabled nefarious powerholders, spread society-wide resentments, and gave rise to the Hamidian Massacres.

Precarities of Plenty

In 1881, the dust seemed to be settling in Istanbul and across Ottoman realms. In 1875, the Ottomans had halted their foreign debt service payments, and the ensuing state of default had alienated Ottomans from their European counterparts, whose subjects stood to lose if the Ottomans reneged on their debts. Then, separatist rebellions in the Balkans, Russia's intervention on their behalf, and Istanbul's defeat in the ensuing 1877-78 War left Istanbul at the mercy of European diplomacy. Yet, by 1881, the diplomatic climate had turned in favor of the Ottomans. European powers had forced Russia and her allies to roll back their territorial gains at the Congress of Berlin, and the government came to a debt restructuring agreement with its foreign creditors. In exchange for a write-off of almost half of the debt, Istanbul accepted the formation of a European-controlled Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA), which came to control 13-25% of Ottoman revenues.⁴⁹³

Previous accounts of this period have focused on how the post-1881 financial regime determined Ottoman Empire's position in global systems of power and capital. Early 20th century authors characterized European financial control as the Ottomans' inevitable demise.⁴⁹⁴ By the

⁴⁹³ Sources conflict on the proportion of revenues under OPDA control. Blaisdell says it was about a quarter of revenues, while Birdal, citing Shaw's numbers, suggests it was between 13-17%. See Blaisdell, *European Financial*, 150-51; Murat Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt: Insolvency and European Financial Control in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 104; Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System."

⁴⁹⁴ According to the likes of Blaisdell and Feis, the Ottoman Empire was succumbing to the "more masterful civilization" of Europe. It fell into trouble because of its "dishonest administration," "its rulers' passions and fantasies," and "its people's helplessness and ignorance." See Herbert Feis, *Europe the World's Banker 1870-1914* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1930), 313; Blaisdell, *European Financial*, 14.

1980s, proponents of World-System Theory still suggested that the post-1881 financial regime was a nail in the Ottoman coffin, but they dropped the culturist explanations of earlier accounts to foreground a process they call economic peripheralization. In a globalizing system of exchange, they have suggested, European financial control forced the Ottoman Empire into a subordinate economic role as raw materials supplier.⁴⁹⁵ Still, in their explanations of peripheralization, they underplay how foreign financial entanglements could not only restrict but also empower Istanbul. Economic historians have offered a corrective, showing how the post-1881 regime brought both benefits and restrictions to the Ottomans. As a result, they have been more equivocal about European financial control, pointing out that it brought limitations as well as the Empire's best-ever borrowing rates.⁴⁹⁶

Still, both of these approaches, world-system and economic history, have relied on a coherent Ottoman state as their unit of analysis. World-system approaches, with their global and structural schema, lend themselves to the assumption of a coherent Ottoman state actor jockeying to escape its position in the "periphery" and to join other states in the "center." This focus on state-level politics risks flattening key differences within the Ottoman government.⁴⁹⁷ Economic historians, on the other hand, treat states as individual decision-makers and use them as the units for collecting economic data and creating predictive models.⁴⁹⁸ Yet, assuming a unified Ottoman state actor during this period risks missing how European financial control transformed the financial flows through Istanbul in ways that empowered some sections of the government while

⁴⁹⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, Hale Decdeli, and Reşat Kasaba, "The Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the World-Economy," in *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy*, ed. Huri İslamoğlu-Inan (Cambridge; New York; Paris: Cambridge University Press; Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1987), 94.

⁴⁹⁶ Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*, 4–6; Joseph Yackley, "Bankrupt: Financial Diplomacy in the Late Nineteenth-Century Middle East" (Ph.D., Chicago, IL, University of Chicago, 2013), 15–17.

⁴⁹⁷ For instance, rather than acknowledging the intra-government competition of this period, they gloss "the Ottoman bureaucracy" and "the palace" in their description of the limits that European capital imposed on the Empire. Wallerstein, Decdeli, and Kasaba, "The Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the World-Economy," 94.

⁴⁹⁸ Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*, 8, 63, and 91; Joseph Yackley, "Bankrupt," 20–22.

impoverishing others. Here, we should heed Özbek's advice to peer beneath the mask of seemingly unified Ottoman state to reveal contradictory forces beneath. Doing so reveals novel forms of power at work, the power not only to impoverish sections of the Empire but also to enrich others.

To foreground that power, this section examines Istanbul's finances during an Anatolian famine in 1887-88. It begins with some historical background by way of a synthesis of work by economic historians and world-system proponents. Then it takes up Istanbul's success in raising loans for foreign arms purchases in the midst of 1887-88 famines. That example shows how the Empire's re-entry into foreign capital markets could insulate certain spending priorities from the droughts that ravaged Anatolia. If we try to read foreign financial entanglements as diminishing the power of a coherent Ottoman state, we risk missing how those entanglements empowered sections of the Ottoman government and, how that power came at the cost of draining badly-needed resources in a time of increasing precarity.

Before diving into the example of foreign arms purchases, some background on the post-1881 financial regime is in order. Sultan Abdülhamid II assented to the creation of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA), and in so doing, his Empire avoided direct subordination like its *de jure* province of Egypt.⁴⁹⁹ Still, the European-controlled organization came to control a sizable portion of state revenues, including the salt and spirits monopolies, the stamp tax, and yearly payments from Cyprus and Egypt (which were both, conveniently, already taken under British control).⁵⁰⁰ These were some of the Ottomans' most reliable revenue sources, since they

⁴⁹⁹ Egypt was forced into harsher terms in exchange for a miniscule write-off, less than 2%. See Joseph Yackley, "Bankrupt," 2-3.

⁵⁰⁰ For data comparing different Ottoman revenue streams, see Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System"; Stanford J. Shaw, "Ottoman Expenditures and Budgets in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 3 (1978): 373-78.

were less susceptible to yearly shifts like agricultural tithes. They were also liquid revenue sources, collectible in cash, not kind. With these revenues under its control, the OPDA succeeded in ensuring timely debt service.⁵⁰¹ In addition to the private debt service administered by the OPDA, the post-1881 Ottoman debt burden also included a war indemnity to Russia, which was one of conditions for ending the 1877-78 conflict. The indemnity amounted to 35m lira, set to be paid over the course of a century (!) in annual installments of 350,000 lira.⁵⁰²

The debt situation may have diminished the image of Ottoman power on the world stage, but, as recent work in economic history has pointed out, the OPDA's founding also inaugurated an era of lower borrowing costs and higher foreign investments. Not only did the OPDA re-open access to European financial markets, it also brought a "drastic change" in support of Ottoman bonds.⁵⁰³ Previously, Istanbul had to offer steep discounts and high interest rates to attract loans from foreign creditors.⁵⁰⁴ With the OPDA supporting foreign confidence, Istanbul could raise larger sums from abroad while taking on just two-thirds the debt burden. During the pre-OPDA period (1855-81), the government took on debts over £228m, but raised just £122m after discounts and fees, and other borrowing costs. Under the OPDA, Istanbul took on debts totaling £150m and raised £133m. The post-1881 era also halved effective interest rates, which dropped from 8-12% to 4-6%.⁵⁰⁵ And, finally, the OPDA period also brought more foreign direct

⁵⁰¹ Blaisdell, *European Financial*, 105.

⁵⁰² For details on the terms of the Russian war indemnity, see 1910-12 Hague arbitration case between Istanbul and St. Petersburg George Grafton Wilson, *The Hague Arbitration Cases: Compromise and Awards* (Boston and London: Ginn and Company, 1915), 285–86; for the currency conversion estimate from francs to lira, see Pamuk, *Monetary*, 209.

⁵⁰³ Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*, 85–86.

⁵⁰⁴ Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 193–97.

⁵⁰⁵ Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*, 86; over 60% of this foreign direct investment went to Anatolian railway projects, which began in earnest after 1889. Still, net foreign direct investment had already begun its dramatic rise even before the expansion of Anatolian railways. For detailed data about foreign direct investment in the Ottoman Empire, see Şevket Pamuk, *Osmanlı Ekonomisinde Bağımlılık ve Büyüme 1820-1913*, 2. baskı, Türkiye araştırmaları 8 (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1994), 197–200; Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*, 94.

investment. Foreign investments had been permitted into the Empire since the 1860s, but they did not grow to significant levels after 1881. In 1859-81, about £12m of foreign direct investment flowed into the Ottoman Empire, but in 1882-1913, that number grew to £63m, with the yearly average between the two periods growing from £548,000 to just under £2m.⁵⁰⁶ By measures like borrowing costs, interest rates, and foreign investment flows, the post-1881 regime brought significant financial benefits to Istanbul.

These financial data seem rosy, which is likely why recent work by economic historians has been more equivocal about the OPDA era. Yet, free-flowing foreign capital notwithstanding, seven years into this new financial regime, correspondence from within the Empire suggested a dismal financial situation. The Ottoman government had no cash on hand, floating debt worth 16m lira, and budget deficits of around 3m lira per year, the head of the OPDA, Vincent Caillard, wrote to the British Foreign Secretary in November 1888. Indemnity payments to Russia were also behind by 615,000 lira.⁵⁰⁷ Key sections of the Ottoman government were also struggling to maintain basic functions. The financial ministry, for instance, was “very hard pressed to find £T25,000 to pay the contractors for the army,” who were “threatening to stop supplies” to border guards at Edirne.⁵⁰⁸ British officials matched Caillard in their pessimism. The Ambassador at Istanbul, Sir W. White, noted that government employees in Istanbul received only half-pay for the *Kurban Bayramı*, the feast following of the holy month of Ramadan (Ar. *īd al-’aḏḩā*). It was apparently the “first time” this had come to pass – “the Treasury has never before been reduced

⁵⁰⁶ These amounts are after deducting repatriated capital. See Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*, 92–94.

⁵⁰⁷ FO 424/157, 71/1, *Indemnité de Guerre Russe*, 13 Nov 1888.

⁵⁰⁸ FO 424/157, 34, Mr. Caillard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Istanbul, 14 Aug 1888 and 34/1 “Memorandum on the present Financial Position in Turkey,” by Vincent Caillard, 10 Aug 1888. In this note, Caillard conceded that the famine conditions prevailing in Anatolian and other provinces in 1887-88 “may be in part responsible” for the shortfalls, but, he noted, the budget situation was already quite bad even before droughts had struck

to such straits” – and it caused “deep discontent among the Mussulmans.”⁵⁰⁹ Two months later, the Ambassador invoked the default period (1875-81) to stress the gravity of the situation, suggesting that Istanbul’s finances had not provoked so much worry “since the Treaty of Berlin.”⁵¹⁰ The note’s reference to the default period emphasizes its sense of urgency. Favorable foreign borrowing terms or not, mounting debts, funding shortfalls, and unprecedented pay cuts pointed to precarity hindering the everyday functioning of government.

