



## **SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT DIVIDE IN THE PRE- AND POST-OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

Political violence occurs regularly in the post-Ottoman region. To date, conflicts in Syria, North Africa, Turkey, and the Balkan Peninsula often dominate the headlines. In examining the history of the region, Daisy Li, University of Western Ontario '16, explores factors that contributed to identity fragmentation in the Ottoman Empire. An analysis of historical accounts reveals that involve self-identification derived from ethno-religious elements sustained by the millet system. These forms of identification, Li argues, became entrenched as the basis of socioeconomic stratification, leading to localized violence during the penetration of Western ideologies in the twentieth century.

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## INTRODUCTION

Massacres of minority groups in the faltering Ottoman Empire over the past two centuries indicate the deeply entrenched problems of intrastate conflict. Policies of the empire were characterized by ethnic coexistence, where self-governing *millets* were administered under an overarching Ottoman identity. Following the French Revolution in 1789, non-Muslim subjects became increasingly dissatisfied with their secondary status. Inspired by sentiments of self-identification, various groups attempted to find their niche in the deteriorating state. However, religious differences and Ottoman failure to adapt to the rapidly changing sociopolitical outlook hastened the decline of the imperial system.

Social scientists interested in political violence often differentiate the catastrophes in Eastern Europe from those of Western Asia. The former region's racial makeup, cultural proximity, and geopolitical relevance to the West place it within the breadth of prominent scholarly analysis. However, underlying factors for these calamities are similar, with ethnic cleansing and genocide appearing frequently in both regions. Within the premises of the Ottoman realm, "genocide" has been applied to the mass killing of Greeks, Armenians, and Assyrians.<sup>1</sup> "Ethnic cleansing" has been used to describe the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, the Istanbul pogrom of 1955, human catastrophes in the Balkan Peninsula, the massacre of Kurds in Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and – occasionally and more recently – the underlying cause of the ongoing Syrian crisis. Despite embedded identity frictions, it is reductionist to evaluate these conflicts as having "solely monolithic ethno-religious" elements.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, political factors are significant in civil strife. However, they fail to explain the mounting identity instabilities that mark the Ottoman region. It is worth noting that clashes in the past two centuries have been similar in their initiations and continuations, as a narrative criminalizing future victims and emphasizing the inconceivability of ethnic coexistence became crucial in justifying violence.

This paper aims to analyze contributors to violence in the pre- and post-Ottoman setting. It will assess ethnic amalgamation as the result of Ottoman governance in affiliated territories. Further, Western influence including postwar treaties and the notions of nationalism and self-determination will be evaluated. This paper will examine the millet system and the general theory used to approach Ottoman demise. Findings concerning the cause of the ethnic divisions will be employed to analyze several cases – the causes of balkanization, the rise of Armenian and Kurdish identity, as well as the emergence of Arab nationalism – to ensure adequate elucidation of the theory. While these cases have their own sets of particularities, together they share commonalities. The gap between socioeconomic classes based on ethnic-religious differences has become fundamental in the distinct perception of "self" and "other."

### OTTOMAN DECLINE THEORY

Scholarly analyses often suggest that Ottoman decline was the result of Ottoman-centrism. The very greatness of Ottoman achievement under Suleiman I carried “within it seeds of ultimate degradation.”<sup>3</sup> Successive Sultans proved to be lesser statesmen. Their disinterest in state affairs and unfeasible ambitions was accompanied by bureaucratic corruption and neglect of national governance. Europe’s scientific progress throughout the seventeenth century was in stark contrast to the lack of technological advancement in the Ottoman Empire. This imbalance contributed to a halt in Ottoman territorial expansion, which some academics have identified as a crucial cause of economic stagnation and, ultimately, civil disunity.<sup>4</sup>

However, recent studies show that the Ottoman Empire did not experience an irreversible decline in the seventeenth century as suggested. While its international position did diminish, the state exhibited the ability to adjust to changing socioeconomic circumstances in the following centuries.<sup>5</sup> The Ottoman bureaucratic system was flexible in containing rebellious groups through negotiations until the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Despite the continuous conflicts it faced from the 1770s onwards, the empire was able to survive into the modern era with most of its governmental institutions intact.<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Grant opposes theories of Ottoman technological stagnation by stating that the empire was able to remain on par with their competitors, in particular, the Venetians and the Russians.<sup>8</sup> While Western European advancements were superior during the Enlightenment, the Ottoman Empire was able to catch up to its rivals by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Süleyman Özmucur and Evket Pamuk argue that there was a “guardedly optimistic revisionism regarding Ottoman standards of living, both in the early modern era and in the wake of the Industrial Revolution.”<sup>10</sup> By comparing the real wages of urban construction workers between 1489 and 1914 in Ottoman cities to European cities’ price and wage trends during the same period, Özmucur and Pamuk refute the theory of Ottoman decline.<sup>11</sup>

While there is evident tension amongst the Ottoman inhabitants, the relation between escalating internal conflicts and Ottoman sociopolitical status remains unclear. To this end, the often-overlooked Ottoman governance should be re-evaluated. Its multifaceted system was fundamental in upholding a tolerant peace during early centuries. However, its inability to generate a shared sociopolitical identity was detrimental to domestic stability in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ethno-religious factors were further exacerbated by Western intervention and became a politicized weapon in identity segregation and Ottoman fragmentation.

