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Sleuthing to Redeem:
In Pursuit of Historical Change in the Late Ottoman Empire
Through Contemporary Historical Novels

Yasemin Şahin

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines fictional and scholarly representations of historical changes in the Ottoman Empire during its final century, with an eye to understanding the dynamics that divided and united the empire across communities. In order better to understand the interplay between history and fiction, as well as the historical changes themselves, I have analysed, in the light of Ottoman history and historiography, a selection of contemporary Anglophone historical novels which have a strong component of social engagement and could be said to attempt to intervene in the representation of Ottoman history. These novels are *The Janissary Tree* (2006) and *The Snake Stone* (2007) by Jason Goodwin, *The Abyssinian Proof* (2008) and *The Winter Thief* (2010) by Jenny White, and *Birds without Wings* (2004) by Louis de Bernières.

The nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire has been marked by technological, structural and social reforms, increased engagement with the European Powers, yet despite all such efforts, also by deteriorating economic status and increased divisions in the society. In their attempt to explore a past that best suits their vision of Ottoman society and the social conditions of the Ottoman Empire in its final century, these three authors have focused on three different moments of pronounced change, the *Tanzimat*, Sultan Abdülhamid II's reign, and the First World War. All three novelists are interested in uncovering the dynamics and management strategies regarding cultural diversity within the empire. The concept of Ottoman 'decline' and the *millet* system emerge as crucial in Jason Goodwin's work; Ottomanism and the heterogeneity of religious and national identifications and ideologies provide the critical focus in Jenny White's novels. Through the analysis of Goodwin's and White's novels, I show that crime fiction, with the genre's powerful ability to showcase social constituents and

conditions, can present historical change as a matter of internal Ottoman dynamism, and project complex and sympathetic characters who help the authors produce a redemptive image of the Empire. De Bernières's historical novel, by contrast, foregrounds the question of civilisation, and possible Ottoman difference from the West, while also exploring the challenges presented by intercultural coexistence in a small community that acts as a microcosm of the Ottoman Empire. Here the possibility of a common Ottoman identity, once perhaps a tacit condition, emerges as newly difficult to achieve because of the lack of any common definition of history, nationhood or patriotism as these concepts have emerged or been altered by the violent coming of modernity.

Through close reading of both texts and contexts in this thesis, I have aimed to determine the projections of each author regarding the efficacy of historical novels as a point of entry to the past, and of Ottoman institutions and ideals as a model for promoting and managing the mutual coexistence of multifaith, multi-ethnic, and indeed multicultural identities. The parameters of each author's investigation of Ottoman history are very much dependent on the kinds of past the writers envisage and are attempting to redeem. This vision in turn is informed by the authors' subject positions vis-à-vis our contemporary existence in a modern multicultural world. That is to say, the authors do not only participate in, but attempt to intervene in, Ottoman history writing, both to redeem a past which they judge to have been most likely misunderstood by western readers, but also to project some alternative futures based upon a new understanding. This thesis argues that more balanced and nuanced representations of the Ottoman past, produced both as a result of the continuous efforts of writers of fiction as well as historians, can help us as readers redefine our contemporary political landscape.

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Introduction

What a strange city Constantinople is. Splendour and misery, joy and tears, a despotism greater than any that may be found elsewhere, yet, at the same time, a greater liberty. Here, four different peoples dwell together, and do not hate each other with more than a becoming hatred. Turks, Armenians, Greeks and Jews all live together in Constantinople as children of the same soil, and they seem to put up with one another better than men of different parties, or countrymen of different provinces, in our own land.¹

There has been a surge in the production of fictional works in recent decades which undertake the task of getting the reader or the viewer closer to Ottoman history. Being products of the twenty-first century imagination, the novels I undertook to examine in this research are aimed at heightening the susceptibility of the reader to a certain past that *might just have been*. In an attempt to fill the gaps between readers' knowledge of Ottoman history and the heritage of the empire in the contemporary world, the authors use their informed imagination to alert readers to their own assumptions and potential biases. This way, they specifically allow themselves to recreate the controversial aspects of Ottoman imperial actions and policies by breaking silences which exist in history text books and expressing or challenging the implicit convictions of the readers. Unavoidably, like every individual who sees history from the perspective of their own personal background, these writers reflect their own projections of the significance of actual historical events and developments, but also specifically, of what being an Ottoman meant during the last century of the empire.

¹ Gerard de Nerval, *The Women of Cairo: Scenes of Life in the Orient*, 2 Vols (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), II, p. 161.