An equally forceful precarity prevailed in the provinces. “The drainage of money, the stagnation of business, the increase of taxes and their relentless collection, are reducing the common people to an extreme of poverty,” the American missionary Henry Barnum wrote in an 1885 report from the eastern provinces.⁵¹¹ Others, too, painted a picture of grim precarity in provincial life, whatever prices Ottoman bonds were fetching abroad.⁵¹² Still, since missionaries relied on a steady flow of donations to fund their activities, we should bear in mind that, intentionally or not, they may have been overstating the need for money to spur on donations. It is likewise possible that the editors of the *Missionary Herald* selected letter excerpts that would encourage its readership to send donations. Yet, widespread poverty was also palpable in British sources, whose authors did not depend on donations. In February 1886, before the famines, the British Vice-Consul Boyajian at Diyarbakır wrote about the “prevailing poverty” around Diyarbakır: “Agriculture, as long as the price of grain remains so low, is not a remunerative

⁵⁰⁹ FO 424/157, 37, Sir W. White to the Marquis of Salisbury, Tarabya [Istanbul], 4 Sep 1888. “Baïram” refers to *Kurban Bayramı* (Ar. *‘Īd al-ḥiṭr*).

⁵¹⁰ FO 424/157, 70, Sir W White to the Marquis of Salisbury, Istanbul, 14 Nov 1888. White’s letter included part of a “Private and Confidential Memorandum” that described how Turkish securities commanded less and less on global markets, while the rigid debt structures imposed by Decree of Muharrem kept the empire financially “bound hand and foot.” See FO 424/157, 70/1 “Extract from Private and Confidential Memorandum concerning Ottoman Finance, and the Arrangement with the Bondholders of December 20, 1881,” n.d. [received 29 Nov 1888].

⁵¹¹ “Hinderances to Education,” *The Missionary Herald* 82, no. 7 (July 1886): 271–72.

⁵¹² “Encouragements and Discouragements,” *The Missionary Herald* 82, no. 9 (September 1886): 350; “Special Help for the Turkish Missions,” *The Missionary Herald* 83, no. 5 (May 1887): 176; “Special Help for the Turkish Missions,” *The Missionary Herald* 83, no. 4 (April 1887): 150.

enterprise to small farmers, money is getting very scarce, and the poverty among this class is so universal and deep that one cannot help wondering how these miserable creatures manage to procure their means of subsistence.” Despite the Empire’s ability to attract growing amounts of foreign capital, the Ottoman government still struggled to find the resources to govern, and provincial subjects still struggled to make ends meet.

Borrowing insights from world-systems proponents about the Empire’s ongoing economic peripheralization may help to explain these contradictory signals. As they have pointed out, the OPDA’s control was part of the Ottoman Empire’s forced incorporation into a global system of exchange, one in which it was assigned the marginal role of raw materials supplier and market for European manufactures. Useful though this approach may be for accounting for the kinds of precarity faced by Ottoman officials and imperial subjects, its focus on the empire as a unit in a broader world-system risks flattening important differences within the Ottoman government. The OPDA, they have suggested, restrained “the degenerated Ottoman bureaucracy” and “terminated the sporadic efforts of the palace to recreate Ottoman centralism.”⁵¹³ Conflating the “Ottoman bureaucracy” with the “the palace” will not do – what if the OPDA actually reinvigorated aspects of “Ottoman centralism”? A conflict was ongoing between bureaucrats at the Sublime Porte and Abdülhamid II’s personal appointees at Yıldız Palace. The Sultan had disbanded parliament, suspended the constitution, and jailed constitutionalists, creating instead a “palace-dominated police state.”⁵¹⁴ If we gloss these internal divides, we miss how foreign financial entanglements could empower parts of the government against others.

⁵¹³ Wallerstein, Decdeli, and Kasaba, “The Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the World-Economy,” 94–95.

⁵¹⁴ Carter Vaughn Findley, “Economic Bases of Revolution and Repression in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 1 (1986): 81.

Access to foreign capital, for instance, freed particular spending priorities from the onerous process of converting agricultural production into financial capital. To raise tax revenues, Istanbul had to mobilize a shifting cast of middle-men – public, private, official, unofficial – all of whom claimed their shares before revenues reached imperial balance sheets.⁵¹⁵ Foreign loans took a more direct route to the treasury. While buyers, banks, and brokers took their discounts, commissions, and fees, these reductions appeared to be more predictable and legible (even if they often were not). What is more, foreign loans were insulated from domestic challenges. They did not require Anatolian rains to fall or harvests to thrive. And so, when droughts and famines were devastating central Anatolia in the financial year 1887-88 (1303), Istanbul secured loans worth over 100m *kuruş* to buy field guns and modern rifles from the German arms manufacturers Krupp and Mauser.⁵¹⁶ As will be recalled, in the fall of the same year, Ottoman officials were enduring an unprecedented cut to half-pay before the feast following Ramadan, *Kurban Bayramı*. In the midst of these pay cuts, Istanbul was sending Krupp and Mauser their first installments, worth 30m *kuruş*.⁵¹⁷ With a famine raging and officials languishing under pay cuts, could Istanbul have raised this gun money on through its own tax revenues?⁵¹⁸ Happily for proponents of the loan, including the Mauser and Krupp companies, that question did not need answering because the gun money did not need to come from regular tax channels. The Empire was obtaining its best-ever foreign borrowing terms, so to

⁵¹⁵ İnalçık and Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:843; Suraiya Faroqhi, “Rural Life,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Kate Fleet, Suraiya Faroqhi, and Reşat Kasaba (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 383–85; Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, 199; Charles Philip Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914*, Publications of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies ; No. 13 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 351–55.

⁵¹⁶ Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*, 88.

⁵¹⁷ FO 424/157, 99, Lt.-Col. Trotter to Sir W. White, Istanbul, 14 Dec 1888.

⁵¹⁸ Rosanne D’Arrigo and Heidi M. Cullen, “A 350-Year (AD 1628-1980) Reconstrution of Turkish Precipitation,” *Dendrochronologia* 19, no. 2 (2001): 181; Ünal Akkemik and Aliye Aras, “Reconstruction (1689–1994 AD) of April–August Precipitation in the Southern Part of Central Turkey,” *International Journal of Climatology* 25, no. 4 (March 30, 2005): 545, <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.1145>.

raise the capital from abroad it pledged some fisheries revenues.⁵¹⁹ The government apparently lacked money for official salaries, but even with a famine creating the expectation of dire need in Anatolia, extra revenues for could be found for loan collateral. These purchases from Mauser and Krupp, show how increased access to foreign capital empowered some parts of the government relative to others. While some spending priorities faced strict austerity, others remained insulated from the burdens of famine and an otherwise dismal financial situation.

Indeed, throughout this period, the combined budget of Abdülhamid's military enjoyed steady, even growing budgets, compared to their civil counterparts. Military expenditures before the 1877-78 war had remained at 22-33% of total spending, but that rate rose to 41-47% in 1887-96.⁵²⁰ Spending on civil administration, by contrast, stagnated and declined, comprising 12-21% of total expenditures before 1881 but just 8-10% after.⁵²¹ Military budgets also ballooned as absolute amounts. Comparing two periods, 1871-78 and 1887-96, the combined budgets of the Ministry of the Army, Ministry of the Navy, and Imperial Arsenal department grew from 504-605m kuruş to 690-844m *kuruş*.⁵²² In fact, they hit their pre-1908 peak of 844m *kuruş* during the famines in the financial year 1887-88 (1303).⁵²³ It is important to bear in mind that Ottoman budget data is anything but complete, filled as it is with off-the-books spending that is effectively invisible, unrecorded, or yet to be uncovered.⁵²⁴ Still, the available data suggest that sections of

⁵¹⁹ Birdal, *Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt*; Blaisdell, *European Financial*, 148.

⁵²⁰ His calculations are different in part because he included the budget of the gendarmerie in his calculation of total military expenditure. See Engin D. Akarlı, "Economic Policy and Budgets in Ottoman Turkey, 1876-1909," *Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 3 (1992): 470-71. Akarlı suggests that ratios may be more accurate than values when dealing with Ottoman budget data. For his rationale, see Akarlı, 444-45.

⁵²¹ For an analysis of Foreign Ministry salaries compared to Istanbul grain prices for this period, see Findley, "Economic Bases."

⁵²² In 1871-78, the Ministry of the Army, Ministry of the Navy, and Imperial Arsenal Department consumed 504m-605m kuruş, or 22-24% of total estimated expenditures, according to Shaw's data. See Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System"; Shaw, "Ottoman Expenditures and Budgets in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries."

⁵²³ Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System"; Shaw, "Ottoman Expenditures and Budgets in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries."

⁵²⁴ Akarlı, "Economic Policy and Budgets in Ottoman Turkey, 1876-1909," 445-47.

the government, like parts of the military, were at least somewhat insulated from the precarity that reigned elsewhere. Indeed, these were dramatic ratios devoted to military spending during peacetime, let alone during a famine. But in the post-1881 period, such spending was possible thanks because the new financial regime that could provide external funds, whatever internal troubles the empire faced.

These differences raise the question of why certain departments received the benefits of Istanbul's newfound access to foreign capital. In this case, we can speculate that, after its disastrous losses in 1877-78, the Ottomans were trying to keep up with the general increase in military spending across European empires during this period.⁵²⁵ Ottoman officials were also keeping a close eye on the arms purchases taking place in its former territories, now countries harboring territorial claims on the empire, like Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia.⁵²⁶ And perhaps then, as today, arms manufacturers were creating not only weapons but – with the help of sovereign lenders – also creating arms races. Or perhaps Sultan Abdülhamid, who was apparently quite paranoid of being deposed like his two predecessors, was pursuing a strategy of keeping the military well-funded, which might keep dissent within it at a minimum. While these speculations would require further research, what seems does seem clear is that access to foreign capital markets could create stark inequalities across the empire and within its government. For those who could claim shares of the foreign capital inflows, this was a period of plenty, uninhibited even by the usual obstacles of raising tax revenues. For those left out of that narrow constituency, it was a time of precarity. If we conflate these separate and conflicting sections of

⁵²⁵ Between the 1880s and 1914, the combined military spending of Ottoman rivals in Europe was growing exponentially, from £132m to £205m to £397m in 1880, 1900, and 1914. These totals are for of Germany, Austria-Hungry, Britain, France, Russia, and Italy. See E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage, 1989), 350.

⁵²⁶ Öztan, "Tools," 174-76.

the government as a single, unified actor, we miss how new financial ties and the vastly resource access they afforded could create internal competition and conflict. Accounting for these internal differences sheds light on a specific mechanism of the power of European financial control, one that worked not only by impoverishing parts of the Empire but also by enriching others.

For the purposes of this chapter, these differences raise important questions about this post-1881 financial era and Istanbul's relationships with the provinces of the Ottoman East. What kinds of power, and attendant forms of violence, did these new financial conditions introduce into those relationships? Answering that question may help us better grasp the more subtle forms of violence ravaging the region in the lead up to the Hamidian Massacres, forms of violence that could both enable nefarious power-holders and spread society-wide resentment. With that question in mind, the next two sections turn to the subtle effects of this new financial era in the Ottoman East.

