FACING "ORIGINAL SIN" OR "REALITIES": MEDITATIONS ON THE ARMENIAN "GENOCIDE"

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Modern law, by separating justice from simple revenge and reprisal, signifies a distinctive jurisprudential achievement. It is this cold-bloodedness of modern law which at the same time has caused a widespread unease in the eyes of the public.

One of the clichés of American detective movies, which we are quite familiar with, deals with this unease. An honest policeman who is duty-bound to bring the guilty man to justice through "strong-arm methods" is, however, prevented by his chief who represents the "establishment". The arrogant behaviour of the guilty man has already convinced us of the justice of these methods. Usually, following this cliché, the policeman's use of these methods results in his dismissal from the investigation. He returns his gun and badge. Indeed, this dismissal is a relief and helps him to finish the case in the way he wishes. In the end of the film, we - to put into Wilhelm Reich's words, the "Little Men" - feel our grievances have been compensated for to a certain level.

If the agreement between crime and punishment at the personal level is so controversial, it will be much more complicated when dealing with more complicated cases. It is certainly true for the historical ones. The relationship between historical events and law is still vague and a matter for legal academics.

One of the practical problems of hearing a historical case, i.e., civil war or genocide stems from an inability to "personalize" the crime. Because it is clear that such cases involve the complex interference of various institutions, which seems hard to "personalize". In other words, it is extremely difficult to identify the murderers and those who give them their orders. Even though the decision-makers, initiators and protagonists can be captured more easily, there still remains a gap to be bridged. The scale of the crime, for instance the number of the victims, is so huge that even

the most rigorous investigations will probably not satisfy the public's conscience.

Such a case is quite obvious in *state-sponsored* genocide.[1] Many participants, who took active part in torture and murder, have defended themselves by saying "we were only obeying orders". The strict hierarchies and official rankings in the modern state enable the guilty people to deny their responsibility. Many accused have resorted to similar clichés when their Nazi pasts were revealed. It is quite clear that in such vague cases the number of people prosecuted will be far less than expected.

The above-mentioned case can clearly be observed in the Nuremberg (Nürnberg) War Crimes Trials that investigated the *Holocaust*. Some of the prominent Nazi leaders, including Hitler, had committed suicide. The Nuremberg Trials only punished those who had given the orders, not the ones who had committed the murders. The number of the suspects, as compared to millions of victims, that is, the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and Poles has nullified the entire process. Where were the other participants–the actual murderers, witnesses, the people who ignored what was happening?

The unprecented gap between the murderers and victims has shaped one of the dominant problematic of post-war moral philosophy. The French moralist, essayist and novelist J. P. Sartre, in one of his masterpieces, **The Altona Prisoners,** tackles this issue. The main character in the play is an aristocrat, an ex-Nazi official. He has imprisoned himself in his ancestral castle. Though the war has finished, he refuses to believe or accept it. He keeps on dressing in Nazi uniform and reading newspapers dating from the 1940s which report the early victories of the *Wehrmacht*. One night, after many years, he leaves his "prison", where time has been frozen and goes into the local town. Hundreds of "happy Germans" are enjoying themselves in a festive, carnival-like atmosphere, drinking and singing. Nobody notices him in his uniform since masked balls are being held at the time. With the word Sartre has masterly philosophised, he feels a deep "nausea". Suddenly, he finds himself in front of a theater where a Brecht play is being performed. He bursts into the hall. He has been

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[1] Matthew Krain, "State Sponsored Mass Murder: The Onset and Severity of Genocides and Policies", **Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies**, 41/3 (1997), EBSCHO HOST, Item Number 9707102413, p. 2.

trembling and his mouth is dry. An actor, playing Hitler, is seen giving one of his speeches with the familiar tone, mimics and gestures. A few others have gathered around his podium with their coats and hats on, clapping their charismatic leader. He cannot help jumping onto the stage and turning to the spectators, shouts in an angry voice: "Where are your hats?"

The *Holocaust* shows the widening gap between murderers and victims. Here lies the vagueness of those responsible, or "grey consciences".[2] The law has found no solution to this problem so far. Because it is nearly impossible to get at the root of the matter. "Grey consciences" may encompass almost an entire society with a wide spectrum of responsibility within it.

The afore-mentioned unbridgeable gap has had a traumatic effect on Western moral life and caused a "*Holocaust*-obsession syndrome". It seems that the *Holocaust* has become a code that signifies the evil in society.[3] Facing the *Holocaust* has been unavoidable in Western consciousness for a few generations. By resorting to Barthesian methodology or Foucauldian genealogy, this indeed can be viewed in the cultural continuum of a deep-rooted Western religious practice, called as "facing original sin" and "confession". Original sin has been preached as an eternal and insuperable fact by the church throughout history. The *Holocaust* now exhibits a similar syndrome as the secular form of it.

The other trend, on the contrary, is to seek new *Holocausts* in the world. Relativisation and reflecting the *Holocaust* seems to be the consequences of "the symbolic effect of the *Holocaust*".[4] Here, the Western mind seeks new examples of genocide in the world in order to ease the permanent moral pressures that are been applied onto human consciences. These two trends, though seeming to be contrary, in the final analyses are the two faces of the same coin. The historical event referred to by some circles as the Armenian genocide (1915) is the most recent example of this. It is a myth or a fiction. Making sense of the history of "the Armenian question" referring to the history of the *Holocaust* should be seen as a simple historical error that can only be made by some politicians.