The works of literature studied in this research project, namely, *The Janissary Tree* (2006) and *The Snake Stone* (2007) by Jason Goodwin, *The Abyssinian Proof* (2008) and *The Winter Thief* (2010) by Jenny White, and *Birds without Wings* (2004) by Louis de Bernières, map some of the complexities of being a member of the last Muslim Empire during its waning years. The period covered by these novels stretches over a century from the early nineteenth century to shortly after the First World War (late 1830s and early 1840s by Goodwin, 1880s by White and the early twentieth century by de Bernières), during which time the Empire showed resistance to further destruction and collapse by taking precautions, particularly by carrying out reformation movements or waging legitimacy battles. Following decades-long suffering of the empire's subjects as the conflicts for independence were predominantly waged on its outskirts, the world eventually witnesses the transformation from an empire into a republic. In this project, on one hand, through the examination of the selected detective stories, the Ottoman Empire is observed from the point of view of the detectives, elite subjects of the empire, in an attempt to understand the struggles of the imperial core while the character of the region was prompted gradually to change through various nationalisms and Western imperialism. The specific use of detective characters with access to all strata of the society particularly provides the authors with the perfect vehicle to investigate both the crimes at hand and the complexities of the Ottoman society in the historical periods in question. On the other hand, in *Birds without Wings*, the concerns in the imperial core translate into the composition of a town. As it is, the alternative and fabricated histories narrated in the works under study here particularly correspond to and challenge the nationalist histories of post-Ottoman polities and identities.

In this study, even if cultural diversity is examined as an important focal point, the emphasis will mainly be on the representation of the gradual process of the empire's

dissolution. The works of fiction in question in this study, put together, examine the social tapestry of the empire when it was undergoing both a political deterioration and a rapid modernisation period in its final decades. It is witnessed in the novels that despite the efforts to confront the disintegration of the empire by state bureaucrats, dissatisfaction within the empire culminates in nationalist movements, and as illustrated by the characters in the contemporary works of fiction examined in this study, during such disturbances, historical subjects, as individuals, have had to find new ways to come to terms with their constantly shifting place within the empire. In its investigation of what being an Ottoman meant in the last century of the empire, this study examines not only the historical backdrop of the characters and events in the novels in question, but also the meaning and significance of the authors' approach to historiography, choices of genre, and other literary conventions for the contemporary reader.

On the whole, there are two main axes of this research project. On the one hand, I have tried to examine the representation of what it means to be an Ottoman and his (predominantly male subject) transformation throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The advance of 'modernity' in social sphere, material culture and technology as opposed to the continuing dominance of religion and superstition have been conducive to juxtapose and evaluate the transitional mileposts during the period in question. As the transformation of the Empire is explored through diverse primary considerations and viewpoints, despite setting their plots in different time periods, the writers of the works studied here were able to portray similar concerns regarding the representation of what being an Ottoman meant, including in terms of cultural diversity and modernity. The second consideration in this work has been the use of the historical novel and crime fiction to put the resources of literature to work in the interests of historiographical investigation. For this reason, specific examples from the novels have

been put under an analytical lens to reveal each author's perception of life, community, and government in the Ottoman Empire. These examples largely distinguish and pinpoint specific turning points that changed, and more often than not limited, the Ottomans' place in world history.

The Ottomans were an empire that, expanding from Asia Minor, stretched to territories in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe. As it spread across continents, it resettled some of its population in the newly acquired lands as its imperial policy and as far as assimilation was concerned, the empire itself evolved and changed as it interacted with new cultures, systems, technologies, administrative and military styles.² Diversity was encouraged, as, with the annexation of largely Christian populated territories that had mostly constituted the Byzantine Empire, and particularly since the reign of Sultan Mehmed II, as is widely acknowledged, the empire made use of its religious diversity to create within its organisation a system of division through diverse legal and administrative structures within it. People that fall within these divisions, which were called *millets*, were allowed to practice their religion, and non-Muslims became exempt from the duties Muslims carried out, such as military service, but at the same time these non-Muslim groups were unable to attain high offices as rulers.

The final century of the Ottoman Empire, before its collapse in the early twentieth century, is marked by the structural changes which had considerable impact on the makeup of the millets. By the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had already stagnated following the blow it had received to its expansionist policies as a result of its military defeats against the Habsburg Empire, which resulted in the Treaty of Carlowitz

² Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, 'Introduction', in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. by Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, 2 vols (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982), I: *The Central Lands*, pp.1-34 (p.11).

(Karlowitz) in 1699, which betrays the onset of the empire's military insecurities.³ With the advent of the nineteenth century, the balance of power had reversed against the Ottomans as European expansionism and scramble for territory now threatened the Ottomans' very existence. During this period, cultural diversity of the Ottomans, which allowed the empire to prosper and thrive for at least four hundred years, now jeopardised its very existence as the idea of nationalism and national sovereignty that developed as a result of the American and French Revolutions, the Napoleonic wars, and what is generally called the Enlightenment, spread across the Balkans. The response of the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century to the threat coming from its own subject communities and European nations, including Russia, which supported such upheavals, was initially meagre, but played a fundamental role in shifting the political and social structure of the empire and the terms on which its subjects' identifications were based. This period marks the Empire's initial embarking upon reforms aimed at a virtually wholesale modernisation along European, and particularly French, lines.