Cheap Acts of Charity

The rural costs of the post-1881 financial situation became more visible during the famines of 1887-88. Poverty and hunger cropped up across the region, provoking Ottoman and Western responses. Ottoman relief correspondence highlights how poverty proved more deadly than absolute shortage. Correspondingly, unpaid salaries and continued tax collection stymied relief efforts by reducing resources available to stave off hunger. American and British observers described this famine suffering their writings, and these observers condemned the Ottomans for continuing to collect taxes during the famines. Yet, they did not condemn foreign governments for continuing to collect debt service payments from the Ottomans. That separation, between internal and external revenue extraction, concealed the violence of hunger that foreign governments and a globalizing financial system were visiting upon the region. We can find an

example of this less visible violence in Ankara. There, officials had requested badly-needed grain be sent from a neighboring province. The Treasury denied permission to send the grain, which, incidentally, had been earmarked to service Ottoman foreign debt obligations. The example demonstrates how the violence of external revenue collection was no less potent than the exactions of Ottoman tax-collectors in draining resources out of famine-stricken areas.

Some background on the famines is in order. In 1887-88, areas including Ankara, Konya, and Adana suffered droughts that sapped harvests, fueled panic, and enabled profiteers. These combined forces allowed those with grain reserves to demand higher prices. As increasing numbers of people could no longer afford food, reports of famine emerged. Like many famines of the past two centuries, those of 1887-88 arose from an interplay of ecological and economic forces. Much of Anatolia is semi-arid, meaning that it typically receives just enough precipitation for rain-fed agriculture, but some years it does not. 1887 was one of those years, according to studies attempting to reconstruct historical precipitation data.⁵²⁷ These data accord with sources from the early months of 1887, which also attested to drought, crop failure, and rising food prices.⁵²⁸ Officials responded by forbidding grain exports and encouraging imports by lifting customs duties.⁵²⁹ In the summer of 1887, the Palace also organized an Imperial Famine

⁵²⁷ Hakan Yiğitbaşıoğlu et al., “A 600 Year-Long Drought Index for Central Anatolia,” *Journal of the Black Sea/Mediterranean Environment* Special Issue (2015): 85–86; D’Arrigo and Cullen, “A 350-Year (AD 1628-1980) Reconstruction of Turkish Precipitation,” 173; Akkemik and Aras, “Reconstruction (1689–1994 AD) of April–August Precipitation in the Southern Part of Central Turkey,” 545.

⁵²⁸ Similar reports emanated from other parts of Anatolia and Iraq. For early reports of drought in Konya, see CDA, MV 21/32, 1/2, Council of Ministers Decision Summary, 9 May 1887 / 15 Şaban 1304; on famine displacing people from Ankara to Istanbul, see CDA, DH.MKT 1428/106, 1/1, Ministry of Zabita to the Şehremanet [Istanbul Municipality], 3 Jul 1887 / 1304 Şevval 11 and CDA, DH.MKT 1429/18, 1/1-3, and see also Interior Ministry to Grand Vizier’s office, 1887 Jul 4 / 12 L 1304; on Mosul Province see CDA, DH.MKT 1443/51, 1/1, Interior Ministry to Mosul and Diyarbakır Provinces, 28 Aug 1887 / 8 Zilhicce 1304.

⁵²⁹ For an example of forgiving customs taxes for grain shipped to Ankara via Kastamonu, see CDA, Y.PRK.TNF, 2/8, 46/1, Derviş Pasha to the Grand Vizier [Kamil Pasha], 15 Aug 1887 / 3 Aug 1303; for an example of export restrictions from Ankara, see CDA, Y.PRK.TNF, 2/8, 2/1, Ankara Governor Abidin Pasha to Imperial Famine Commission, 3 [Sep] 1303 / [15 Eylül 1887]; for an example of export restrictions from Konya via the port of Antalya, see CDA, Y.PRK.KOM 5/10, 1, Yaver-i Hazret-i Şehriyari Kaymakam Mehmed Faik and Konya Vilayet

Commission (*Kaht Komisyon-ı Alisi*) under the leadership of İbrahim Derviş Pasha, a military veteran and confidant of the Sultan, Abdülhamid II.⁵³⁰ The Commission took steps to reduce livestock losses, control food prices, and raise relief money through charity campaigns.⁵³¹

The Famine Commission's correspondence shows how the key problem facing famine-stricken areas was increasing poverty, not an absolute lack of food.⁵³² For example, in the first weeks after its formation, the Commission produced an order banning the sale of pack animals in Adana province and requested emergency allocations to procure fodder from neighboring Syria.⁵³³ It may seem counterintuitive to prioritize saving animal lives as “most important and most necessary” (*ehem ve elzem*), but this was a strong move to prevent present and future impoverishment. Famines tend to kill flocks first, since owners can be tempted to slaughter them for food or sell them for badly needed money. Indeed, reports of cattle sell-offs emerged in Adana and across Anatolia in 1887-88.⁵³⁴ The poverty of famine was driving people to sacrifice

Inspector [Müfetiş] Ferik es-Seyyid Ahmed bin Osman Sana[k]ı to Imperial Famine Commission, 2 Aug 1887 / 21 Jul 1303.

⁵³⁰ “Editorial Paragraphs,” *The Missionary Herald* 84, no. 2 (February 1888): 47; “The Famine – Kozolook - Sis,” *The Missionary Herald* 84, no. 3 (March 1888): 119.

⁵³¹ On actions to stem animal mortality and sell-offs nearby Adana, see CDA, İ.MMS 92/3897, 2/1, Cabinet order [İrade Meclis-i Mahsus], 8 Aug 1887 / 18 Zilkade 1304; and CDA, MV 23/8, 1/2, Cabinet decision, 10 Aug 1887 / 20 Zilkade 1304. There was also cattle mortality in Erzurum, at least according to one Interior Ministry note sent to the province about procuring cattle for famine-stricken people there. See CDA, DH.MKT 1513.96, 1, Interior Ministry to Erzurum Province, 19 Jun 1888 / 9 Şevval 1305. The note is about an enterprising Bitlis merchant who, upon hearing that there would be livestock procured for famine-stricken people in Erzurum, was offering to sell livestock to the vilayet for “moderate prices.” Farther north, Commission members lobbied to have customs lifted on both food and fodder imports to the Black Sea ports of Kastamonu province – the ports closest to famine-stricken Ankara. See CDA, Y.PRK.TNF, 2/8, 46, Derviş Paşa to the Grand Vizier [Kıbrıslı Mehmed Kamil Paşa], 15 Aug 1887 / 25 Zilkade 1304 and Grand Vizier Kamil [Paşa] to [Derviş Paşa] 23 Aug 1887 / 3 Zilhicce 1304.

⁵³² For more on this, see the work of Amartya Sen, which urges us to examine not only food supplies but also a phenomenon he calls a “Failure of Exchange Entitlements” (FEE). If food prices rise above people's ability to exchange money, labor, or anything else for it, hunger or even starvation tends to follow. See Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 1–4 for an Ottoman example of FEE from 1879-81, see Chapter 4.

⁵³³ CDA, İ.MMS 92/3897, 2/1, Cabinet Order [İrade Meclis-i Mahsus], 8 Aug 1887 / 18 Zilkade 1304.

⁵³⁴ For an example from Adana itself, see “A Famine in Central Turkey,” *The Missionary Herald* 83, no. 7 (July 1887): 261–62. There was also cattle mortality in Erzurum, at least according to one Interior Ministry note sent to the province about procuring cattle for famine-stricken people there. See CDA, DH.MKT 1513.96, 1, Interior Ministry to Erzurum Province, 19 Jun 1888 / 9 Şevval 1305. The note is about an enterprising Bitlis merchant who, upon hearing that there would be livestock procured for famine-stricken people in Erzurum, was offering to sell livestock to the vilayet for “moderate prices.” Farther north, Famine Commission members also lobbied to remove custom duties from food and fodder imports to the Black Sea ports of Kastamonu province, the ports closest to

their main source of labor for plowing, pulling and dragging. Farmers bereft of cattle would reap and sow far less in subsequent years. Anticipating this, the Commission tried to ban sales and procure fodder.

Commission correspondence also highlighted how price tended to be their primary target for relief measures, not grain supplies. In a telegraph to Commission, the Ankara Governor Abidin Pasha noted that desperation created opportunities for profiteers. Merchants had brought grain from neighboring provinces, but they did so to sell at inflated prices.⁵³⁵ The grain was there, but a slight reduction had compounding effects, since it allowed profiteers to demand prices well above people's meager spending power. Likewise, a note written by the British Acting Consul at the Russian-border province of Erzurum underscores this point. The 1887 harvest there, "though not first-class, was still not very much below the average." The cause of the distress was "not so much the dearth of grain . . . as the fact that the agricultural classes have no money wherewith to buy it."⁵³⁶ His observations suggest that, in eastern Anatolia as well, even a minor reduction in harvests could push sustenance out of reach.

Price and supply can, of course, affect each other. Still, correspondence from Kırşehir District (*sancak*) in Ankara demonstrates how Commission activities focused not on procuring grain from far away but on finding money to coax it out of nearby granaries. A September 1887 petition, signed by a mufti, a village headman, and two dozen other local notables, congratulated the two officials, Şahin Pasha and Yusuf Bey Efendi, for solving the area's crisis of "shortage

famine-stricken Ankara. See CDA, Y.PRK.TNF, 2/8, 46, Derviş Paşa to the Grand Vizier [Kıbrıslı Mehmed Kamil Paşa], 15 Aug 1887 / 25 Zilkade 1304 and Grand Vizier Kamil [Paşa] to [Derviş Paşa] 23 Aug 1887 / 3 Zilhicce 1304.

⁵³⁵ CDA, Y.PRK.TNF 2/8, 2/1 Ankara Governor Abidin Pasha to Imperial Famine Commission, 3 [Sep] 1303 / [15 Eylül 1887]. On not allowing exports, his telegraph says, "*Ankara vilayeti'nden harice bir habbe bile zahire ihracı katien caiz olmayacağını,*" and on merchants bringing in grain at inflated prices, it says, "*tüccarın Amasya ve Dersaadet'den ve sair mahallardan gali fiyatlarla bir mikdar zahire celb itmekde oldukları.*"

⁵³⁶ FO 424/145, 44/1, Acting Consul Wratislaw to Sir W. White, 24 Mar 1888.

and inflation (*kaht u gala*).” The two of them had relieved the district’s woes by arranging for grain sales from the granaries of the government and tax-farmers, “to deny hoarders the chance to deceive people.” If this were a famine of absolute shortage, they would have needed to procure grain from far off places. Instead, they found the grain right there in Ankara Province, from the imperial granaries and those of tax-collectors (*mültezim*) in neighboring Yozgat District.⁵³⁷ The grain was there. It just needed money to draw it out of granaries. The petition congratulated the Commission and its officials, who held bread price increases to “just 5 or 6 *paras* higher than normal, about 26 *paras*.”⁵³⁸ We should take their self-congratulation with a grain of salt: government and private granaries had just secured a 25-30% profit boost on the backs of Kirşehir’s toilers, who would apparently be expected to pay up extra for their daily bread. Then again, it is possible that the inflation would have been worse without their action. In any case, we can ascertain that grain prices were the target of the Commission’s action and the object of the petition’s praise. This example of famine correspondence from Kirşehir, as well as those from Adana and Ankara, all suggest that grain supplies had not been reduced to starvation levels. Rather, cultivators, without their own crops, were left to purchase from a small number of public and private actors who demanded higher prices than most people could afford. If the Commission could temper those demands by procuring nearby grain and restraining price increases, they could coax the grain stores of hoarders out to people’s tables and win the praise of local notables.