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[2] Stephen Eric Bronner, "Making Sense of Hell: Three Meditations on the Holocaust", **Political Studies**, 47/2(1999), EBSCHO HOST, Item Number: 1949222, p. 4.
[3] Yehuda Bauer, "The Impact of the Holocaust", **Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Sciences**, 548 (1996), EBSCHO HOST, Item Number: 9701101649, p. 1.
[4] Bronner, "Making Sense of Hell", **op**. **cit**., pp. 7-14.

The *Holocaust*, willingly or unwillingly, has re-shaped the European political moral world. The most striking feature of this process is the degeneration of the limits of the political field. The above-mentioned weakness and the disfunctionalization of the judicial field when met with cases like the *Holocaust* have worked as the basic impetus in this development. Having been disfunctionalised to some extent, the judicial field has left the initiatives mostly to politics and especially to political morality. This denotes the growth of the political field, so as to fall beyond the basic distinction that once was drawn by Montesquieu and put itself in place of judicial power. The recent and most typical example of this is the law passed in the French Parliament, accepting the idea of "the Armenian genocide".

Political Histories, Civil Histories and the Three Variables

Here arises another problematical point, denoting the complex relations between the modern historiographies and politics. Presumably, the materials which were the sources for the French law were derived from one-sided, biased historiographies, mostly published by Armenian or pro-Armenian historians. It may perhaps be more accurate to state that the French politicians were merely after satisfying a section of their electorate. Here, one does not help recalling Paul Valéry's ironic views on history: "History is the most dangerous chemical that has ever been produced in the laboratory of ideas". Using historiographies in politics has always been easy but burdensome as well. Historiographical texts are not unquestionable divine texts, and if the French parliamentarians had studied and used other sources, the result would have been very different.

Findings hitherto have already revealed that the events of 1915 were horrific for both Armenians and Turks. The Armenian population of eastern Anatolia was deported, and many of them lost their lives during their dramatic journey. Moreover, the Armenian insurgents took the lives of numerous Turks, Kurds and Circassians. Recalling Albert Camus, now, we are at a critical point: reject debates involving *the algebra of blood*, instead focus on civil histories, which I believe, would make us aware of the facts such as the extensive co-habitation which existed amongst the grandparents of today's hostile communities. Certain facts have been kept and others neglected in political histories, resulting in one view of the past. The first step to be taken is to bring all the

facts together and by studying the historical co-habitation patterns of various given communities to see if there is hope for the future. If this is done, the real reason why the *Holocaust* is unique will appear. It is the state of absolute despair, the clear historical-civil experiences that the continent had exhibited until the *Holocaust*.

Today, by standing on the historical continuum, we easily come to understand the recorded processes paving the way for the *Holocaust*. In order to judge whether 1915 was a *Holocaust* or a genocide or not, we ought to apply the same variables to the Armenian case. The *Holocaust* appears to be the reasonable consequence of three factors. First of all, it stems from a tradition of an everlasting fanatical religious discrimination in feudal Europe. Secondly, this dark background has been consolidated through the state-building and nation-building processes. To sum up, the *Holocaust* is the cumulative result of three variables: religious discrimination, ethnic discrimination and the irresistible and destructive physical power of the modern state.[5]

The Tradition of Ethno-Religious Fanaticism and The *Holocaust*

Within the framework of feudal history, we see step by step how Jews were driven into their dark fate through their presence in Europe. Their fate in Europe, indeed, had brought no change in their historical fortune. On the contrary, compared to their previous sufferings, they had experienced in the Ancient World, the new threats were much more frightening. Almost everywhere in Europe they were the subjects of Christian persecution. The hatred of Jews was an unquestionable feature of the pre-industrial era.

As is known, Platonian imperatives give their colour to almost the entire establishmental realm of the antique world entailing the strict control of every aspect of "degenerated" life -*doxa*- by *Politeia*, or political power, in a Platonic sense. The heretic realm of *doxa*, according to Plato, should not be left uncontrolled. Excess was the key factor, threatening the stability of *Politeia*, the unique civilized and prudent form of living.

Following his reasoning, the Neo-Platonists of the Alexandria School formulated their master's views by blending them with Stoicism and Aristotle's mildness. Here, one is faced with the

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[5] Bauer, "The Impact of the Holocaust", **op. cit**., p. 1.

founding principles of Rome. Feudal history, in the cultural sense, means the bursting of Platonian heritage and the atomisation of its components. This also meant returning to the sources of sophism that had been condemned by Plato. It is indisputable that feudal atomisation gave way to the emergence of deep-rooted automian practices and contributed to exploring the pluralistic aspects of life, by which Europe and the West in general today is proud of. But on the other side of the coin, there lies the terrible history of parochialism, intolerance and conflicts among communities.

The advent of the Catholic churches asserting religio-political ideas, provoking and pushing masses into hazardous ventures, in a way, was due to the independency they had obtained in post-Platonic era. It is beyond doubt that, throughout the prolonged history of indoctrination even in the modern era, the most convincing ways of creating hostility amongst communities, where human beings unconditionally accepted killing and being killed, focused on the sphere of organised religious beliefs since they eternally have monopolized the most calming response to the wide-spread fear of death.

By taking into consideration the remarks above, it can be said that Jews, who have experienced the ancient forms of persecution conducted by the Egyptians, Babylonians and Romans, were now encountering the medieval form of it. There was no way out for Jews. They were being denigrated both for their mysticism and rationalism, poverty and wealth. On the other hand, the hostility directed at them was not limited to Catholicism. They were the subject of a far worse, much more extreme humiliation under the reign of Orthodoxy in Russia.[6] Besides, Protestantism was, by no means, a salvation for them, since antisemitism was deeply stressed in the writings of Luther.