## SOCIOECONOMIC DIVIDE: THE MILLET SYSTEM AND WESTERN INFLUENCE

Owing to the Ottoman Empire's complex historical ventures, it is difficult to illustrate a clear-cut Ottoman identity. While academia often places emphasis upon its "Islamic and Turkish character,"<sup>12</sup> these definitions do not adequately define the intricate nature of the empire. The term "Turks," used to describe Ottoman inhabitants, did not carry any nationalist or ethnic meaning in a modern sense.<sup>13</sup> Before the twentieth-century, "Turk" largely referred to the peasants residing in the outskirts of Anatolia, whom the Ottoman elites preferred to keep distant. Such socioeconomic divisions were essential to Ottoman governance. According to Ziya Gökalp, the overall Ottoman identity before the twentieth-century was, in fact, the identity of ruling nobility.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there is also debate in regards to Ottoman religious identity. To many, the idea of an "Ottoman citizen" is dependent on the underlying notion of Ummah, which refers to a collective Islamic identity that is the "paradigm of a complex, non-territorial, post-national form of allegiance."<sup>15</sup> However, while Islam influenced Ottoman social, administrative, and judicial arrangements, it was interpreted as an instrument that supported Sultan authority.<sup>16</sup> This is evident in the acceptance of religious pluralism, which became the basis of the millet system.<sup>17</sup>

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism were the three largest religions within the Ottoman state. To sustain a tolerant peace between its different occupants, the millet emerged as a political system that divided non-Muslim communities, or dhimmis, based on religious affiliations. The term millet has several definitions, often translating into "religious community" or "nation" in the Ottoman context.<sup>18</sup> The system preserved a religious and cultural system within the different *millets* while introducing Ottoman influence through certain civic duties.<sup>19</sup> The administration did not aim to create definitive parameters based on ethnic affiliations. Rather, flexible ethno-religious boundaries existed between the Muslims and non-Muslim Ottomans. Groups with distinct administrative procedures were granted the capacity to establish separate societal arrangements.<sup>20</sup> Dhimmis were exempt from military service but paid a tax applicable to adhered adult males.<sup>21</sup> Coupled with teachings from the West, they were often better educated and engaged in roles of merchants, craftsmen, and tradesmen.<sup>22</sup> These were fundamental factors in the wealth accumulated by dhimmis and the preservation of their self-identities.

Ottoman tolerance was, at its basis, a maneuver intended to provide stability to the expanding empire. Despite intended religious acceptance, there remained deep-seated prejudice against non-Muslims, who were perceived as "separate, unequal and protected."<sup>23</sup> During periods of Ottoman disintegration, many local authorities took advantage of their non-Muslim subjects through imposing taxes, looting properties, or enforcing rigid legislations.<sup>24</sup> Discontent has been particularly vivid in the agrarian Balkans, as Muslims held sole landownership.<sup>25</sup> By preserving their distinctive culture and social customs, religious

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solidarity under separate *millet*s often superseded Ottoman loyalty.<sup>26</sup> Although explicit sub-identities were lacking within the Rum millet, these Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, and Romanians were aware of their differences.<sup>27</sup> Notions of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century perpetuated separate identities and heightened liberal ideologies. Two stages of de-identification occurred among the Ottoman minorities: nationalism-inspired movements in the nineteenth century and an ethnic awakening exacerbated by the concept of self-determination after WWI. While non-Muslim minorities experienced these sentiments because of inherent differences, they were largely the basis of tension between members of the same millet before the Enlightenment.

Greek dominance in the Rum millet often provided them with extensive power over Orthodox Christians. This led to the oppression of non-Greek subjects, such as the attempted demolition of Slavic history through book burnings.<sup>28</sup> In response to the inequalities, a period of Islamization emerged in the Balkans in response to associated socio-economic benefits.<sup>29</sup> Under Ottoman reign, conversion to Islam was encouraged and accepted regardless of one's ethnic identity. After mastering the official Ottoman language, anyone could become a member of the elite Ottoman.<sup>30</sup> The elite and the masses became two distinct classes with the cosmopolitan Ottoman aristocracy – which saw itself as the millet-I hakime, the sovereign nation, who governed the millet-i mahkure, the inferior nation.<sup>31</sup> Conversion in the Balkans became a widespread phenomenon in the sixteenth century as a result of market pressure, lifestyle adaptation, and religious factors.<sup>32</sup> In 1525, conversion to Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina was twice that in most of the other Balkan territories.<sup>33</sup> The seventeenth century was considered to be the “age of conversion” in the peninsula, with extensive Islamization encouraged by economic and religious elements.<sup>34</sup> Since agricultural output was the primary source of revenue in the Balkans, ethno-religious stratification became an embedded element in the region owing to Muslim landownership. This provided the basis to religious frictions during the era of nationalization.

According to Ernst B. Haas, nationalism refers to a collective consciousness that differentiates a group of people from others through a set of common characteristics.<sup>35</sup> It fosters the notion that they must constitute a nation, or that “they already are one.”<sup>36</sup> Coupled with political discourse, nationalism evolves into ideologies that shape the sociopolitical forecast of a people, whether it attempts to rid them of traditional values through revolutionary teachings or amend these values through syncretistic principles.<sup>37</sup> As a result, movements emerge, either to seek a homogenous order or to reconstruct governance in an attempt to self-perfect, restore a “golden age,” or achieve any political goal in-between.<sup>38</sup> The French Revolution took on the form of sociopolitical reconstruction. The movement spread ideas of nationalism throughout the world, polarizing social, political, and intellectual structures whilst laying the foundation for modern liberal democracy. As a result of its subordinated political status, the Ottoman Empire underwent several Great Power

interventions that demanded equality for Christian subjects.<sup>39</sup> Owing to its association with Christendom, the Rum millet formed distinct ties with the Western powers through economic and social arrangements.<sup>40</sup> These religious sentiments were ripe with purpose; nationalism only provided them with a political direction.