⁵³⁷ About the grain sources, the document says “*Vilayetçe Kirşehirli sancağına Yozgad’dan ve mültezimin mültezimin ve miri malından verilub*” CDA, Y.PRK.TNF 2/8, 5, Telegraph copy of petition signed by Mufti, Mutasarrıf, and 32 other Kirşehir officials and council members, 13 Sep 1887 / 24 Zilhicce 1304.

⁵³⁸ A *para* is 1/40 of a *kuruş*, which is 1/100 of an Ottoman lira. CDA, Y.PRK.TNF 2/8, 5, Telegraph copy of petition signed by Mufti, Mutasarrıf, and 32 other Kirşehir officials and council members, 13 Sep 1887 / 24 Zilhicce 1304.

Yet, in other cases, the Commission and provincial officials faced obstacles in gathering the resources necessary for procuring nearby grain. For instance, the government's failure to pay official wages, mentioned in the previous section, stymied Commission relief efforts. This became apparent when the Commission tried to raise money by selling aid certificates (*bilet*).⁵³⁹ Similar fundraisers had taken place during the famines of 1879-81 (see Chapter 3). In such schemes, donors, often state employees, would donate parts of their salaries to fund famine relief. In 1887-88, the Famine Commission's plan called for the sale of 50,000 lira worth of aid certificates to provincial and district officials.⁵⁴⁰ Fundraising did not proceed as planned, however, because official salaries had gone unpaid. In one case, the Famine Commission wrote to the Education Ministry, requesting that the ministry forward the proceeds for the aid certificates it was supposed to have sold. The Commission's note suggested a tone of urgency (if not annoyance): "Your ministry has not – like the others – sent even a single *akçe* for the 16,200 *kuruş* certificate fees."⁵⁴¹ The money was needed urgently, the note said, because the Commission had already procured grain on credit secured against the expected fundraising. "The merchants' complaints are endless."⁵⁴² Unfortunately for the Commission (and the merchants), the money was not forthcoming. The tickets were never sold, according to the Education Minister's curt response, not even two lines long: "For our ministry to distribute and divide these

⁵³⁹ More research will reveal whether these tickets had some possible material benefit, like a lottery, or whether they were only a token for the donor's generosity and/or patriotism.

⁵⁴⁰ For the imperial order for the cabinet [Meclis-i Vükela] to examine the plan for printing tickets, see CDA, İ.DH 1042/81894, 1, Yıldız Palace Imperial Order to the Interior Ministry, 7 Aug 1887 / 17 Zilkade 1304. For the cabinet decision approving the plan, see CDA, MV 22/80, 1/2, Meclis-i Vükela [Cabinet] decision, 10 Aug 1887 / 20 Zilkade 1304. On the Cabinet's approval of the Commission's handling of funds raised, "*Hasıl olacak iane akçesinin Komisyon-ı Ali'ce mesaib-i kahta dışar olan vilayetlerin derece-i ihtiyacına göre taksim.*" CDA, İ.DH 1042/81894, 1, Yıldız Palace Imperial Order to the Interior Ministry, 7 Aug 1887 / 17 Zilkade 1304; MV 22/80, 1/2, Meclis-i Vükela [Cabinet] decision, 10 Aug 1887 / 20 Zilkade 1304; and Y.PRK.TNF 2/8, 50, List of 4 documents with numbers, date, and summaries, n.d.

⁵⁴¹ During this period, an *akçe* was 1/3 of a *para*, which was 1/40 of a lira. In this context, *akçe* would translate to something like "not even one penny."

⁵⁴² CDA, Y.PRK.KOM 6/141, 1, Derviş Paşa to Education Minister [Mehmed Tahrir Münif Paşa], 5 Jul 1888 / 25 Şevval 1305. "*İşbu alacaklarından dolayı tüccar dahi la-yenkati sızlanmakda olduklarına.*"

tickets among our officials, the Treasury needs to send us [at least] one full salary.”⁵⁴³

Employees could not devote portions of their salaries to charity with no salaries to donate. If Istanbul had forgone its Mauser and Krupp orders, perhaps it could have afforded timely payments to the Education Ministry. In this example, we see how the simultaneous enrichment and empowerment of different sections of the Ottoman government, discussed in the first section, could create serious obstacles for famine relief operations.

In addition to obstacles raising money, famine relief efforts also faced orders by the central government for tax collection from areas unable to remit them. The famine had left many areas bereft, and tax obligations were only making matters worse. For instance, in October 1887, the Interior Ministry sent an announcement to Erzurum Province to stress that tax collection should be stringent that year to make up for famine losses elsewhere. The message urged Erzurum officials to concentrate on collection in the Eleşkirt and Karakilise (Ağrı) sub-districts, where their “most important duty” (*akdem vazifesi*) was to uphold strict tax collection and to discipline any of their lax underlings (*gevşek davranan*). The note assumed that there were any taxes to be collected in those areas, an assumption contradicted British consular correspondence attesting to a difficult winter there in 1887-88. “Great scarcity is also said to exist in the district of Alashkird [Eleşkirt],” the British Acting-Consul at Erzurum wrote in March 1888.⁵⁴⁴ The timing of Consul’s note suggests a few possibilities. Perhaps the region’s weather had not seemed irregular in autumn. Or, perhaps, officials had indeed executed the orders for stringent tax-collection, leaving people there with so little that by the following spring, the British official would receive reports of “great scarcity.” In any case, it is clear that the Commission and

⁵⁴³ CDA, Y.PRK.KOM 6/141, 1, Derviş Paşa to Education Minister [Mehmed Tahrir Münif Paşa], 5 Jul 1888 / 25 Şevval 1305.

⁵⁴⁴ FO 424/145, 44/1, Acting Consul Wratishlaw to Sir W. White, 24 Mar 1888.

provincial officials faced two major obstacles in staving off hunger: the reliance on already-spent or unpaid funds and the continued requests by central authorities for revenues that were not there or would leave people bereft.

At the time, British or American observers in Anatolia seemed more focused on the latter, the evils of continued Ottoman tax-collection. Their writings blamed an oppressive Ottoman government and its ruthless tax-collectors for the poverty and hunger of famine. In January 1888, at Mardin, the Ottoman government was “sending soldiers to collect taxes, who by their oppression drive the people away from their houses to . . . perish from cold and hunger,” according to an American missionary, Rev. Gates.⁵⁴⁵ Records left by American and British observers contain similar condemnations, blaming hunger and famine on Ottoman internal revenue collection, its “exactions,” and its “fearful cruelty.”⁵⁴⁶ The acting British Consul at Erzurum wrote about similar exactions and proposed the solution of a tax holiday: “The distress of the inhabitants would be alleviated . . . were the Imperial government to remit the taxes for the present year . . . and thus, not expose them to additional sufferings from the brutality of the tax-gatherers. This would be a cheap act of charity, as in any case there is no money with which to pay the taxes.”⁵⁴⁷

This focus on the evils of continued Ottoman tax-collection imposes a problematic division between Ottoman revenue collection and foreign debt collection. There is plenty of evidence, as Nadir Özbek has shown, that Ottoman revenue collection was a “hazardous site,”

⁵⁴⁵ FO 424/145, 17/2, Rev. CF Gates to Vice-Consul Boyajian, 30 Jan 1888.

⁵⁴⁶ FO 424/145, 17/2, Rev. CF Gates to Vice-Consul Boyajian, 30 Jan 1888; FO 424/145, 17/1, Vice-Consul Boyajian to Acting Consul Wratislaw, 6 Feb 1888; FO 424/145, 106 “Memorandum by Mr. A. Riley, and the Residence of the Priests of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission in the Province of Hakkiari, lately incorporated with that of Van” by Athelstan Riley, 1 Dec 1888; “Editorial Paragraphs,” *The Missionary Herald* 84, no. 2 (February 1888): 47; “The Famine – Kozolook - Sis,” *The Missionary Herald* 84, no. 3 (March 1888): 119; FO 424/145, 44/1, Mr. Wratislaw to Sir W. White, 24 Mar 1888.

⁵⁴⁷ FO 424/145, 44/1, Mr. Wratislaw to Sir W. White, 24 Mar 1888.

one “frequently accompanied by state terror and communal violence.”⁵⁴⁸ And the force of Ottoman tax collectors must have appeared especially cruel in the midst of a famine, as the citations above show. Still, in the sources consulted for this chapter, not once did I come across a mention of the equally cruel practice of demanding continued foreign debt service payments from the famine-stricken empire. The British Acting Consul at Erzurum had suggested that Ottomans could offer a tax forgiveness as a “cheap act of charity,” but he did not suggest that the Ottoman government’s foreign creditors should forgive or even temporarily suspend debt service payments. Asking creditors to forgo even just the interest on their loans would have constituted a similarly “cheap act of charity.” Yet, these foreign creditors escaped adjectives like “inexorable” and “merciless.” British and American observers maintained a separation between the internal Ottoman revenues and those collected for external debt. Those continued payments for external debt, though perhaps less visible to them, were implicated in the very same “fearful cruelty” of the Ottoman taxmen. This implicit divide in British and American sources separated the hand of the Ottoman taxman from the invisible hand of foreign debtors, who were quietly taking grain from people on the verge of starvation.