Mercantile developments in the history of the state, not only inherited antisemitism with all aspects, but also went much further. The organised church could have never been as hazardous as an organised state power. Newly, the profane administrative aspect, maintaining secular desires was now being added to the previous sources of religious discrimination and humiliation. It meant that the potential religious hostilities were prone to be sharpened and much more overtly voiced. In the countries where

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[6]   Bronner, "Making Sense of Hell", **op. cit**., pp. 8, 9.

Catholicism and Orthodoxy were linked to the power of the state, this trend was much more striking. The bloody extermination/deportations of Jewish and Muslim populations in the Iberian Peninsula and the massacres of Protestants by Catholics in France (St. Bartholomew) are the two conventional examples to show this.

The overlapping of religion/church and politics/state have increased the effects of antisemitism and thereby, the sufferings of the Jews. But in the 19th century, a fresh and energetic power -nationalism- was added to the legacy of religious hatred. Ethnocentric ego-expansions, exalted by historical pantheistic worldviews, soon became the secular religion of the modern states. Nationalism, coupled with running debates over the existing frontiers, destabilized the entire continent.

Departing from the early 19th century, having been inspired by the *zeitgeist* of the age, the desire towards nationalist historiography was spreading among the newly awakening intelligentsia of the Balkan countries who had been under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The successful pattern of the Greek uprising was becoming the main model for the others. It should be noted that these movements were fuelled and patronized by the Western great powers that were actively supporting the Eastern question, thereby endeavouring to increase their shares in a possible repartition.

The ethno-religious structures, which had remained untouched up to that time, were the main springs legitimising such interferences. Catholic France and Orthodox Russia, in close contact with native churches, were running effective policies against the Ottoman Empire, thanks to their patronage of their co-religionists. Therefore, at this stage, nationalistic historiography was crucial to anti-Ottoman and separatist indoctrination.

At the beginning of the 20th century (1918) the project of eliminating the political existence of the Ottoman Empire was achieved. Newly born nation-states replacing the Ottoman Empire accelerated and concentrated their efforts on severing all cultural ties which would serve to remind of the Ottoman past.

Strictly engaged in the friend and foe distinction, modern historiographies were anxious to erect sub-histories that they believe belonged to the pure nation. These partial, homogenous histories, though consistent with the standards of scientific

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historicism, may be viewed to have brought some aspects of the past into light. However, they are not free from being superficial since they neglect ties linking them to a broader historical environment. To put in other words, throughout the Near East and Middle East, modern historical consciousness is derived from this neglect.

For instance, the average Turkish person accepts 1453 as the departure point of a new age and boasts of achieving their historical mission by ending the "festering" Byzantium Empire. The 29th of May is the day celebrating the 'Turkifying' of Constantinople, which became stanbul after the capture of the city. Every year this monumental day is celebrated with great celebrations. However, Greeks marking the anniversary of a national catastrophe also mourn the same day. Whilst feasts are held in stanbul, funeral bells are heard in Athens.

This sort of self-blinding may be seen as a pre-requisite from the viewpoint of modern political ontology. But it denotes a tragic break in the mentalities of millions of people living in the Near and Middle Eastern regions. However, a quick glance at the heterogeneous (at least not as homogenous as it has been assumed) cultural histories, obscured by the mentioned ontological imperatives, will make us feel that they have much more to tell us than the simplifications of historical-political theologies.

Above all, we ought to adjust our mentalities to a broader history, one that partial and purified histories are subject to. If this is done, it will clearly be seen that the emergence of the Ottoman Empire in the Near and Middle East was not so revolutionary by its very nature, causing radical changes in the existing lives of the inhabitants of the mentioned zone. On the contrary, it points out an era of restoration of some deteriorated processes, parallel with the weakening of Byzantium, which native inhabitants in both patrician and plebeian spheres were well acquainted with.

In order to grasp the underlying transformation, one also ought to get rid of the simplification, stressing and exaggerating the replacement of *the cross* with *the crescent*. It is actually not that simple. The formation of the Ottoman Empire does not mean the end of Rome, instead reinvigorating it. The mentioned process means the restoration of the Platonian antiquity in Islamic terms.

Here are a few pieces of evidence to "back-up" this argument. First of all, the Ottoman Empire arose in parallel to the dissolution of the Roman legacy in Europe. The weakening of the Byzantium Empire had destabilized the peace sustained and guaranteed by the political power–*Politeia*. Dissolving processes were aggravating the circumstances of the components that were in close contact with the Turks rather than the central agents to whom they were responsible in word only. This gave way to the birth of new and enriched experiences between the Turks and the local elites. On the other hand, the disintegration of Byzantium increased and hardened local exploitation. The old vendettas between communities, which had been forgotten or shelved under the Byzantines, began to re-surface. The Ottomans, as the time went on, were becoming a promising power, capable of restoring the desired peace and justice in the eye of the plebeian sphere as well as the local patricians.