Ensuing conflicts were laden with the desire for autonomy. However, despite ethnic differences, the will to combat Muslim “infidels” became a shared Christian purpose. Centuries of religious segregation cultivated the nationalization of religion. According to Jayeel Cornelio, nationalization of religion occurs when “the performances of religion are cloaked in a nationalistic character that renders the religious significantly invisible and the prevailing political order unquestioned.” This is evident in the extermination of Muslims during the Greek Independence, the assertion of the “other” in the Armenian and Assyrian massacres, and the subsequent rise of Turkish and Arab nationalism. In reaction to the nationalization of religion, religious nationalism became a fundamental element during the period of Ottoman Islamization under Sultan Abdülhamit II and in present day pan-Islamism. To clarify, religion was not the sole basis for these conflicts. However, the religious element was heavily underscored by the ineffectiveness of religious coexistence. It provided a justification for the regional violence that was perceived as a necessary instrument for ethnic survival.

With the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca following Ottoman defeat in the 1768-74 Russo-Turkish Wars, Russia sought the right to act as the protectorate for Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire. For Greek Christians, the maneuver was seen as liberating. While Greek Phanariot nobilities retained a relatively lavish lifestyle, most of the Greek provinces were reduced to subsistence farming under Ottoman rule. Discontent with economic and political turmoil in Greece led to minor rebellions by Greek Christian klephts and *armatoloi*. Over 6,000 men between 1800 and 1810 were involved in these regiments, which provided them the means to basic living.<sup>42</sup> This figure is substantial considering that the Greek Revolution barely exceeded 20,000 men in its initial year. Between 1809 and 1814, diverse factors led to the disbandment of these corps, which left numerous Greek Christians without a means of survival.<sup>43</sup> Coupled with the notion of Greek identity as fostered by the French Revolution, economic disparities heightened tensions among sociopolitical classes represented by different ethno-religious groups. This is most evident with the members of the “Philike Hetairia” (Friendly Society), which instigated the 1821 Greek Independence. The 1819 records of the association reveal that the majority of its 452 members had neither a wealthy nor influential background.<sup>44</sup> Approximately a quarter (153) were identified to be merchants and shippers, while others varied from soldiers to priests and doctors.<sup>45</sup> Evidently, revolutionary ideals were also attractive to those with some political status. Yet initial rebellions were instigated by people of a lower socioeconomic class relative to their Ottoman Muslim counterparts.

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Despite claims of the secularity of the Greek nationalist movement, it is important to note that over time Christianity has become a part of the cultural construct that defined the Greek identity. The extent of so-called “religion suffused nationalism” is evident in the 1821 massacre of Tripolitsa, where approximately 20,000 Muslim inhabitants and some Jewish minorities were slaughtered by the Greek community during their struggle for independence.<sup>46</sup> Many ethnically Greek Muslims did not escape the massacre, in which mosques too were destroyed and converted to churches.<sup>47</sup> In William St. Clair’s words, “the orgy of genocide exhausted itself in the Peloponnese only when there were no more Turks to kill.”<sup>48</sup> As mentioned, the notion of “Turk” lacked ethnic relevance in the contemporary sense. The Great Powers labeled all Ottoman Muslims as “Turks” in reference to Ottoman ancestry to Central Asia Turkic clans. As such, there was no distinction between a “Turk” and other Ottoman ethnicities.

In response to the loss of its Eastern European grounds, the Ottoman Empire commenced the Tanzimat reforms. Between 1839 and 1876, a period of secularization was initiated by reformist Sultan Mahmud II. It upheld Ottomanism, which recognized all inhabitants as equal citizens under Ottoman law.<sup>49</sup> However, freedom given to Christian subjects did not result in corresponding loyalty to Ottoman rule.<sup>50</sup> Instead, it was used to secure further support from European powers in separatist movements. During this period, Muslim refugees who resided in the Balkan Peninsula swarmed the remainder of Ottoman land, further dividing Eurasia along religious lines.<sup>51</sup> In Anatolia, economic prosperity experienced by the non-Muslim population in the latter nineteenth-century fueled Muslim resentment towards their comparably privileged counterparts. At the same time as the rise of European imperialism on former Ottoman soil (specifically the French presence in Tunisia and Algeria), many Muslim inhabitants became ever more attached to the identity of Ottoman Caliphate.<sup>52</sup> In 1875, conflict emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina between exasperated peasants and their Muslim landlords.<sup>53</sup> As part of the Tazimat reforms, the Safer Decree was introduced in 1859 to classify and divide the land between agaliks and begliks. The former established a legal relationship between landowners and peasants; the latter established the properties of the landholders.<sup>54</sup> While the decree attempted to codify customary law to grant legal rights for farmers working on the agalik estates, it undermined Christian peasants through its imposition of high taxes and fixed loopholes for Muslim landholders.<sup>55</sup>