The invisible hand of foreign debt was, indeed, removing grain from Anatolia in the midst of the 1887-88 famine, as Ottoman correspondence from Ankara shows. In August 1887, when droughts and rising food prices were becoming more apparent, Ankara officials began preparing to protect their province from the ravages of scarcity. They sent a note suggesting that Kastamonu province, just north of Ankara, had plenty of grain on hand. Still, Kastamonu responded that it could provide just 50,000 *kile* of grain from just one of its districts – a tiny

⁵⁴⁸ Özbek, “The Politics of Taxation and the ‘Armenian Question’ during the Late Ottoman Empire, 1876–1908,” 773.

fraction of Ankara's needs.⁵⁴⁹ Kastamonu had more grain but could not send it to famine-stricken Ankara because the Finance Ministry had set aside Kastamonu's grain as part of the Ottoman's annual Russian War Indemnity payment, and the Finance Ministry denied permission for its transfer to Ankara.⁵⁵⁰ As if to add insult to injury, in September 1887, the Finance Ministry asked that Ankara remit to Istanbul 8000 lira in taxes. In response, Ankara officials requested an exemption. If the province were forced to pay, they wrote, it would bring upon the population "the pain of famine's violence."⁵⁵¹ Whether the Finance Ministry was desperate, incredulous, or ignorant, we cannot know without more research. Perhaps there was discord among officials, or perhaps someone in the winding chain of command was passing on misinformation that, dropped strategically, could create opportunities for personal enrichment.⁵⁵² Whatever was going on, Kastamonu's grain was not relieving Ankara's hungry but paying down the Russian War Indemnity. By the following January, Kastamonu had contributed over 4300 lira to the indemnity fund, and it would continue monthly contributions through the rest of 1888, according to the British Ambassador's calculations.⁵⁵³

What might that grain have done for Ankara's hungry and needy? The British diplomatic corps had the information before them to ask that question (if not answer it), but they didn't. Such a question would not fit well within the moral imaginaries of these American and British

⁵⁴⁹ CDA, Y.PRK.TNF 2/8, 49, Interior Minister Münir Paşa to Derviş Paşa, 17 Aug 1887 / 27 Zilkade 1304. On the dispatch of 50,000 old kiles of grain from Bolu and on the urgency of the situation: "*Kastamonu Vilayeti'nin Bolu Sancağından başka mahallardan zahire itası gayri-kabil olduğundan Bolu Vilayet-i müşarün-ileyhima emvalından tesviye olunarak elişerden yüz bin kile hintanın mezkur mahallara sürat-ı sevki lazım geleceği ve verilmediği halde ahalinin açlıktan telefleri ve mecbur hicret olacakları melhuz bulunduğu ifade ve dermeyan kılınmış.*"

⁵⁵⁰ CDA, DH.MKT 1445/36, 1/1, Interior Ministry to Grand Vizierate, 8 Sep 1888 / 19 Zilhicce 1304.

⁵⁵¹ CDA, DH.MKT 1445/30, 1, Interior Ministry to Grand Vizierate, 8 Sep 1887 / 2 Muharrem 1306. "*İtizar-ı vaki kabul olunmadığı takdirde huda nekerde beliyeye-i kahtın şedaidiyle nüfusca telefât vuku gibi.*"

⁵⁵² In 1889, a year after the famines, Imperial Famine Commission members in Konya would be investigated for embezzlement resulting in the loss of more than 40,000 lira. See CDA, MV 46/66, 1/2, Council of Ministers Decision Summary, 18 Aug 1889 / 21 Zilhicce 1306 and CDA, MV 46/61, 1/2, Council of Ministers Decision Summary, 25 Aug 1889 / 28 Zilhicce 1306.

⁵⁵³ FO 424/157, 71/1, *Indemnité de Guerre Russe*, n.d. [c. Nov 1888]

authors, because to ask such a question would be to co-mingle two utterly divided realms, Ottoman revenue collection and foreign debt collection. The former was irredeemably backward, oppressive, and in need of reform. The latter was the natural product of economic and financial systems that had their own laws and rules, which stood apart from the opprobrium that came with taking food from the needy. Profits reaped on far-off trading floors and bank salons wrought the violence of hunger, but that violence remained concealed within this division of the world. In this way, I would argue, that division masked the violence that foreign debt wrought on Anatolia.

Such binaries may have fit neatly within the moral imaginaries of British officials and American missionaries, but repeating them today will not do, because they fail to account for how suffering in Anatolia could be directly tied to Istanbul's deepening relationship with foreign capital. Highlighting that divide is not to downplay the brutalities of Ottoman revenue collection but to suggest that violence of foreign debt was just as brutal but seemingly invisible. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence suggesting that Ottoman tax collectors and their para-state partners were ruthless and violent. But a newer and more subtle violence, foreign debt service, was just as ruthless in its draining of resources away from the famine-stricken areas. That drainage could take place directly, as it did in Ankara in 1887-88, where debts could be secured on the crops themselves. Just two years later, in 1890, Istanbul raised another loan, again secured directly on agricultural tithes, this time from Bursa and parts of Ankara – a dark irony in a region just recovering from famine.⁵⁵⁴ The drainage of foreign debt payments was also taking place indirectly, as the Empire's most stable, liquid revenues were unquestionably devoted to the debt service payments of the OPDA. As will be recalled from the first section, Istanbul successfully

⁵⁵⁴ FO 424/167, 14/2, Memorandum on Arrangements connected with the Conversion of Priority Bonds and Turkish Internal Debt, and the raising of a new Loan, n.d. [c. 2 May 1890]. In 1890, the Bursa tithes were committed to Holders of *Dahiliye* and *Sehim* bonds, to provide them “a real and marketable security, the tithes of the Vilayet of Broussa [Bursa], and of certain sanjaks of the Province of Angora.”

raised loans worth over £6.9m in 1886-88 based on those payments. The money raised by loans was used to consolidate other debts and to purchase German firearms, but it may have been quite helpful to the Imperial Famine Commission as it scrounged for resources.

Underscoring a key conceptual division in the writings of American and British observers motions toward a broader separation at the time of this famine, one that separated the collection of Ottoman internal revenues from the collection of external debt collection. It shows how financial resources were crucial to the operation of relief efforts, and how the Imperial Famine Commission encountered obstacles when those resources could not be found. Western observers suggested that the Ottomans should relieve peasants of tax obligations, but those observers left unquestioned the Ottomans' continued obligations to foreign creditors. This separation between internal and external debt is a red flag, signaling to us that new sorts of power were afoot. Here, it was the subtler but no less potent violence of foreign debt collection, quietly draining food from the famine-stricken.

Lending Support

While foreign debt collection exacerbated suffering in famine-stricken Anatolia, financial transformations at the local level highlight another form of violence visited upon famine-stricken areas, the threat of dispossession. The famines of this period saw the Ottoman administration assert more control over relief activities by preventing nonstate relief campaigns. This left the needy with little choice but to accept whatever aid Istanbul would offer, which increasingly came in the form of loans. Obtaining those loans required people to submit information about themselves, their wealth, and their lands. Forcing cultivators to register their plots, obtain title deeds, and immediately surrender those deeds as collateral made it easier to threaten the lands with confiscation. In this way, Istanbul's lending activities to the famine-stricken were re-

creating, on a smaller scale, the Ottoman Empire's own entanglements with foreign lenders. In the leadup to this post-1881 period, Istanbul had been made to submit to European financial control at a moment of vulnerability – default, war, and rebellion. Now that famine had forced its own subjects into a moment of vulnerability, Istanbul was making them submit to its own financial control. This replication of inter-imperial domination on the local level is significant because it reveals a mechanism by which these novel forms of financial and imperial control could penetrate far off, seemingly disconnected parts of the globe, areas like the Ottoman East.

The post-1881 period brought a major change to the Ottoman government's attitude toward foreign and Christian humanitarian organizations operating in the Empire. During a previous set of famines in 1879-81, Ottoman relief efforts were joined by those of American missionaries, British consuls, and the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate (see Chapter 3). After 1881, Istanbul restricted these three nonstate actors from providing relief. The American missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), for instance, tried to raise and distribute donations, and by August 1888, they had raised over \$38,000.⁵⁵⁵ Still, they faced increasing Ottoman government restrictions. Imperial orders were “strenuously forbidding any further distribution of relief to the poor,” according to a missionary letter excerpted the February 1888 *Missionary Herald*.⁵⁵⁶ While it is difficult to tell how exactly these restrictions affected relief, we can speculate they did not help the overall funding situation.

Another major source of 1879-81 relief, charitable donations raised in Britain, also dwindled in 1887-88 due to the Hamidian government's posture. In 1879-81, consular

⁵⁵⁵ “Editorial Paragraphs,” *The Missionary Herald* 84, no. 8 (August 1888): 329–30.

⁵⁵⁶ “Editorial Paragraphs,” February 1888, 47; another letter from the same month suggested that the Ottomans were “hindering work of relief on account of a false charge that the ‘missionaries were buying Protestants.’” On that, see E. E. Strong, “Starvation in Turkey,” *New York Tribune*, March 9, 1888; the Ottoman government's accusations of “buying Protestants” seem to have been a symptom of some of the earlier restrictions that Sultan Abdülhamid II's government put on missionary activity, restrictions that would with time intensify. For more on Hamidian relations with American and other missionaries, see Deringil, *Well-Protected*, 112–19 and 125–32.

correspondence contained dozens of reports about famine, and officials in Anatolia had distributed hundreds of thousands of *kuruş* in charity raised in Britain, which British officials distributed themselves. While some British donations did seem to flow to famine regions in 1887-88, it was a trickle compared to the flood of money raised a decade earlier.⁵⁵⁷ Famine seldom arose in the Foreign Office's Confidential Print, copies of consular correspondence published and distributed for internal use. Hand-written correspondence held at the National Archives suggests that the 1887-88 famines received little attention in part because the British Ambassador at Istanbul, Sir W. White, raised doubts about whether donations would do any good. In January and February 1888, he received letters discussing the possibility of raising donations in Britain to aid famine-stricken Anatolia. While White assumed it would be possible to raise money from British donors, he questioned whether he could "protect its distribution from passing through the hands of local native committees," who would apparently squander the funds.⁵⁵⁸ What is more, dispatching British officials or money would be "particularly disagreeable," he wrote, because Abdülhamid II was "extremely suspicious as to English acts of Charity." As a result, British charity seems to have been a trickle in 1887-88, compared to what it had been in 1879-81.

Compared to the decreased American and British relief, however, the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate's absence must have been most palpable during famines of the post-1881 period.

⁵⁵⁷ Another letter from the same month suggested that the Ottomans were "hindering work of relief on account of a false charge that the 'missionaries were buying Protestants.'" On that, see Strong. The Ottoman government's accusations of "buying Protestants" seem to have been a symptom of some of the earlier restrictions that Sultan Abdülhamid II's government put on missionary activity, restrictions that would with time intensify. For more on Hamidian relations with American and other missionaries, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 112–19 and 125–32.

⁵⁵⁸ FO 4097/35, Sir W. White to the Marquis of Salisbury, 31 Jan 1888. In another note from February 1888, White wrote again, forwarding information from the Vice Consul at Diyarbakır, who believed that some relief, collected in coin, might be able to be distributed. The scheme might work, he suggested, if not British officials but some "unofficial but trustworthy persons." See FO 4107/8, Sir W. White to the Marquis of Salisbury, 6 Feb 1888.