What is more important is that the Ottoman Empire arose in a historical–geographical zone (the Balkan Peninsula and Asia Minor) where the Roman way of life, with its traditions and institutions had been deeply rooted. The early formative stages of the Ottoman Empire are somehow obscured in modern historiographies. The early stages of the Ottoman Empire are better to be read as a history of assimilation and transformation of all sides within each other.[7] In order to revitalize the Platonic norms, rather than the encountering of rival histories and the one-sided assimilation, the mysteries of this over-neglected history seems to be a rich source of information. By focusing on this area, we get a golden opportunity, enabling us to witness–to quote the striking formulae of a distinguished Turkish historian- the establishment of the *Last (Third) Rome.*[8]

Here, the diversity in the belief system is not to be exaggerated. Indeed, the behaviour of the Ottoman sultans sets a good example for us. None of the Ottoman sultans, including Selim I (1512-20), who conquered part of the Arab world, used the symbols of the *Caliphate.* It was only Abdülhamid II (1878-1908), who claimed this title for some practical, mostly defensive reasons. Within the limits of the imperial correspondence some of them preferred to

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[7] Cemal Kafadar, **Between Two Worlds**, California, University of California Press, 1995, p. 22.
[8]   İber Ortaylı , "Osmanlı Barışı", **Türkiye Günlüğü**, Ankara, 58 (1999), p. 17.

use the title of "*Roman Caesar*" instead of *Caliph-Sultan of Islam.* This manner shows us how they assimilated Roman traditions and portrayed themselves as "quasi-Roman Emperors". The Romans had first met the cultural codes of the Platonic paradigm with the Stoic version of them and later with the Christian version. What the Ottomans did was to convert these into Islamic terms.

The *Third Rome*, as a Platonic structure, represents distinctive characteristics. The most distinctive characteristic was related to the agglomeration of various agents- economy, religion, law, morals, etc. in *Politeia* that crystallized as the supreme establishment. None of these agents could have a separate meaning and act as an autonomous entity. In accordance with the Platonian principles this would mean deprivation.

Within the context of state-religion relations, the Byzantines had adhered to *Caesaropapism,* inherited from the Romans. Here the religious sphere was not left wandering and not allowed to constitute a rival power. To put it simply, the *sword* and the *law* would gain priority and overcome *belief*.

Also, we are aware of the fact that the Ottomans had some historical advantages easing their attempts to meet with the Platonian legacy of the Ancient World. One of them appears to be related to *Sunnism*. Unlike the rival Muslim sect *Shiism,* which at times allowed a disciplined and effective clergy who perceive themselves as independent and above state affairs, *Sunnism,* due to the weakening of the *Caliphate* (especially in the post-Abbasite period), had experienced a different pattern. This ended, first, with the disappearance of the manipulative power of the *belief* over the *sword* and *law-making*. The independence of *law-making* and *warfare* processes in *Sunni* tradition reversed the relations in favour of themselves. Religious agencies would no longer be a rival to them; on the contrary, they would be dependent on their manipulations.

The formation of the Ottoman concept of "*din-ü devlet*" (Caliph-Sultan) shows that the assertations attributing to it a pure Islamic core are worthless. Islam constitutes merely the discursive aspect of the state affairs of the Third Rome. The Ottoman history is much better understood as a pragmatic, but not as a dogmatic history. It is certain that religion kept on playing its crucial role in legitimising the Ottoman policies. But whilst achieving this task,

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religious agencies could have never acted by resting on its own initiatives.

The formation of Ottoman power never gave the religious agencies the opportunity of interfering or getting involved in the existing religious conflicts at the level of actual community lives. Since the political sphere, in which serious and critical warfare and law-making processes required prudence -but not fanaticism- was organised to prevent such interferences. *Politeia* would never accept heresies of the heterodoxy that were found to be the most threatening for the establishment,[9] to be involved in her orthodoxy. The very existence of *Caesaropapism* was the most essential resistance point to such developments. As compared to the Church, which by itself was partisan in religious conflicts with its militant clergy, the Islamic orthodoxy of the Third Rome, with *Sunni* theologians exhibiting moderate and respectful manners, looks very different.

What has been set forth hitherto may help to show that attempts to find a religious, antisemitic like basis for the deaths in the Armenian relocations of 1915 is incorrect. The realities hidden in the Ottoman version of *Ceasaropapism* prevent us from drawing such a conclusion. This also self-evidently makes it impossible to draw a parallel between the *Holocaust*-like genocide and the Armenian relocations in 1915. Does this resettlement ever have some roots in the ethnic sphere? Dealing with this question will inevitably force us to focus on two important matters: the *millet* system and *dev irme* system.

The Ethnic Sphere, the Idea of Genocide and the Ottomans

The *dev irme* system refers to large-scale attempts of the political authorities to recruit military and civilian personnel. One of the reasons showing the fallacy of relating 1915 to the *Holocaust* stems from misunderstanding the *dev irme* system. Modern political theologies have considered the *dev irme* system as one of the most tragic aspects of "Ottoman cruelty". Indeed, it seems hard to justify this practice if viewed from the modern humanitarian point of view. Gathering little Christian children at an age when they most needed their parents, erasing their memories concerning their homeland, subjecting them to a disciplined indoctrination

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9 Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth", **Turcica**, Paris/Strasbourg, XIX (1987), p. 23.

where they were alienated from everything except their duties in the service of the state are all deemed to be unacceptable in the eyes of the members of modern societies, formed in accordance with family-based bourgeois ideology. But if we can manage to view the *dev irme* system cold-bloodedly for a while, we will get the chance to comprehend it in its normality.