Responding to the rise of nationalism, a poor harvest season, and worsening relations between classes, the Bosnian peasants revolted in the spring of 1875.<sup>56</sup> The movement quickly spread to neighboring territories, which “inflamed the whole South Slav population and was a signal for revolt in other parts of the Balkans ruled by Turkey.”<sup>57</sup> Rebellion extended to Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Albania, while Habsburg held Dalmatia, Croatia, and Vojvodina; the events came to be known as the “Eastern Crisis.”<sup>58</sup> Leveraging

the tumultuous situation, Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1876.<sup>59</sup> In Bulgaria, the April Uprising commenced with the slaughter of Muslims by the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee.<sup>60</sup> In response, Bulgarian civilians were later massacred during the mobilization of Ottoman regular troops and irregular bashi-bazouks. Under these circumstances, Sultan Abdülhamit II initiated an era of pan-Islam to strengthen the territorial integrity of the empire. Initially intended to strengthen the deteriorating state by reinstating the role of Caliphate, the counter-reformation process exacerbated prior socioeconomic conditions.<sup>61</sup> In 1877, Russia waged war on the Port. Continuous Ottoman defeat led to the Congress of Berlin, which resulted in the independence of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro, as well as an autonomous Bulgaria. Cyprus was transferred to British administration and Bosnia to that of the Habsburg Empire.<sup>62</sup> It is within this economic and political context that the Hamidian massacres occurred in the mid-1890s.

As for the Greeks in their crossroads location between opposing civilizations, Christianity is also crucial to Armenian ethnic identification.<sup>63</sup> The ethno-history of the people was heavily linked to the Armenian Church.<sup>64</sup> The Armenian society generally “identifies their ethnicity by their religious affiliations...and disapproved deviations from the general norm.”<sup>65</sup> From 1768 to 1878, six wars were waged between Imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>66</sup> Millions of Muslim people in Imperial Russia were driven into Ottoman-held Armenian land while a vast number of Armenian Christians fled into Russian-held Armenian territory.<sup>67</sup> During the Tanzimat Reforms, the Armenian and Assyrian people achieved greater economic and political influence, with the former securing the title of Millet-i-Sakika (The Loyal Millet) and the latter acquiring its own millet.<sup>68</sup> However, the implementation of pan-Islam by Sultan Abdülhamit II and gradual independence of Balkan states incentivized the Armenian populace to seek internal autonomy from the Port. In the 1890s, these sentiments manifested in the rise of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun.

Elements of the Armenian insurgences resemble Balkan revolts. Like the Balkan farmers, the Armenian peasantry endured a system of heavy taxation. Both groups were taxed by the central government and again by local Muslim landowners.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, they were influenced by external and internal elements, notably encouragements from Western powers and nationalistic ideals from domestic revolutionary committees.<sup>70</sup> These factors served as a pretext for the 1894 Sasun Uprisings.<sup>71</sup> As the first potent fighters of the Armenian resistance movement, the Sasun Mountaineers were subjected to the “exactions of the Kurdish chieftains [which] had evolved into an organized system of tribute by blackmail, paid for their protection by the Armenian population.”<sup>72</sup> These mountaineers protested against the oppressive taxation by stating that they “couldn’t serve two masters at the same time.”<sup>73</sup> The distress became a crucial element in the Sasun uprising against



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their Muslim landowners in 1894. While the insurgency was quickly put down by Kurdish irregulars and Ottoman troops, it resulted in estimated death counts between 6,000 and 10,000 civilians.<sup>74</sup> The resistance strengthened nationalistic sentiments among both Armenians and their oppressors. It triggered a decade of ethno-religious clash in the Caucasus Mountains. The Hamidian massacre from 1894 to 1896 led to the estimated the death of 80,000 to 300,000 Christian minorities.<sup>74</sup> Religious undertones were evident. While the mass killings were to repress Armenians, Syrian Christians in the same region also experienced annihilation. An estimated 25,000 Syrian Christians were slaughtered during the process, 3,000 of whom were burnt alive in the cathedral of Edessa.<sup>76</sup> Ethnic tension also grew between the Armenians and their Azerbaijani neighbors owing to preferential treatments based on ethno-religious differences. Otherwise known as the Armeno-Tatar war of 1905, the encounter was a pivotal moment of national awakening for both peoples.<sup>77</sup> However, it was not until 1914 that Dashnak-led Armenia began seeking independence from the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).

Dismayed by the deteriorating Ottoman state, the Young Turks emerged as a reactionary force to the absolute rule posed by Sultan Abdülhamit II. Originally a secret society, the CUP began as a liberal reform movement influenced by the Meiji Restoration in Japan.<sup>78</sup> In 1902 and 1905, the CUP formed coalitions that united the Turkish population in the Caucasus and the Balkans by adopting a forceful Turkic line.<sup>79</sup> However, the Young Turks did not hesitate to leverage Islam in the process of delegitimizing the Sultan and criticizing European imperialism.<sup>80</sup> To unite the Muslim population, they maintained that European colonialism had a hidden Christian agenda aimed at discrediting the Ottoman Muslims.<sup>81</sup> In tandem with the fear of Great Power intervention in Macedonia, the CUP initiated the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire.