During the 1879-81 famines, the Patriarchate had been the relief heavyweight, spending over 3.8m *kuruş*.⁵⁵⁹ The Patriarchate's success in shielding Armenians and others from the worst of famine was noted throughout American and British correspondence at that time (see Chapter 3). Such observations were all but absent in 1887-88.⁵⁶⁰ Likewise, publicity of the famine was muted in 1887-88. In 1879-81, the prominent Ottoman Armenian daily *Masis* was filled with donor lists, updates on relief efforts, and calls for aid. The 1887-88 famines did not give rise to regular lists or calls.⁵⁶¹ A few weeks later, *Masis* also ran a short note, echoing the Ottoman paper *Tarik*, calling on authorities to address the “unfortunate situation” in Harput, Diyarbakır, Sivas, and Aleppo.⁵⁶²

Given the Palace's intensifying scrutiny of the Istanbul Patriarchate, we can speculate that Ottoman Armenians faced similar if not more intense restrictions than those faced by missionaries and British diplomats. Indeed, Armenians during this period were targets of mass arrests and violent investigations as part of a broader campaign to hunt down pro-reform and revolutionary agitators.⁵⁶³ Government suspicion honed in on Armenian humanitarian activities,

⁵⁵⁹ *Deghegagir*, 118.

⁵⁶⁰ For an example, see FO 424/145, “Memorandum by Major Trotter on the subject matter of the Marquis of Salisbury's Despatch No. 264 (Reforms in Kurdistan),” Istanbul, 26 Dec 1887. In that memorandum, Major Henry Trotter, who had been active in famine relief distribution in 1879-81, noted that “special attention should be drawn to sufferings of the Rayah-Kurds, which were often greater than those of the Armenians.” Still, he seemed to doubt whether diplomatic channels would rouse aid for Kurdish peasants: “It would be impossible to get the other Ambassadors to unite in going beyond the provisions of the Berlin Treaty, where the Kurds were not mentioned, except as individuals from whom the Armenians were to be protected.”

⁵⁶¹ In December 1887, the weekly edition of *Masis* ran a short note concerning the “difficult condition” of Armenian villages in Van, which was “in the face of famine and drought.” The only institutional responses from the Patriarchate that it mentions are those of the Religious Council (*Krōnakan Zhogov*), which tried to point out the suffering to provincial authorities. For this and other examples, see B[oghōs?] Shashian and Serovpe Gülbenkian, “Sovelots' Getr. Hantsnazhoghov [Central Famine Commission],” *Masis*, no. 2603 (May 7, 1880): 3; “Hayasdani Sovē [The Famine of Armenia],” *Masis*, no. 2608 (May 14, 1880): 2.

⁵⁶² “[No Title],” *Masis Shapat'at'ert'* 36, no. 3901 (December 5, 1887): 8; “[No Title],” *Masis Shapat'at'ert'* 36, no. 3905 (December 31, 1887): 7.

⁵⁶³ For more on this, see Toygun Altıntaş, “The Placard Affair and the Ankara Trial: The Hnchak Party and the Hamidian Regime in Central Anatolia, 1892–93,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4, no. 2 (2017): 309–37. For some examples from British Confidential Print, see FO 424/178, 127/1, Consul Graves to Sir P. Currie, Erzurum, 1 May 1894; see also FO 424/178, 137/1, Report by Mr Eliot, Ankara, 23 May 1894; FO 424/178,

as well. “After the famine years, 1879-81, a subscription was raised and society founded for the maintenance and education of about a score of orphaned children,” British Vice-Consul Devey at Van wrote about in a January 1889 note. “It is members of these [societies] that are now summoned or arrested and brutally interrogated.”⁵⁶⁴ In an environment where the prospects of arrest and brutal interrogation were ever greater, their specter was likely a powerful deterrent to Armenians contemplating a new relief projects.⁵⁶⁵

Indeed, when an Armenian clergyman named Ohannes sent a telegraph to the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate in 1887 asking that aid be sent to famine-stricken people in the Haçin sub-district of Kozan, he faced a stiff rebuke. The Famine Commission admonished the priest for “exaggerating damage from hunger, requesting unnecessary aid.”⁵⁶⁶ The rebuke contradicts missionary letters from the region, which noted “many deaths from starvation” and hundreds of families relying on charity in areas across Adana, including areas around Kozan like Haçin.⁵⁶⁷ Whatever was going on in Haçin, Ottoman authorities there were quick to pounce on Armenian requests for aid, even if they were handled by the Patriarchate. That stance did not change in

133, Sir P. Currie to the Earl of Kimberly, Istanbul, 17 May 1894; FO 424/178, 176/1, Memorandum. Notes from Yuzgat. [n.d., circa 11 Aug 1894].

⁵⁶⁴ The Patriarchate was not wholly absent. One Ottoman Interior Ministry note addressed to the province of Hüdavendigâr (Bursa) said that people in villages outside of Bilecik sub-district were pleading for more help because the grain given by the Armenian Patriarchate was insufficient (“*adem-i kifayetinden*”). CDA, DH.MKT 1493/65, 1, Interior Ministry to Hüdavendigâr Vilayet, 6 Mar 1888 / 22 Cemazeyilahir 1305.

⁵⁶⁵ For more on how non-Muslim aid organizations were under the heightened scrutiny of Abdülhamid II’s security state, see İlkey Yılmaz, *II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Güvenlik Politikaları, Mürur Tezkereleri Pasaportlar ve Otel Kayıtları: Serseri, Anarşist ve Fesadın Peşinde [Security Policies During the Reign of Abdülhamid II, Passport Laws, Passports, and Hotel Records: The Pursuit of Vagrants, Anarchists, and Mischief]* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2014), 86.

⁵⁶⁶ Y.A.HUS 214/140, 1, Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa to Yıldız Palace, 8 Jul 1887 / 26 Şevval 1304. On his note being called an exaggeration: “*Haçin’de açlıktan telefâtın çoğalmakda olduğundan bahsle iane talebi havi Ohannes episkipos.*”

⁵⁶⁷ “The Famine,” *The Missionary Herald* 84, no. 6 (June 1888): 261–63. In that issue: “I have just been making a tour to the east side of our plain, to the towns of Uzerly, Chorkmerzmen, and Osmania, and home by Missis. Much of the plain in that direction is strewn with the carcasses of dead sheep and Angora goats, sometimes as many as fifty on a half-acre. Hundreds of thousands of them have perished for want of food. It is said that ninety-five per cent of all the cattle on the plain have died.” A page later, “As the season advances the distress from want of food is becoming more general, especially throughout the Marash field”; see also “Famine Reports in Turkey,” *The Missionary Herald* 84, no. 5 (May 1888): 195–96.

1892-94, when a second wave of famines broke out. In the spring of 1892, the Patriarchate had started to collect donations for aid until local police (*zabita*) put a stop to collections, according to Ottoman internal correspondence. The Patriarchate was duly informed that, without official permission, aid activities were “strictly forbidden.”⁵⁶⁸ The Patriarchate did apply for such permission, but, a year later, the cabinet replied that there was “no need” for an Armenian aid commission, since the Ottoman government had taken care of the “necessary aid for those harmed by famine last year.”⁵⁶⁹

In sum, nonstate humanitarian agencies played a far smaller role relieving famine in the post-1881 period. When famine struck, the Ottoman government was the main source of relief. This was a major change compared to the 1879-81 famines, when foreign fund-raising raised the vast majority of relief funds. The ABCFM missionaries raised funds as they did in the past, but they were never the largest of foreign aid suppliers, and they faced restrictions on where and how they could distribute aid. British consular officials, who in 1879-81 had distributed hundreds of thousands of *kuruş*, were all but absent from relief in 1887-88. Judging by the ambassador’s statements, this was because they anticipated obstacles from the Ottoman Palace. The Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate’s relief was also markedly absent in 1887-88 and 1892-94. The Palace’s hunt for agitators had already unleashed violent scrutiny upon Armenian subjects, and Armenian philanthropic organizations also came under fire. While in 1879-81 the Patriarchate had raised millions of *kuruş* for famine relief, in 1887-88 and 1892-94, its aid seems to have been minimal by comparison.

By cutting other relief agencies out of the picture, Istanbul was monopolizing famine relief. Yet, as mentioned in the previous section, Istanbul’s own relief efforts faced chronic

⁵⁶⁸ CDA, DH.MKT 1936/25, 1/1, Interior Ministry to Ministry of Justice and Sects, 24 Mar 1892 / 24 Şaban 1309.

⁵⁶⁹ CDA, MV 74/90, 1/2, Summary of Cabinet Decision, 30 Apr 1893 / 13 Şevval 1310.

funding shortages. Since burdens on the imperial budget were to be avoided, officials increasingly substituted grants of aid with loans. While these schemes may have relieved immediate needs, they forced many into debt and precarity. They also forced subjects to submit information about themselves, their wealth, and their property, as government officials were tasked with classifying individuals by their ability pay.⁵⁷⁰ That information would allow imperial officials to effect a separation between abstract property rights and concrete property. Title deeds embodied those abstract property rights, and their creation made dispossession more plausible.⁵⁷¹ During these Anatolian famines, the needy were made to register their properties, obtain deeds, and then immediately surrender them as collateral for badly-needed loans. If the debts went unpaid – perhaps the next year’s harvest was scanty – then the threat of dispossession loomed large. The impending hunger proved potent for effecting this separation of property rights from the property itself. It provided a pretense to enforce property registration, and that registration allowed officials to threaten confiscation of cultivators’ land. Famine lending schemes, with their property registration requirements, were quietly re-producing, on a smaller scale, the same debt entanglements that Istanbul faced with its foreign creditors.

In early 1892, Ottoman and British officials in eastern provinces like Erzurum and Trabzon regions noted unusually heavy snowfall.⁵⁷² That spring, as the immense quantities of

⁵⁷⁰ For example, during the 1887-88 famines, officials concocted an elaborate information gathering campaign for the people of Ankara, Adana, and Konya. See CDA, DH.MKT 1522/21, 1-3, [Derviş Paşa?] to Ankara, Konya, and Adana Provinces and the Finance Ministry, 17 Jul 1888 / 8 Zilkade 1305. In that scheme, each village council was to draw up lists of all their residents, assign each to one of three categories – able to pay for grain, able to borrow money, or hopelessly needy – and attach an explanation for each assignment. They would then forward these lists to their superiors, and they would move up the administrative ladder, subjected to “close examination” at each level. Elaborating such a plan underscored the importance of this classification. Indeed, it would determine whose wealth would be liquidated, who would be forced to take on debt, and who would qualify for “pure aid.”

⁵⁷¹ Timothy Mitchell highlights this in his work on Egypt during this period. See Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 60–63.

⁵⁷² FO 424/172, 21, Acting Consul Hampson to Mr. Fane, Erzurum, 5 Mar 1892. CDA, MV 70/47, 1/2, Summary of cabinet decision, 17 Jul 1892 / 21 Zilhicce 1309, “*Kesretle nüzul eden barf haylı müddet tarlalardan kalkmayub mezruat-ı mevsimden geç kalmasından dolayı.*” CDA, MV 70/35, 1/2, Summary of Cabinet Decision, 5 Jul 1892 / 9 Zilhicce 1309, “*Mahsulatının kism-ı azami mahv olunması.*”

snow melted, reports of flooding also emerged.⁵⁷³ Yet, by fall, correspondence mentioned drought, as well as scarcity.⁵⁷⁴ By November, provincial authorities notified Istanbul that they would restrict grain exports.⁵⁷⁵ Still, food prices were already rising, and by the following spring, matters had not improved. Two episodes from these famines show how loans were replacing grants of relief, and how those loans and their requisite property registration brought about the threat of dispossession.