Initially, it can be said that the *dev irme* system as a coercive assimilation, if once compared to the assimilation run by the modern nation-state, can relatively be treated as of little importance. First of all, the assimilation techniques exercised by the nation-state seem to be milder than the coercive techniques of the *dev irme* system. The scale of alienation, on the other hand, which springs from the modern educational processes, is supposed to be much greater and irreversible. One should call it irreversible, because indoctrination hidden in civilized forms of education emerges with the assertation of earning the nation her pseudo "objective past". It is indeed this assertation that makes the alienation process irreversible.

Indeed, the *dev irme* process in the Ottoman Empire is better to be seen as the equivalent of the modern meritocracy in the pre-industrial world. On the other hand, thanks to the *dev irme* process the Ottoman court society isolated itself from the conventional life. This process was designed for the sake of the authority of the state. Due to the *dev irme* process, not only the untouchability of *Politeia* and its qualification were granted, but also conditions were matured convincing and spreading from above to the bottom the idea that the political system belonged to none of the existing ethno-religious entities but embracing them all at once. One of the most crucial concepts of the Ottoman state, creating a world order was interwoven with the *millet* system to serve this aim. Due to the *dev irme* system, many of direct ties with the founding ethnic group -the Muslim Turcomans- were cut off. Resulting from this, it can be said that the *dev irme* system was run against the founding principle of the Turkoman tribes, identifying the state with ethnicity. This was the most crucial point, distinguishing the Ottoman pattern from others, for instance the rival Safavids of Iran. It is also noteworthy that *Nizam- Âlem* (General Order) as the key principle guiding the fundamental mission of the state, to a certain degree, meant the authority of it over every-day lives and mostly used authoritative methods but not authoritarian ones.

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Ottoman Warfare Tradition and Carnages

The *dev irme* system, though it sounds negative, was a system of privilege as well as responsibility. But what is striking is that the gates of the political and administrative sphere, after the late 15th century -that is, the reign of Sultan Mehmed the Conquerer- until the end of the 18th century were restricted to members of those communities that were non-Muslims by birth. Instead, the system was open to talented people (non-Muslims) who passed through the *dev irme* process. This feature of the Ottoman state tradition points out the gap put between the formative discourse of the state -Islam- and Turks who were supposed to be the privileged holders of the mentioned belief-Muslims.

The *dev irme* system, certainly, was a sort of assimilation but it should not be confused with its contemporary counterparts. By assimilating merely a narrowly selected administrative-military group, more coercive assimilative ambitions, which were likely to have arisen in the civil society, indeed were prevented.

The project of *Nizam- Âlem* had been within the context of the Islamic laws of war which were quite consistent with the realities of the old world. It is certain that the regular Ottoman armies played a vital role in it. But it should also be stated that the military structures of the Empire were not independent of the agricultural system. This means that military victory was not an end in itself. This is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Ottoman military history to be put forward against the superficial thesis likening it to a barbarian pillager army. Consequently, in the eyes of the Ottomans, battles were just dependent variables of peace that was harder to achieve and required more subtle techniques. Yet, while battles were still raging, Ottoman officials were making conscientious observations and calculations and developing projects on how the newly captured lands were to be reorganised. Cultural demographic inputs were also a very important part of these projects. By adhering to the main principles of these projects (within the norms of the Ottoman warfare tradition), the duration and intensity of pillage was tightly controlled. On the other hand, any unnecessary destruction was prohibited, and any troops found guilty of breaking this rule were severely punished and the victims compensated. The killing of unarmed civilians by Ottoman troops was a very rare occurrence.

The Ottoman Civilization has been conceptualised as *Pax Ottomana*. This concept may also be defined as, the central theme of Ottoman history: Peace was the ultimate goal of the Ottomans. It can also easily be deduced that ethnic-religious genocide was totally inconsistent with the central theme of the Ottoman past.

Turco-Serbian and Turco-Hungarian wars intensified between the 14th and 16th centuries and ended in the absolute victory of the Ottomans. Conventional armies fought these wars. The afore-mentioned two kingdoms deemed themselves heirs to the Roman heritage and wanted to replace the Byzantium Empire. What is particularly striking is that the triumphant Ottoman forces seemed not to harbour any hostility and take revenge for their losses on Hungarian and Serbian communities. In fact, both these communities were peacefully absorbed into *Pax Ottomana*. They were never asked to change their religions. Referring to the issue of Islamisation of the Bosnians and the Albanians the same statement can easily be repeated here. Balkan history has shown that both Bosnians and Albanians had been in an everlasting conflict and were the victims of mistreatment especially by the Serbians. Some sections of these communities, having become weary of pressures coming from their eternal enemy and having been impressed by the neutrality of the Ottomans in the existing conflicts, found it safer to voluntarily join the Muslim population. It is beyond question that the Turcoman *gazis* were the main proponents of the coming *Pax Ottomana* and played a vital role in the "Islamisation" of the Balkan Peninsula. But their methods are not to be confused with the coercive, assimilative methods used in the colonial era in the 19th century, e.g., the Belgian treatment of the native Congolese people in Africa.

In the world order introduced by the *Pax Ottomana*, communities, including the Armenians, were gathered under the umbrella of the Third Rome, protected by the revived core principles of the *Pax Romana* system. *Pax Ottomana* simultaneously guaranteed the protection of her subjects from each other and from an alien power. The demilitarisation of the civil communities and the monopolization of the right of using sword by the state were the most striking aspects of the project.