Despite an emphasis on Turkic elements, the revolution appeared to offer remaining minority groups the equality and internal autonomy they had long desired. Not only did the Young Turks cooperate with minority committees including the Dashnak, but a few of the original CUP members were in fact of Kurdish origin.<sup>82</sup> In Albania, the Muslim-dominated demography was threatened by rival Christian neighbors and continuous European intervention. As a result, the Committee for the Liberation of Albania allied with the CUP while its guerrilla units fought Christian terrorists and the Ottoman government.<sup>83</sup> However, the Young Turk movement was ultimately dedicated to the strengthening of the empire.<sup>84</sup> Shortly after the Balkan War, it adopted a fear-based agenda, where the systematic division of “self” and “other” became crucial to the dynamics shaping Ottoman socio-political conducts.<sup>85</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the internal economic problems as faced by the newly independent Balkan states resulted in a need for additional land. As a region heavily reliant on agricultural production, independence accelerated state expenses and reduced exporting

markets.<sup>86</sup> Political corruption, overall economic backwardness, and population growth transformed mounting tensions into the first Balkan War between the Balkan League and the Ottoman Empire. In the years leading up to the war, arms bandits and paramilitaries emerged throughout the peninsula. Many organizations and committees used direct and violent methods to attack Ottoman forces and rival groups.<sup>87</sup> The war resulted in the mass extermination of Muslim communities. Within a year, 1.5 million Muslims in the Ottoman Europe were purged or forced to exile, leading to the formation of homogenous nation states around Anatolia.<sup>88</sup> Guerrilla troops annihilated numerous Turkish and Albanian communities, with Bulgaria destroying “practically all the Muslim villages,” Serbs purging Muslim communities in Northern Macedonia and Albania, and Montenegrins demolishing Northern Albania.<sup>89</sup> Following the war, CUP coerced approximately 100,000 Greeks out of Istanbul and 200,000 Greeks out of the Aegean coast of Asia Minor.<sup>90</sup> With the pretext of ethno-religious polarization, Ahmet Cemal Pasha, Ismail Enver Pasha, and Mehmet Talat Pasha initiated a military coup along the racial ideologies of ethnic homogeneity in 1913. Their rise to power accompanied further acts of segregation to which defined twentieth-century Ottoman.<sup>91</sup>

The creation of the modern Turkish Republic began with a gradual process of exclusion. Ottoman elites governed the remaining territory by a “fear-based belief system” comprising prejudice, negative stereotypes, and scapegoating.<sup>92</sup> As such, ethnic violence transformed into a locally normalized practice for pre-emptive action against co-nationals. One of such ethnic massacres occurred in 1914 in Diyarbakir, a city that contained a mix of Muslims, Armenian, and Assyrian inhabitants. After a failed attempt by the CUP at attacking Russian troops in Sarikamish, ethnic tensions in Diyarbakir prompted violent searches that accused minorities of treason and espionage.<sup>93</sup> During this period, many statesmen radicalized and blamed Christian minorities as the cause of Ottoman degradation.<sup>94</sup> In his post-war memoirs, Mehmed Reshid, the Governor of Diyarbakir, wrote,

My appointment to Diyarbakir coincided with a very delicate period of war. Large parts of Van and Bitlis had been invaded by the enemy; deserters were transgressing, pillaging and robbing everywhere. Yezidi and Nestorian uprisings in or at the border of the province required the application of drastic measures. The transgressional, offensive and impudent attitude of the Armenians was seriously endangering the honor of the government.<sup>95</sup>

Prejudice against Christian minorities was apparent in the Ottoman Empire. Although the period witnessed the rise of a secular Turkish identity, violence evidently had religious undertones. Intolerance was intensified by the conflicts with the West. In Diyarbakir, Reshid appointed anti-Armenian radicals to office and took severe measures

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in arresting and prosecuting Armenian subjects on arbitrary grounds.<sup>96</sup> Anti-Armenian forces incarcerated Christian servicemen, political elites, and religious leaders.<sup>97</sup> Massacres spread throughout the province, but some Christian families were able to survive the atrocities by conversion to Islam.<sup>98</sup>

The rejection of ethnic pluralism is a recurring theme throughout the Ottoman region. From the IMRO to the Serbo-Croatian Četniks, various paramilitary groups emerged with the hardline policy of ethnic homogeneity. After WWI, Ottoman grounds fostered further identity disintegration by taking part in the “Wilsonian moment.” Originally aimed for colonial powers, the notion of national self-determination initiated movements for the “rights of people” throughout the world. Leaders of minority groups espoused the principle in declaring their struggle for autonomy. Evidently, ethnic sentiments were not new in Anatolia. Under the Young Turks, the process of Turkification became a nation-building project through the assimilating and dissimilating Anatolian communities.<sup>99</sup> However, this did not evoke potent ethnic awakening amongst the Kurds until the twentieth century. Unlike the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim population was not ethnic-conscious, owing to their collective identification with Ummah.<sup>100</sup> Despite this, many Muslim groups did “retain their core identity,”<sup>101</sup> such as their language or certain cultural practices.

The relationship between Ottoman Empire and the Kurds remains complex. As people committed to the empire, Kurds were treated as a distinct group and given their fiefdoms, or provinces, by the Sultan.<sup>102</sup> In return for their semi-autonomy, they provided taxes and soldiers to the empire. However, the failure of the Tazimat reforms saw to the re-centralization of the deteriorating state, which ultimately led to the abolition of Kurdish semi-autonomy.<sup>103</sup> In 1876, Sultan Abdülhamit II implemented the Hamidiye Alayları in eastern provinces to secure the Russo-Ottoman frontier and suppress Armenian uprisings. By creating the predominately Kurdish corps and supplying them with weaponry, the Sultan hoped to gain loyalty from the people. The division of Kurdish and Armenian populations in the region was to eliminate possible alliances between the two, as well as between the Kurdish tribes and the Russian Empire.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the abolition of hereditary semi-autonomous Kurdish principalities and the devastations of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) led to Kurdish revolts. The feeble socioeconomic conditions and ongoing famine prompted Sheikh Ubeydullah, a former landowner and religious leader from a powerful Kurdish tribe, to form a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire in 1880. While this was the first nationalistic Kurdish insurgency, it did not result in a potent national awakening for the Kurdish people.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, the ethnic stratification in the Caucasus – notably the abolition of Kurdish self-governance and subsequent economic deprivation – was a fundamental cause of the initial uprising.