Since 'it was nothing less than a public declaration by the sultan that he would respect the rule of law', as Selim Deringil puts it, the reform edict of 1839 is principally accepted favourably as 'the start of the Ottoman constitutional movement'.⁴ The edict promoted the burgeoning of increasingly nonreligious military and legal structures, and, according to the dominant historical narratives, gradually transformed the archaic palace-oriented organisation of power. However, these gradual reforms that were carried out in various areas of government, including bureaucratic structure, law,

³ Behlül Özkan, *From the Abode of Islam to the Turkish Vatan: The Making of a National Homeland in Turkey* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 15.

⁴ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), p. 45; Leonard A. Stone, *Representations of Turkey: A Primer* (Ankara: ATS, 1998), p. 17.

military, education and finance, were also, to a great extent, conditioned by the strain of negotiating with and resisting British and Russian imperialist ambitions. The predominance of British interests over the Russians' in Ottoman policies could already be discerned through the 1838 Treaty of Balta Limanı, which imposed a free-trade regime on the Ottoman Empire while the Ottomans did not possess the legitimacy to import goods using similar privileges. The treaty generated a rise in trades in the empire in the mid-nineteenth century; however, the system of free-trade and French capitulations (*ahidnâmes*), coupled with the Porte's increased spending, precipitated an economic and political crisis that deepened further after the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russo War despite economic growth as a result of the loans the Empire received from the British (and investments by the French and Germans).⁵ In the meantime, the empowered status of Christians was starting to cause an upset among some Muslim circles 'who increasingly felt their position of superiority under the *Şeriat* was being undermined'.⁶ In the latter part of the nineteenth century, especially mid-1870s onwards, the palace assumed a more reactionary stance to the increasing empowerment of the subjects, non-Muslims or Muslims, by closing the newly formed parliament (which lasted just over a year), and repressing nationalist and liberal ideologies. Legal reforms in this period included 'the Penal Code (1858), the institution of secular (*nizami*) courts in 1869, the empowering of the Ministry of Justice to control these courts, as well as the introduction of the principle of advocacy (1879)'.⁷ However, for some circles, the continuing evolution of education system and the new constituents of state bureaucracy were insufficient, so the slow progress in the face of increased financial hardship and the general mood of oppression led to the development of an internal resistance against the

⁵ Stone, *Representations of Turkey*, p. 17.

⁶ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 48.

⁷ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 45.

monarchy, which found an outlet in the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.⁸ Bedross Der Matossian, in his *Shattered Dreams of Revolution*, explains the dynamics and the potential of this insurgence:

There is no doubt that the Revolution of 1908 was affected by the regional and global waves of revolutions and constitutional movements that emerged in France (1789), Japan (1868), Russia (1905), and Iran (1905–1911). All of these revolutions had in common that they believed the predicaments of their states and societies should be solved through the kind of political reform that had transformed the West into a successful entity: constitutionalism and parliamentary rule vehicles to curb the power of the monarchy. The revolutionaries of this period saw these political mechanisms as the only sure way to guarantee the demise of older, absolutist political systems.⁹

Despite the best intentions of this initiative, after the capture of Tripoli by the Italians in 1912 and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, the standpoint of the Young Turks (Committee of Union and Progress) would assume a rather ‘defensive’ character.¹⁰ The onset of the World War One would prove that the Young Turks were failing to prevent the collapse of the Empire.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire has been a contentious topic in the body of both national and international historical literature of the subsequent generations, with many efforts, ranging in their focus and points of interest, channelled in understanding the circumstances which led to it. These developments have particularly, and rather predominantly, found their expressions in the experience of both the *millet* system, which played a direct role in the administration of the Ottoman Empire on the basis of religious differences for most of its existence, and Ottomanism, the project to create an egalitarian citizenry within the context of a reformed empire. The *millet* system was a method of administration which was introduced after the takeover of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet II with the aim of governing the growing population of the empire with

⁸ Stone, *Representations of Turkey*, p.17.

⁹ Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 2.

¹⁰ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 47.

diverse religious backgrounds. Ottomanism, on the other hand, was the project of transformation of Ottoman subjects into Ottoman citizens and, as a byproduct of the will and efforts in keeping the empire together, was marked by the Tanzimat reforms, 1876-1878 Constitutional Era and the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.

The increased interest in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the *millet* system and Ottomanism is an expression today of a move away from the modernist postulation of homogeneity and totalising concepts of nation and territoriality towards the acceptance and celebration of heterogeneity, multiplicity, and individuality.