The *millet* system refers to the consolidation stage of the Third Rome. In order to secure its authority among its subjects the Ottoman Laws of War were now adapted to the consolidation of

Peace. The basic principle was to isolate each ethnic-religious community from each other and let them live in their own lifestyles. To link this process with the Jewish way of life -ghettoization- would be quite superficial. The Turkish historian, lber Ortayl , more correctly, associates the mentioned case with the term–*compartmentalization* of the population.[10] Within the *millet* system, each community was given the right to maintain its own cultural, professional, religious and even judicial traditions. Political power would not interfere with these matters.

In various texts, it has been emphasised that the *millet* system was far from being egalitarian. Rankings, which had been stressed in the *millet* system, were the evidence provided to support this assertation. It is true that the *millet* system made a brief classification of subjects. The basic distinction was made between the *dominant* and *subject millets*. The effect of this distinction is evident in the fiscal policies of the empire. The Muslim warfare law created a special tax -*cizye*- for non-Muslim communities while placing them under the patronage of the peace. It also exempted them from military service. This tax was designed to be the price of the guarantees provided to them. In other words, it was the price of peace.

On the other hand, rankings of the *millet* system are better understood if taken as the pre-requisite of *cursus honorum* concerned with the delivery of the prestige. Although it brings to mind discrimination between subjects, it by no means resembled the patterns of hegemonic and discriminative classifications which are specific to modernity.[11]

A brief study of the career structure prevailing in the classical Ottoman regime will enable one to grasp the above-mentioned situation. Within the *millet* system, at least before the end of the 18th century, a subject who was born as a child of a Muslim family found it difficult to reach certain ranks within the administrative sphere. However, mostly for the Balkan non-Muslims, on the condition that they passed through the necessary stages of the *dev irme* system, it was much easier to reach some

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[10] Ortayl , "Osmanl Bar   ", **op. cit**., p. 17.
[11] A. Graham and K. Robert, "Devolution by Revolution: Selective Genocide Ensuing from French and Russian Revolutions", **Mankind Quarterly**, 39 (1998), EBSCHO HOST, Item Number: 1267605, pp. 1-15.

prestigious positions. What was hard for a native-born Muslim in a Muslim state was frequently easy for the convert Muslims.

More importantly, when talking about Armenians, their privileges were particularly generous. From the viewpoint of the rankings of the *millet* system, the qualification given to the Armenians was quite positive, and they were welcome into the system with the title *millet-i-sâd ka* (the loyal nation). Hence, assertions, claiming that the Armenians had been subjected to long term discrimination, including violence and massacres, and that Armenians were treated as a "second class minority"[12] within the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire seem to be gross exaggerations.

The inclusive mentality and applications of the *millet* system were maintained for centuries. The Ottoman Empire, isolated from the mercantile developments interweaving state power with religious power, easily welcomed and integrated French Huguenots and Spanish Jews fleeing persecution in Europe. The effects of this inclusive mentality was maintained even in the 19th century, as can be seen in the acceptance of the liberal nationalists who were the victims of the 1830 and 1848 Revolutions, forced to leave their homelands as a result of pressure from the powers of the Old Regime.

The founding principles of the Ottoman Empire, the overcoming of regional conflicts based on ethnicity and religion, are quite different from the idea of the genocide of a particular community by the institutions of the state. The atrocities perpetrated against the Alevite community in Central and Eastern Anatolia between the 16th and 18th centuries have been put forward as an exception to the generalization set forth above. It should be kept in mind that such atrocities were not the product of ethno-religious prejudices, such as those in Spain directed against the Jews. The rival Alevite groups were Turcoman in origin, as were the Ottomans themselves. Indeed, such atrocities are better understood if they are placed in the context of the Turco-Iranian Wars conducted within the stated period. No matter in what framework, they were, nevertheless, atrocities. Neither Hugenouts in France, nor Jews in Spain had taken part in hostile activities

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[12] Alison Palmer, "Colonial and Modern Genocide: Explanations and Categories", **Ethnic and Racial Studies**, 21/1 (1998), EBSCHO HOST, Item Number: 400185, p. 3.

directed against the countries they were living in. However, the Alevite heterodoxy, nourished by Shiate sources and incited by the Safavids in Iran, were in a state of continual rebellion -a "fifth column"- and actively sought to weaken the power of the Ottoman Empire internally.

The Modernization of the Ottoman State and the Idea of Genocide

The relationship between the state and her subjects was conducted covertly and indirectly in the old world. Confrontation was undesirable. However, the modern state has arisen as the product of intertwining confrontation between the institutional forms and the societal ones.

The pursuit of private interests, thereby "personalizing" state affairs can be seen in the Ottoman Empire, too. But they were never overtly expressed. Emphasizing the unquestionable sacred entity of the state pursued private interests, hidden behind the curtain of the state affairs. This prevented the advent of an *open* bargaining regime -i.e., the birth and the maturing of the parliamentary regime stemming from the confrontations of societal forms with the institutional ones.

There could never have been such a problem in Ottoman political history, involving a debate on which the societal partner of the state should be. A question such as "Who is the real owner of the state?" did not exist. Even if it existed, nobody could have addressed this question. Even the royal family would not dare to identify itself with the *Politeia* that was considered to be above all mundane creators. Institutions were held above secular powers in the way Plato had stated. In this tradition, the *raison d'état* - to put into Hegel's concepts - was the *Objective Geist* independent from every sort of subjective legitimacy; a unique standing point in the actions of it.