By the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had sufficiently integrated a bulk of Arabic speakers into the empire because of their collective practice of Islam. Arab relations

with Ottoman rule were manifold. In fact, the degree of control over the Arabs varied between regions. The seventeenth century witnessed the virtual autonomy of Algeria, Tunisia, Tripoli, and Yemen while Ottoman reign over Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Palestine became largely nominal. Coupled with spiritual separatism, tensions between feudal lords often resulted in political struggles with religious undertones. Moreover, the Porte attempted to liquidate collective ownership of land and claim state ownership in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. This act resulted in various Arab tribal uprisings. To worsen the situation, landlords often appropriated produce, while natural disasters frequented said regions. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, approximately 2,500 villages became extinguished around Aleppo. Subsequent Ottoman decline deprived feudal lords, or *ayani*, of their primary source of revenue.<sup>106</sup> Economic stagnation bred dissatisfaction. In response, Arab revolt against local Pashas and Pasha insurgencies against the Porte became prevalent. Notably, liberation movements were reflective of socioeconomic stratification in the various regions. Nevertheless, these insurgencies did not carry nationalistic motives until the twentieth century.

Peasant uprisings—inherently class conflicts—spread throughout the Arab lands with significant disorders in Aleppo (1895) and Beirut (1903).<sup>107</sup> Internal dissatisfaction during the period of political instability led to the Arab awakening in various Arabic-speaking Ottoman provinces.<sup>108</sup> The process was two-fold. First, European influence was experienced by the Arabic-speaking Christian minorities.<sup>109</sup> Second, Arab minorities demanded provincial autonomy due to inspiration from the independence of Ottoman Balkan territories.<sup>110</sup> As in the rise of Kurdish identity, the Turkification of the empire was a key factor in the exacerbation of Arabism. By 1915, the Porte had banned the official use of Arabic and its teaching in schools.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, the construction of the Hejaz Railway, which connected Mecca and Damascus, threatened the region due to its facilitation of Turkish militants and Ottoman bureaucrats in the Arab heartland.<sup>112</sup> Lastly, the Zionist settlement in Palestine challenged the sociopolitical status quo in the Arab provinces.<sup>113</sup>

By World War I, the Arab people had become hostile to both the Anglo-French alliance and German-Turkish coalition.<sup>114</sup> The economies of Syria and Palestine could barely withstand the detriments of war. The Ottoman 4th Army began requisitioning Arab peasants' produce out of military necessity.<sup>115</sup> In 1915, approximately nine-tenths of harvests in Lebanon and Syria were appropriated. Tens of thousands of people in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Syria died of starvation and disease.<sup>116</sup> Widespread discontent led to hostility towards the Ottoman Empire and Turkish militants. In 1914, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, ruler of central Arabia, allied with the Wahabi Islamist movement in open criticism of the CUP as anti-Islamic.<sup>117</sup> Coupled with the Young Turks' pan-Turkic nationalist movement, many Arabic inhabitants in Greater Syria began rejecting the Ottoman identity. Leveraging

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emergent nationalist sentiments, Britain and France directed Arabs against Ottoman rule. Cooperating with British Intelligence, the Ottoman Party for Administrative Decentralization (OPAD) sent propaganda material to Syria and Palestine urging revolts against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>118</sup> In 1915, British intelligence began renewing relations with Sharif Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashimi to instigate unrest in Hejaz. Aiming to establish a unified kingdom for the Arabs, the Sharif of Mecca commenced the Great Arab Revolt.<sup>119</sup>

In alliance with France and Britain, the uprising led to Arab control of most of the Arabian Peninsula, southern Syria, and Petra.<sup>120</sup> While Sharif Hussein aimed to institute an independent Arab state inclusive of all minorities under Islam, the colonial powers decided otherwise. From the Congress of Berlin to the Treaty of Lausanne, there were a number of negotiations that directly partitioned the Ottoman Empire. However, the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 holds a decisive role in the contemporary state of tension in the Middle East. As a secret treaty between the Great Britain and France, the document divided Ottoman Arab land in accordance to proposed British and French spheres of influence.<sup>121</sup> Shortly after the revolt, the League of Nations formalized French control over the northern Levant in accordance with the Sykes-Picot Agreement.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, the British government began implementing the Balfour Declaration, which voiced support for Zionist settlements in Palestine.<sup>123</sup> The subsequent partition of Arab land into Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Transjordan, and Palestine was mostly coherent with the strategic positions of Great Power imperialism.<sup>124</sup> While some argue that the blame placed on the arbitrary borders is reductionist, it is irrefutable that the accord paved the way for identity fragmentation within the region.