Correspondence from the early months of 1893 shows how budget concerns continued to encourage loans rather than grants of relief, and how those loans facilitated the expansion of state agencies into local credit and debt relations. In famine-stricken areas in 1892-94, local moneylenders and merchants were reportedly benefitting from grain rackets. In areas of both Erzurum and Trabzon, there was grain to be had in “full” granaries, official correspondence said, but small groups had cornered supplies and charged high prices, forcing people to borrow money from local loan sharks at usurious rates.⁵⁷⁶ In Trabzon, the provincial governor responded to the problem with a lending scheme that would displace some of the local moneylenders with the state agricultural lender, Ziraat Bank, which had been founded in 1888. Using Ziraat Bank would eliminate the need for government aid distribution. People would provide collateral – oftentimes a land deed – and receive grain on loan from the bank. For those who could not provide

⁵⁷³ FO 424/172, 70, Consul Graves to Sir Clare Ford, Erzurum, 20 Jul 1892. The report, from July 1892, says floods occurred “at the end of the past winter,” which we can assume was sometime around March, when the snows tend to start to melt.

⁵⁷⁴ At first reports were mixed. There had been droughts in previous years around Erzincan, the Fourth Army leader wrote in September 1892, but the harvest was not badly damaged. CDA, DH.MKT 1988/2, 26 Sep 1892 / 4 Rabiulevvel 1310, Interior Ministry to Erzurum Province. A month later, however, reports changed. In October 1892, provincial officials from Erzurum wrote of far worse conditions: drought, indebtedness, and requests for food. See CDA, DH.MKT 2014/117, 1, Interior Ministry to Grand Vizierate, 26 Oct 1892 / 4 Rabiulahir 1310.

⁵⁷⁵ CDA, DH.MKT 2018/18, 1, Interior Ministry to Grand Vizierate, 6 Nov 1892 / 15 Rabiulahir 1310.

⁵⁷⁶ On Erzurum, see CDA, BEO 160/11963, [Sublime Porte] to Erzurum Vilayet, 1/2, 21 Feb 1893 / 4 Şaban 1310. Prices had reached 180 kuruş for a *kile* of grain. “*Kiği kazası civarındaki anbarlar zehayir ile memlu ve olduğu halde bir takım muhtekirler fükera-yı ahaliye beher kilesini yüz seksen kuruşa furuht etmekte.*” On Trabzon, see CDA, DH.MKT 1/38, 2/1, Trabzon Governor telegraph to Interior Ministry, 11 Mar 1893 / 27 Şubat 1308.

collateral, the governor would assign notables from the area to sponsor them. As a result, the Trabzon governor wrote, “the need for government grain procurement and distribution would cease.”⁵⁷⁷ When the Interior Ministry relayed the message to the Grand Vizier’s office, it also underscored this feature of lending as relief, verbatim, emphasizing that it was preferable that notables be made to sponsor the loans: “If we choose to have village notables sponsor the loans, there will be no need to buy and distribute grain. We just need 700,000 or 800,000 *kuruş* to be sent.”

This correspondence suggests how officials created loan schemes to avoid distributing grants of relief. It also shows how lending was a vehicle for the expansion of state agencies into local credit and debt relations. Forcing people to put up collateral would provide a higher chance of cost recuperation from the loans, and it would also expand Ziraat Bank’s control over provincial wealth. The power to force local notables to sponsor loans would mean that needy cultivators as well as wealthy notables would be subject to the bank’s scrutiny.⁵⁷⁸ In this way, the correspondence about famine relief demonstrates how loans could present themselves as a solution to budget concerns while at the same time enabling the expansion and growing knowledge of state agencies like Ziraat Bank.

A second set of messages from later that spring demonstrates how Ziraat Bank loans could facilitate vehicle for another government goal, registering the lands of recently-arrived Muslim refugees from the Balkans, the Caucasus, and southern Russia (*muhacir*, pl. *muhacirin*). Correspondence among the Interior Ministry, the Trade and Public Works Ministry, and the Grand Vizierate shows how this took place. According to reports from the spring of 1893, the

⁵⁷⁷ CDA, DH.MKT 1/38, 2/1, Trabzon Governor telegraph to Interior Ministry, 11 Mar 1893 / 27 Şubat 1308.

⁵⁷⁸ On Ziraat Bank’s unsavory involvement in land dispossession arising from unpaid debts elsewhere in the Ottoman East, see Polatel, “Armenians and the Land Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1870-1914,” 139–41.

produce of some refugees settled around Erzurum “had not been enough because of drought,” so they asked for loans in “money and grain” and offered to give their lands up for collateral. Their offer ran into an obstacle, however, because the refugees did not have title deeds. The refugees had paid tax on the lands they cultivated, but they had not paid the paperwork fees to obtain their title deeds. They had not needed them, apparently, until the desperation of famine came knocking. Without title deeds, however, the Ziraat Bank would not issue loans. The solution to this impasse, proposed in the note, was an additional “paperwork loan,” (*deyn-i sened*) to be added on top of the originally requested loans of “money and grain.” In this way, the government would lend the refugees money to pay for their title deeds, which it would immediately take as collateral for the money and grain they requested on account of the famine.⁵⁷⁹

These lending schemes in Trabzon and Erzurum show how the desperation of famine became a vehicle for registering the property of provincial subjects and threatening them with dispossession. The information officials gathered was crucial, because it allowed them to access a new tool for abstracting the rights to a property from the concrete property itself. Dispossession was not new, but previously it was not as easy to revoke an individual’s rights over the land (officially, at least), because they were usufruct rights that guaranteed some of the produce to those who actually tilled the soil.⁵⁸⁰ Those arrangements were changing in the 19th century, with the uneven roll-out of property regimes more closely resembling those that reigned elsewhere,

⁵⁷⁹ CDA, DH.MKT 29/5, 2/1, Grand Vizier [Ahmed] Cevad [Pasha] to the Interior Ministry, 10 Apr 1893 / 23 Ramazan 1310. On the non-payment of document fees: “*Harcları adem-i tesviyesinden dolayı henüz senedatı istihsal idilememiş.*” On the reference to the Ziraat Bank charter: “*Tapu senedi olmadıkça zeker olunan banka nizamnamesi ahkâmınca akçe ikraz olunmayacağı.*” On the additional “paperwork loans,” or “*deyn-i sened*,” and its payment to the Land Registration Ministry, “*Akçenin müstakrazlara ita olunacağı sırada ikraz istida kılınan mebliğeye ilaveten deyn-i senedine idhal idilerek nakten Defter-i Hakani Nezaretine irsal ile.*”

⁵⁸⁰ Dispossession had still happened, of course. In an 1877 report of provincial oppressions compiled by the Armenian Patriarchate, a majority (21/38) of the cases concerned property, theft, and dispossession. The difference between that earlier era and this one was the new legal façade for the old practice. See *Reports on Provincial Oppressions*.

with private, demarcated, and transferable plots linked to individual owners. As noted in the correspondence above, refugees had been working and paying tax on their lands for years, and neither they nor their tax-collectors deemed it necessary to have title deeds drawn up. Yet, when famine crept in and officials offered relief as loans, those loans required collateral, so needy peasants, with little else to provide, were made to register their lands and provide them as collateral. It was not possible to pledge rights to land as collateral until the rights to land were defined and made transferable with a title deed. The seemingly innocuous separation imposed between the abstract right to the land's produce and the land itself concealed a quiet violence visited upon cultivators in the region. It meant that the desperation of famine gave rise to debt and the threat of dispossession.

In these ways, Istanbul's monopolization of relief, conversion of grants to loans, and demands for collateral worked together imposed an important division in the realm of property relations, between abstract rights to a property and the concrete property itself. In his work on 19th century Egypt, Timothy Mitchell has shown how private property did not arise as a form of emancipation or a "right," but as an intensifying debt relation between authorities and cultivators.⁵⁸¹ The violence of that intensifying debt relation worked by separating the abstract rights to a plot and its produce from the land itself. Making the rights separate from the land made those rights easier to threaten with confiscation. The examples above suggest that, in the Ottoman East as well, a similar process was afoot. Since the 1858 Land Code, Ottoman authorities had been trying, often in vain, to register private properties into a regime that would allow lands to be dispossessed.⁵⁸² Private property there, too, was emerging not as a "right"

⁵⁸¹ Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 56–75.

⁵⁸² For an example of the divergent pathways to (non-)registration in Ottoman Jordan, see Mundy and Smith, *Governing Property, Making the Modern State*, 66–79; for examples from the Balkans, and specifically Yanya district in what is now southern Albania, see Islamoğlu, "Property as a Contested Domain," 35–39.

people fought for, but as a deepening debt relation imposed upon people in a time of desperation. The extra “paperwork loan” mentioned above only underscores how property rights were a form of debt: the needy were forced take on yet more loans to pay for the title deeds that would in turn raise the threat of dispossession.

Yet, the Ottoman East was quite different from Egypt in terms of its administration and its degree of integration within a globalizing world of trade. While technically still an Ottoman province, Egypt was firmly under the thumb of British “advisors.” Situated at one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes, Egypt sat at a crucial center of global exchange. Landholding there consisted mostly of huge plantations producing commodities for export.⁵⁸³ The Ottoman East was just the opposite. It was the backwater of a backwater, a land-locked Ottoman periphery where small landholdings prevailed and most production aimed at subsistence.⁵⁸⁴ Bereft of rail or steamship connections, the region was quite removed when compared to Egypt’s position in a globalizing world of physical exchange. Despite this seeming remoteness, however, the Ottoman East was still affected by that world’s seismic shifts and novel forms of power. Examining the famines of the post-1881 period and the desperation, debt, and dispossession they unleashed highlights how the Ottoman East was just as connected to global exchange, not physically but financially. The region’s crops could support Istanbul’s borrowing sprees, and its subjects would be subjected to the same cycles of vulnerability, debt, and financial control that Istanbul faced from its imperial rivals.

⁵⁸³ Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 215–18; Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820-1914: A Study in Trade and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 238–41.

⁵⁸⁴ According to data from 1909-10, landholdings of less than 5 hectares made up the majority in every Ottoman province. Still, in some of the eastern provinces, like Erzurum, Trabzon, Van, and Harput, as much as 70-85% of landholdings were under five hectares. On the other hand, Diyarbakır and Bitlis had the highest proportions of landholdings over 5 hectares, at 47% and 38%, respectively. See Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 207.

It is these connections and this sort of violence that we risk missing if we buy into the divisions of the world that Ottoman authorities imposed on cultivators' lands. In this case, the imposition of a seemingly innocuous creation of title deeds to facilitate loans was in fact re-producing, on a smaller scale, forms of violence like the burden of debt and the threat of dispossession that had been operating elsewhere on larger, inter-imperial scales. These resembled the same forms of violence that European empires were visiting upon the Ottoman Empire through the OPDA and Russian War Indemnity. Identifying that violence allows us to observe how global changes in trade and finance were expanding and penetrating even seemingly remote areas by re-producing trans-imperial debt entanglements at the local level.