So, whilst the synthesis between politics and religion as in Spain (Catholicism and Politics), resulted in conversion and expulsion in the modern sense, the socially ownerless character of the Ottoman state, in a way, prevented it from acting in the name of a particular social class. This is the most important reference point differentiating it from the actions of an average mercantile state, reshaping itself by borrowing from the established beliefs of the major community. So, the practical effect of the afore-mentioned aspect of Ottoman political culture, eliminates the

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possibility of finding a departure point in social history which could explain the events of 1915.

Here, one objection could be that the modern state had been designed as a corporate body. It is true that the history of the modern state has witnessed the "impersonalization" of societal-institutional relations. For instance, issues such as how interests were to be depicted and pursued were arranged in the cycle of law. But here one should not be deeply influenced by this process. Instead, one should be aware of the dialectical and transitional character of the process. Indeed, this development is the solution to the problems resulting from the over-personalized relations of early modernization. So, the displacements between these two patterns have become reversible, especially during crises. The Nazi experience gives us a striking example of this transition. The Nazis, by objecting to the principle of the impersonalization of rules, had given a fetishist aspect to the "personalizing" of the establishment.

The inevitability of the modernization of the Ottoman Empire was begun to be acknowledged in the late 18th century. The proud Ottoman statesmen of earlier ages disappeared and were replaced by worried ones who had problems in coping with the expansionist policies of the modern Western states, which began to threaten the very existence of the Ottoman Empire. The solution to this problem was either to use their own methods against them, or simply to begin a process of Westernization. The Ottoman modernization has been viewed as an example of autocratic modernization. The elitist feature of this was quite visible. As there was a lack of societal support, the political elite carried out the modernization process. This meant the reappearance of the *Politeia* in a modern form.

The Ottoman modernizers perceived the modernization process as an intra-state matter. This approach stemmed from the historical background of their occupation. The sole issue they were interested in was the imitation of modern institutions and organisations. They were quite unaware of the basic underlying fact, namely the social dimension of modernity. The Ottoman reformers expected to re-invigorate the authority of political power over their subjects by adopting the centralizing and integrative establishment. They could not see that the compensation of the centrifugal dynamics could only be accomplished on the condition of the affairs of state were open to public debate. Thereby, the Centre's attempts to re-establish the state's authority caused

nothing other than a sharpening of the existing tensions, specific to centre-periphery relations. Each step taken by the Centre was perceived as an intervention and rejected by the peripheral powers. So, these modernist-integrative policies became trapped in a vicious circle and paradoxically led to a widening of the historical gap between the official and non-official spheres. Furthermore, the alienation of the state from her subjects (and *vice versa*) became worse. The integrative aspect of the modernization process led to problems in Europe too. But debates run on it did not question the nature of the process. Instead, debate concentrated on the mechanics of it. Consequently, the character of modernization in the West was linear whereas it was cyclical in the Ottoman pattern.

The classless character of the state continued during the process of modernization as well. The main deficiencies of the Ottoman modernization process once again indicate the organisational inability of the Ottomans to organise a genocide, by associating the *Staatsgeist* with the *Volksgeist*. On the other hand, the Eastern question got the benefit of the paradoxal aspects of Ottoman modernization and masterly manipulated the called centrifugal reflexes by injecting nationalism into them. This means that the process of hostility stemmed not from the original dynamics of Ottoman tradition but was imported from the outside world. This is quite the reverse of the *Holocaust*, which was rooted in a prolonged history of hostility from both the official and non-official spheres.

Ottoman modernization experienced the most extreme form of integrative crises, namely separatism. This tragic aspect of the Ottoman Empire provoked the defensive reflexes of the *Politeia*. In the eyes of the bureaucracy, *Devletin Bek'as* (the permanency of the State) became top priority. Those aspects of the modernisation process, concerning state-building, were (more or less) carried out successfully. Since the Ottoman Empire had long, deep and practical experience of this phenomenon. The problem at core was the lack a societal entity - which was the nation. The key element of Ottoman modernization -the perpetuation of the state- covertly incorporated the question, which can be formulated as finding out the original owner of the state other than the court society. The solution to this issue, formulated by the *Tanzimat* bureaucracy, was quite moderate and very different from the brutal nationalistic, antagonistic conflicts of the era. This means that, although the

problem faced by the state was so crucial as to be existential, the response was by no means draconian.

What the *Tanzimat* reformers did was an attempt to expand the Ottoman identity which up to that time had been applied only to the ruling dynasty. According to the *millet* system, which was now being reformed by the political elite, communities were allowed to maintain their cultural traditions as they had in the past. However, these were now incorporated into the Ottoman legal system, where the different nationalities were granted equal rights and responsibilities. This trend transforming Ottoman identity into a legal-political concept was by no means nationalistic in essence which might have resulted in a genocide. On the contrary, it was designed to mollify the ongoing separatist demands. It is unjust to identify the Ottomanisation of the population with any sort of assimilative policies, such as the Pan-Slavism of those days.

The outstanding figure of the modernization process, Ahmed Cevdet Pa a (1822-95), unlike others, had come to realise the importance of the cultural dimension in the nation-building process. According to him, the necessary societal framework to be carried out by the political elite, due to the institutional reforms, was to be based on Islam that reflected the belief of the dominant *millet*. Ahmed Cevdet stressed the priority of the *Volksgeist* above *Staatsgeist* as the reverse of the generally accepted relationship designed by his colleagues. Even if he was the most radical figure of *Tanzimat* reformism, his pro-nationalistic projects were not welcomed by the general body of the other *Tanzimat* reformers who worried about the rise of separatism. Furthermore, Ahmed Cevdet himself never defended the forced assimilation of the non-Muslims.