Conflicts in many French-administrated territories were caused by sociopolitical inequality as a result of the exacerbated social cleavage between favored minorities and suppressed majorities. To undermine rising Sunni Muslim Arab nationalism, autonomous status was granted to areas where heterodox Muslim minorities were in consensus with French interests.<sup>125</sup> While there were many wealthy Sunni Muslim landholders, “all units [of the 1949 Syrian Army] of any importance as well as the important parts stood under the command of persons originate from religious minorities.”<sup>126</sup> The French occupants sought to divide and rule Syrians along sectarian lines.<sup>127</sup> Social stratification and the struggle for “upward social mobility” became a potent element in the ethno-religious competition between Sunni majority and the Alawite minority. By militarizing different ethnic and religious factions, the French legacy in the Middle East intensified notions of “self” and “other” that became the backbone to violent political confrontations.

Similarly, French presence in Lebanon destabilized the religious factions. The Greater Lebanon as established by French occupation subjected Muslim territories to Christian Maronites.<sup>128</sup> While the Maronites remain a unique precedent by which Christians became

a majority in an Arabic country, the conflict experienced by different sectarians remains a problem today. Between 1920 and 1943, the nationalization of religion was reinforced by French imperialism. Violent clashes emerged between Muslim and Christian inhabitants as the former demanded reunification with Syria.<sup>129</sup> During the institution of the state of Israel, many Palestinians were displaced to Greater Lebanon, shifting the demographic balance towards a Muslim majority. Subsequent division in WWII resulted in the 1958 Lebanon crisis between Maronite Christians and Muslims, paving the way for the Lebanese Civil War between 1975 and 1990. Nevertheless, the conflict in Lebanon was not a French-imposed phenomenon. As early as 1845, sociopolitical stratification based on ethno-religious differences has been apparent. While hostilities were rooted in class division, the Druze-Maronite massacre of 1845 was tinted with religious undertones that resulted in the reciprocal slaughter of the “other.”<sup>130</sup>

The struggle for Ummah between followers of the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad and the supporters of Ali ibn abi Talib has come to characterize the politicalized identity disputes in and between Muslim nations.<sup>131</sup> In Iraq, this ethno-religious stratification frequently extended to minorities. Under Saddam Hussein, a Sunni, various military operations were initiated against the Iraqi Kurds and Shia majorities. After the Anfal campaign in 1983, the Human Rights Watch estimated that 50,000 to 100,000 Kurds were victims of Iraqi extermination.<sup>132</sup> In addition, groups including Yazidis and Christians have also been the targets of destruction. Following the Iran-Iraq war of 1980, sectarian militant groups began to multiply in the Middle East, with some of the most infamous activities undertaken by al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the recent Islamic State (ISIS). Hamas and Hezbollah are both organizations in reaction to Israeli undertakings, with the former operating against the occupation of Palestine and the latter a response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.<sup>133</sup>

Carrying on the traditional interpretation of Ummah, religious nationalism became a fundamental tenet of the Islamic State’s (ISIS) agenda in consolidating all Muslim populations under the religious and political jurisdiction of the Caliphate.<sup>134</sup> Thomas Piketty argues that social inequality is the driver behind the bulk of Middle Eastern terrorism, including the rise of ISIS.<sup>135</sup> According to Piketty, the income inequality in the region exceeds that of the United States by 3.37% and almost triples that of France.<sup>136</sup> When this is coupled with ethno-religious differences, the consequence becomes distinct. The relatively recent rise of ISIS was rooted in Syria and Iraq, both Shi’ite political regimes that dominated Sunni populations. In Iraq, the ejection of Sunni elites during the process of de-Baathification and the rise of Shia leaders to prominence fueled resentment towards the religious “other.” Protests were quelled with force, resulting in numerous Sunni deaths. These elements encouraged Sunni Muslims and Iraq’s Sunni military force to join the Is-

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lamic State.<sup>137</sup>

Similarly, the hostility towards different identity groups in the Balkans remains socioeconomically and ethno-religiously driven. In 1934, the Croatian Revolutionary Organization Ustaše was brought to power in Axis-occupied Yugoslavia under the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). To realize the creation of a Greater Croatia, they instituted policies that aimed to eliminate undesirable elements: namely, Serbs, Jews, the Roma, and Communists.<sup>138</sup> The war saw the deportation and massacre of hundreds of thousands of Serbs, as well as forced religious conversion to Catholicism.<sup>139</sup> The nationalization of religion was a pivotal element in the Ustaše agenda.<sup>140</sup> In cooperation with German fascism, the group aimed to create ethnic homogenization through instituting the notions of “state rights” and cultural exclusiveness.<sup>141</sup>

The Serbian Četniks, or the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland (JVUO), resurfaced with the political aim of expanding a “homogeneous Serbia” in postwar Yugoslavia.<sup>142</sup> Similar to ustaštvo, Četnik ideology stressed the importance of the peasantry, as well as validating the use of its national identity in leading postwar Yugoslavia.<sup>143</sup> As most of the pretext to conflicts in the post-Ottoman arena, the JVUO justified violence by mass criminalizing “others” and underlying the impossibility of ethnic coexistence. Thousands of Croats and Muslims were killed during the massacres between 1941 and 1942 without regard for gender or age. In addition to these two organizations, other committees also fought to realize their respective agendas. Estimates of casualties in the kingdom ranged from 900,000 to 1.8 million throughout the duration of WWII.<sup>144</sup>