Slow Storms and Red Tides

The reader would be forgiven for losing sight of this chapter's starting point, the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-97 and the legacy of "extraordinary terror" they left in their wake. A history of finance and famine in the years leading up to the violence may seem quite separate from those massacres. Still, we should avoid taking seeming separations at face value and instead take them as beacons, beckoning our closer attention. Discussions of the Hamidian Massacres have revolved around such a separation, a nefarious Ottoman state and society-wide resentments. That state/society divide has guided a difficult search for an indeterminate criminal, but it will not do to explain the outbreak of these anti-Armenian, anti-Christian pogroms across Anatolia. Any credible explanation of this violence, so widespread and so deadly, will involve both unsavory powerholders and society-wide affective states. What is more, divisions like state/society are the very sort that concealed and unleashed violence in this region long before these massacres erupted. Rather than adopting these binaries to frame our analyses, we should adopt them as guides, signals outing novel forms of power at work. This chapter has outlined

some of the novel forces acting on the Ottoman East in the post-1881 period, and how they unleashed poverty, hunger, and the threat of dispossession. These sorts of violence existed before, but new capital channels and predictable climatic patterns combined to intensify and spread these sorts of violence, enabling underhanded powerholders, spreading society-wide discontent, and laying the groundwork for the Hamidian Massacres.

The first section provided background by way of a synthesis of findings from world-system proponents and economic historians. It foregrounded their contributions but urged that we leave their shared assumption of a coherent state actor behind. Comparing Istanbul's foreign borrowing for foreign arms purchases and correspondence regarding acute funding shortages in key sections of the Empire reveals how European financial control imposed itself not only by impoverishment but also by enrichment. Istanbul's financial entanglements did not simply diminish Ottoman power; they re-arranged capital flows to suit the needs of some parts of the Empire, while leaving whole other sections to languish.

The latter two sections of the chapter turned to specific examples of conceptual divisions used by historical actors and the forms of violence they concealed, taking up the internal/external distinction in the realm of revenue collection and the abstract/concrete distinction in the realm of property relations. The second section examined relief operations during the Anatolian famines of 1887-88. Drawing on the correspondence of the Imperial Famine Commission and relevant ministries, it foregrounded how poverty, more than absolute shortage, was ravaging the region, and how officials faced the obstacles of a cash-strapped government. Those troubles had many and varied causes, but one – the demands of foreign creditors – went unseen or at least unmentioned by American and British observers in Anatolia. This section suggested that the

force of foreign debt remained unseen because of a division in the minds of these observers, one that separated Ottoman internal revenue collection from the collection of debt service payments.

The third and final section turned to how the Ottoman government, through the vehicle of famine relief, was ensnaring provincial subjects with new property and debt relations, and thus, reproducing on a smaller scale the very financial entanglements in which it found itself ensnared. The desperation of famine invited debt into the region, since Istanbul converted grants of aid into loans and monopolized relief work. Those loans, in turn, forced the separation of abstract property rights from the concrete property, bringing with them the threat of dispossession. Just as imperial rivals had entangled the Ottomans and bound them to debt obligations at a vulnerable juncture, so too did Istanbul entrap its own subjects. Instead of grants, they received loans, ghost rations whose debts would haunt them if next year's harvest went awry.

Taken together, these sections urge a different approach to the ethnic and religious violence that became increasingly common and increasingly deadly in the Ottoman Empire's final decades. Searching not with but within the ways we divide the world may help us peer beneath the masks of assumptions from the past. Divisions of the world in the writings of historical actors masked the violence connecting Mauser factories to granaries in Yozgat and Russian indemnity demands to hungry bellies in Ankara. Allowing such divides to frame our thinking today restrains how we can conceive of violence, who or what is capable of violence, or when its effects are felt. That violence impoverished countless people in the past, but it need not impoverish our thinking today.

At the time, those who witnessed the Hamidian Massacres compared them to a storm that ravaged the region.⁵⁸⁵ With the benefit of hindsight, I would suggest a different metaphor, that of

⁵⁸⁵ "Editorial Paragraphs," *The Missionary Herald* 92, no. 3 (March 1896): 96–97; "Sivas and Out-Station," *The Missionary Herald* 92, no. 9 (September 1896): 370.

the red tide. Red tides arise after serious storms, the force of which stir up matter from the seafloor, triggering toxic algal blooms that turn waters crimson. The storm had come to the Ottoman East long before 1894. It was a slow storm, and its gathering rains pummeled the region with pauperization, hunger, and dispossession. Together, these forces enabled new avenues for precarity, spread something toxic through society, and stirred up red waters. “Blood flowed in streams, covered the church and ran between the walls,” Habib Jarwe, a Syriac Catholic priest, wrote of Urfa in 1895.⁵⁸⁶ It was not the first time, nor would it be the last.

⁵⁸⁶ Gaunt, “Two Documents on the 1895 Massacres of Syriacs in the Province of Diyarbekir,” 194.

Conclusion

This project has presented a history of the *Tanzimat* and early reign of Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) in the Ottoman East with an eye on the material and institutional changes that shaped communal boundaries there. It has focused on Armenians, Kurds, and Turks in that region to ask what forces hardened those boundaries and channeled internecine violence across them between 1839 and 1894. That period began with a radical declaration of equality propagated by the Ottoman court in the Edict of Gülhane, the first Tanzimat decree. It ended with a dramatic outbreak of communal violence, the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-97, when many tens of thousands perished in anti-Armenian and anti-Christian outbreaks that took place across the empire but especially in the Ottoman East. What took place between this declaration of confessional equality and this widespread communal bloodshed?

To answer that question, this project has offered three overlapping arguments. First, it joins others to argue that we first must acknowledge how mass violence across communal divides was not an old pattern, but something that arose from widely held visions of progress and civilization built around well-defined and unambiguous communities. Second, it argues that studying the provincial partners that adopted and spread those visions were important to the shape they took in the Ottoman East. And third, it suggests that we must look not only at new discourses about difference and belonging but also at the radical shifts in resource distribution that provided material backing to those discourses. To that end, this project has examined not only the new ideas and the institutions that tried to execute them, but also the changes to material life and resource distribution in the Ottoman East during the Tanzimat (1839-76) and the first half of the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, from 1876 to 1894.

To the trace institutional changes of the Tanzimat, the first half of the project examined the intellectual underpinnings of the Tanzimat as well as the spiritual brotherhoods who helped carry out the reforms in the Ottoman East. It argued that Ottoman, Armenian, American, and British authors all shared key ideas about the meaning of reform and how it ought to be carried out. It presented examples of how all of these sorts of authors looked to history to locate the origins of discrete communities, and how they believed that reform should aim toward encouraging those communities to emulate the past purities they imagined. Whether in the realm of narrative, spiritual practice, or language, reform-oriented authors sought to disentangle the myriad hybridities that confronted them, especially in remote and rural areas like the Ottoman East.

Chapter 2: Faith in the State, took up examples of those intellectual currents being put into force. The chapter argued that the reforms were carried out via the members of particular spiritual brotherhoods, who took up the cause of the Tanzimat. These included the Nakşibendi-Halidi Sufi brotherhood that was fast spreading throughout Armenia and Kurdistan, along with the clergymen of the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate, which was newly re-asserting its authority in the same regions. Although these Christian and Muslim spiritual brotherhoods were often at odds, their ideas of communal cohesion shared key aspects. As their adherents preached faith in the reforms of the Sublime State, they also attempted to police and rigidify communal boundaries. As a result, the lines between Christian and Muslim or Armenian, Kurd, and Turk became more salient as the lines of self-identification and resource distribution.

The second half of the project took up resource distribution during moments of scarcity and famine in the decades before the outbreak of the Hamidian Massacres. Chapter 3: The Shot of a Gun, the Sound of a Stream, examined the moment just after the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman

War, when violence and famine ravaged the borderlands between these two empires. The chapter argued that examining the interplay of technological, ecological, and financial forces during this key moment helps explain the power of exclusionary discourses during this period. Calls on well-bounded ethnic and confessional communities had more force because the distribution of life-saving aid followed the communal boundaries upon which those discourses called. Kurdish leaders spoke out against Western humanitarians and their Armenian protégés, whom they accused of hoarding aid for Christians in the region while leaving Kurds to languish. Armenians, for their part, complained that Ottoman governors favored Muslim subjects of the Sultan and that predominantly Kurdish tribes were pillaging aid caravans and hindering the recovery of agrarian activities with the help of a newer and deadlier weapons like the repeating rifle.

The fourth and final chapter, *Indeterminate Criminal*, took up the new era of European financial control imposed on the Ottomans after 1881. That period brought new relations of credit and debt, as well as new institutions to monitor and distribute Ottoman imperial revenues. The chapter argued that the debates about the roles of society-wide affective states and nefarious power-holders to explain the outbreak of communal violence have missed the subtle but no less powerful effects of changes in Ottoman finances. Taking up two famines that struck during this new era of financial control in 1887-88 and 1892-94, the chapter showed how this new era of imperial finance quietly drained resources from agrarian areas like the Ottoman East. Even in the midst of famine, tax money and even spare grain were demanded and dutifully sent out of these regions, leaving people there to scrape by on ghost rations. This widespread precarity and dispossession, it suggested, was key to enabling the corrupt powerholders and inciting society-wide affective states that, together, created and enabled the massacres that followed.

To trace institutional and material changes in the Ottoman East from 1839 to 1894, the project has drawn on a broad range of sources, which shed light on a variety of forces operating not just within but also among various imperial, ethnic, and religious communities. While leaning too much on one set of sources might skew a project's perspective toward one subset of historical actors, comparing perspectives across contentious communal boundaries and power disparities helped mitigate the effects of that inevitability. By drawing on the accounts of Armenian clergymen, Ottoman officers, Kurdish sheikhs, British consuls, and American missionaries, the project uncovered issues like the disproportionate suffering of pastoralists during the famine of 1879-81 or the absence of Armenian and British aid during the famines of 1887-88.

Drawing on a diversity of accounts has also allowed for this project to examine the novel forms of power that came to affect seemingly remote corners of the planet like the Ottoman East. Even in an age of heightened connections facilitating more rapid physical and communication, the region still appeared to be a disconnected backwater. Yet, as the chapters above have shown, the Ottoman East was no less affected by the expansion of a globalized system of finance and the new forms of power that accompanied them. That power could conceal, unleash, or justify violence with seemingly apparent but no less fungible divisions of the world, like the division between internal taxes and foreign debts that could mask the extraction of desperately-needed grain supplies in the midst of a famine. This project cannot offer a method for obliterating categorical divides in our ways of thinking, and it has indeed used them as a short hand in its own arguments. Still, it can at least gesture toward methods for preventing such divides from limiting the kinds of questions we ask. Further research in that direction could do more to

elucidate causal chains that weave between the seemingly separate realms of ideas and material life, and the kinds of power that could arise from them.

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