Other cosmopolitan empires which, in a sense, were facing similar ethnic uprising dangers, i.e., the Habsburgs and the Romanovs kept resisting such trends by practicing harsh counter state-nationalism. One of the most effective policies they had was to "purify" the civil-military bureaucracy both on the racial and religious levels. Though there were exceptions to this approach, generally one had to be German and Catholic in order to work in the civil service. Likewise, being Slav or Russian was the main recruitment criteria in the Tsarist bureaucracy.

However, the opposite pattern can be observed in the official employment policies of the Ottoman Empire. The *dev irme* system renewed by the *Tanzimat* modernism continued accepting non-

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Muslim and non-Turk components in the official realm. The reformed institutions of the empire employed talented Jewish, Greek and Armenian staff. Numerically, their numbers were above those of the Muslims and Turks. State policy did not hesitate to employ an Armenian at the most critical positions-i.e., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, the new version of the *dev irme* system removed the regulation that an applicant for a civil service position had to convert to Islam in order to be appointed.

The dynamics of Ottoman modernization does not show any symptoms which would later develop into the "disease" of genocide. The articulation of the modern state-building process with nation-building process was far from being realized. Even the separationist peripheral movements agitated by the European states were appeased through mild policies. This trend was continued in the latter stages of modernization.

The question seeking the original societal owner of the state, left vague in the *Tanzimat* reformism, was much more passionately tackled by the counter-*Tanzimat* movements, known as the *Young Ottoman* and the *Young Turk Movements*. Here, for the first time, does one witness some intellectual attempts stressing the role of ethnic and religious bonds. This means that *Volksgeist* was becoming much more efficient and more important than *Staatsgeist*. For instance, the most outstanding figures of the Young Ottoman movement, Ali Suavi and Nam k Kemâl, stressed and exulted cultural ties. But the official ideology known as the *Osmanl c l k* laid stress on the Brotherhood of the Ottoman *millet*s. Furthermore, the new stresses were incorporated into Young Ottoman texts in a disorganised manner and were never been set down as an alternative, substituting formulas.

In the post-Young Ottoman Turk Revolution of 1908, the problems that arose during the crises of nation-building began to be debated in a more strict sense. A well-educated Crimean Tatar Turk, Yusuf Akçura had published a long article in the beginning of the century, systematizing and discussing the options standing in the near future: **Üç Tarz- Siyaset** (Three Styles of Policies). He formulated three policies comparatively. They were Ottomanism, Islamism and Turkism. In the post-1908 Revolution period, as if to confirm Yusuf Akçura's ideas, the Ottoman intelligentsia was also divided into three groups. They had their own publications in which some fruitful debates were conducted. What is striking in

these debates is that even in the most radical ones, one cannot witness a trend rejecting the opponent's thesis totally. For instance, in a polemics between Süleyman Nazif defending the Ottomanist policies and Ahmed Ağaoğlu (an outstanding figure of Turkism), the latter advocated that the activities for the sake of Turkism was in a sense supporting Ottomanism, since the Ottoman land or state encompassed one of the essential part of the Turkic world. Ahmed Ağaoğlu used the same reasoning against one of the most prominent figures of the Islamist camp: Babanzade Ahmed Naim Bey. Here again, he advocated that activities for the sake of Turkism also would contribute to the strengthening of the Islamic bonds. The same can be said for the other's thesis. Advocating Islamism was considered to be an efficient way of strengthening the Turkic ties.

If the aforementioned texts are carefully read, it can be seen easily that at each camp radicalism was strictly controlled. On the other hand, the state party, *ttihad ve Terakki* (The Union and Progress) neither involved nor supported any of these theses; instead, it employed at least one representative of each movement in its central committee. Ottomanism was still the official ideology just before World War I. This also means that the political and intellectual climate of the post-revolutionary era of 1908 was still vague and far from creating the "necessary conditions for genocide". It is also true that separatist tendencies, at times supported by Austrian or British diplomacy, were also discernible in the leadership of some Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire.

Epilogue

The debate over the state ideology took place in "hellish" warfare conditions. The catastrophic fall of the so-called Third Rome meant fire and death. When "betrayal" sprang from agitations, and phantasms of nationalism were added to it, the whole picture becomes clear.[13] First the Armenians, provoked by the Russians, began to kill innocent Muslim people (Kurds and Circassians as well as Turks). Then followed the resettlement and the death of some innocent Armenians on the way.

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[13]   George W. Gawyrch, "The Culture and Political Violence in Turkish Society, 1903-14", **Middle East Studies**, 22 (1986), p. 327.

What happened in 1915 is beyond the limits of this article. Furthermore, the author does not believe in the validity of "document wars". Each new document will do nothing other than sharpening the existing hostile feelings of both sides. What the author has tried to postulate here is not to search for excuses but to direct the attention of both sides to an almost all-forgotten history, which has enabled us to live in peace for six centuries. The knowledge of how two peoples mutually "throttled" each other is useless, but the knowledge of how we lived in peace is priceless. If we, both Armenians and Turks, were parts of European history, we could not talk about such a hope. The interpretative absolutism of the *Holocaust* is true in a sense that nothing positive is observable before it. Neither Armenians nor Turks are part of such an history. This means that we still have hope. Let us put aside the mentality of "the children of the Original Sin" and leave them alone. We should not forget that coordinated reasoning of civilian histories has generated much more positive results than one-sided political judgements.