In 1944, Josip Broz Tito succeeded to power. While his regime was heavily contentious, it is inarguable that the Communist imposition lessened ethno-religious massacres in Yugoslavia. This was the result of his economic reform policies and national identity policies, including the institution of the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA).<sup>145</sup> To strengthen relations with Yugoslavia during Cold War bipolarity, the United States provided \$2.2 billion in military and economic aid between 1950 and 1965.<sup>146</sup> In turn, the Soviet Union provided mass aid funding to the Yugoslav postwar reconstruction efforts. Understanding its strategic importance to both the USSR and the US, Tito leveraged the opportunity to initiate an inconspicuous bid for his support. The maneuver proved valuable, as the two competing powers strengthened socioeconomic initiatives in an attempt to entice Yugoslav allegiance. This provided a substantial basis to the economic reforms as led by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY). In the early 1950s, the self-management program was instituted to tackle economic issues facing Yugoslavia.<sup>147</sup> Tito embraced a model of market socialism and saw Yugoslav economic growth as “the logical continuation of the present policy of equality among [Yugoslav] peoples.”<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, economic development was short lived. Despite the transition of Yugoslavia from an agriculture-dependent

economy into an export-orientated economy, regional contrasts in levels of prosperity and escalating foreign debt remained apparent. Tito's death in 1980 further weakened Yugoslav governmental system. Combined with the repercussion of the OPEC oil crises, the 1980s economic recession, and internal failings, Yugoslavia's socioeconomic conditions reduced living standards to "low 1965 levels."<sup>149</sup>

By the early 1990s, ethnic tensions reached a boiling point. Socioeconomic tensions contributed widely to the civil strife in Yugoslav.<sup>150</sup> When Slobodan Milošević became President of Serbia in 1989, he attempted to consolidate power by centralizing the six Yugoslav Republics. The maneuver triggered the Slovenian Independence War, which marked the beginning of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. On April 24, 1987, Milošević visited the town of Polje, Kosovo. In the predominately ethnic Albanian region, he exacerbated ethnic relations by announcing to the Serbian minorities: "From now on, no one has the right to beat you."<sup>151</sup> Milošević effectively appealed to Serbian heroism by legitimizing their presence in Kosovo.<sup>152</sup> Notably, economic disparities enabled tensions among sociopolitical classes represented by different ethno-religious groups. Before the war, ethnic Serbs benefited significantly from redistribution policies in Montenegro and Kosovo.<sup>153</sup> They were disproportionately and advantageously represented in the federal army, employment, and security forces.<sup>154</sup> As such, the other republics often collaborated to check Serb ethnic interests. Coupled with Milošević's Serbian nationalism, ethnic tension largely sustained by economic disparities evolved into a decade-long war.

## CONCLUSION

The intricacy of conflicts in the pre- and post-Ottoman region denotes an extensive correlation between mass violence and socioeconomic elements based on ethno-religious differences. Political elites often mass criminalize ethnic others and undermine the possibility of national coexistence. The Balkan Peninsula continues to endure the after-effects of its regional conflicts. In Syria, the Alawites sect controlling state bureaucracy began cracking down on Sunni Muslim majorities, an act which the United Nations cautioned was a route "heading toward civil war" in 2011.<sup>155</sup> In a recent report published by Amnesty International, the claim is made that IS has "systematically targeted non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities," slaughtering or abducting ethnic and religious minorities in captured regions.<sup>156</sup> In all the cases discussed, it is evident that the rejection of ethno-religious pluralism is a recurring theme throughout the Ottoman Empire.

Under the multifaceted Ottoman Empire, the millet system played a vital role in preserving peace and stability. While it maintained a division between different religious factions, the system did not intentionally perpetuate animosity between its subjects. How-



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ever, social stratification as rooted in the millet system became one of the underlying causes of the subsequent ethno-religious conflicts. Disparities heavily influenced ethnic tensions among socio-economic classes represented by different ethno-religious groups. The Ottoman Empire's inability to generate a unitary socio-political identity that appealed to the masses was a fatal blow to its stability during Western interventions. Religion took shape in two forms following the spread of nationalism in 1789. Although most of the Christian independence movements were labeled as secularist endeavors, the supra-systemic position of religion was evident in the massacre of Ottoman Muslims and other ethnic minorities.<sup>157</sup> Religious nationalism became a reactionary force implemented by Sultan Adulemet II in an attempt to sustain the remainder of the Ottoman Empire. The two processes continued to evolve simultaneously, which is evident by the development of a Turkish identity, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and the development of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism as seen in the Middle East. Following the uprisings in the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of self-determination by Woodrow Wilson, a vivid Kurdish identity began to flourish in the past century. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) continues to wage armed struggle against the Turkish state for the right to autonomy.

Following the emergence of nationalism, socioeconomic classes based on ethno-religious differences became the basis for nationalist sentiments in the Balkans. Inspired by Balkan independence, Ottoman Armenians' struggle for autonomy was met with detrimental repercussions and a lack of support from European powers. Wilson's proclamation of the right to self-determination and various sociopolitical factors inspired Kurdish and Arab people to seek autonomy from the Porte. The subsequent divide of the Middle East placed Ottoman Arab lands under French and British administration. Western imperialism leveraged ethno-religious stratification in the suppression of Sunni Muslims in Syria and the general Muslim populace in Lebanon. In the remainder of the twentieth century, the schism between Shia and Sunni Muslims was frequently politicalized by Western powers and regional powers that sought for political gain. While social stratifications have been detrimental in the pre- and post-Ottoman region, tension has shifted from socioeconomic differences towards a predominantly ethno-religious incentivized rejection of the "other," particularly in the current state of Middle East affairs.

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