Particularly with the advent of globalised free-trade capitalism, taking hold of the national economic policies notably since the beginning of the 1980s and bringing with it, via more porous borders, an increase in the exchange of goods as well as labour forces, a renewed appreciation of pluralism has been cultivated around the world, paving the way for raised awareness about the past experiences of cultural diversity.

The hailing of the Ottoman *millet* system in recent decades is not independent of such developments since the increased demand and appreciation for individual particularities and freedoms of the second half of the twentieth century eventually started also to include religious freedoms.

Today, when social pluralism and individual identity have largely been accepted as the basis of modern democracy, the interest shown in the Ottoman Empire over the past few decades should not be seen independently of the worldwide interest in cultural diversity and the postmodern attraction to history. In an effort to be able to contribute to the scholarship on the relationship between imperial decline and social pluralism, at the outset of this project, I had confined the research problem of this thesis to the Western representations of multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire during its years of decline. As I discovered the limitations of applicability of the concept of cultural diversity or

multiculturalism retrospectively to the nineteenth century, the research question of this thesis has had to evolve to include various perceptions on Ottoman identity, history and nationalism. Multiculturalism is a form of social coexistence of people with different values in terms of religion, cultural heritage, etc. The concept of cultural diversity or multiculturalism can have limited applicability retrospectively since the phenomenon presupposes the equal application of democratic political representation among social groups under one law, whether those groups are defined by race, religion or assigned ethnicity.

The acceptance of the concept of toleration within the framework of cultural diversity is dependent on the choice of the individual or group to include or to exclude certain characteristics of the social group in question. In his review of Bhikhu Parekh's *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, Tariq Modood defines Parekh's understanding of multiculturalism as 'a form of (highly qualified) universalism'. According to Modood, multiculturalism's fundamental 'political' tenet is the liberals' obligation 'to go beyond toleration and accommodation of other cultures to a dialogue with them' in an 'institutionalised' way.¹¹

An early example of institutionalisation of multiculturalism is the regulated toleration of non-Islamic religions in the Ottoman Empire through the *millet* system. The interest in the *millet* system in recent academic studies and the cultural sphere can partially be explained through the efforts devoted to understanding the unavoidable experience of increase in the breadth of metropolitan cultural diversity in Western countries that occurred as a result of decolonisation, no border policies, and the lower costs and higher

¹¹ Tariq Modood, 'Their liberalism and our multiculturalism?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3.2 (June 2001), 245–257 (p. 248); Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000).

benefits of relocation. Another reason for the general interest in cultural diversity is the desire of the culturally-liberal-minded to overcome the obstacles in building truly egalitarian societies by embracing differences.

Examples of investigating and finding evidence of a just Ottoman society abound despite the vast variation of religious or ethnical affiliations within the empire. Gerald MacLean, for one, explains how ‘[i]n expressive and personal form, Evliya’s *Seyahatname* captures the Ottoman ideals of toleration, diversity and hospitality both as lived, conditional practice and – given his religious inclinations to the mystical traditions of Sufism – as the imaginary possibility of a joyous unconditionality’.¹²

Despite all its appeal for a seventeenth century community, however, the *millet* system unquestionably lacked universalism, one of the main building blocks of contemporary understanding of multiculturalism, for the nineteenth-century communities in the post-French Revolution era, until its final replacement with the official ideology of Ottomanism and its practical demonstration with the advent of a parliament.

Ottomanism unreservedly represents ‘the possibility of a “convivial cosmopolitanism”’ in Evliya Çelebi’s vision of the Ottoman Empire, which

is not a question simply of institutionalizing toleration but a founding principle and the future horizon of Ottoman civility, one that imagines and promotes the possibility of ‘a perpetual progressive movement’ that seeks to open hospitality to cultural and even religious differences, however radical they may be.¹³

Here we can see within MacLean’s description of Evliya Çelebi’s model of Ottoman ideals an anticipation of the later movement of ‘Ottomanism’ in the nineteenth century investigated most fully by Michelle Campos, and to which we will return later.¹⁴

¹² Gerald MacLean, ‘Remembering the Ottoman Past: Evliya Çelebi’s *Book of Travels* and Our Times’, in *Literature and Cultural Memory*, ed. by Mihaela Irimia, Dragoş Manea, and Andreea Paris (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2017), pp. 145-154 (p. 148).

¹³ MacLean, ‘Remembering the Ottoman Past’, p. 150.

¹⁴ Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Addressing the very humanistic concerns regarding the cohabitation of people with different criteria for individual constraints and adaptability, Ottomanism in this broad sense, as a belated project that may still trouble the conscience of a post-Ottoman citizenry, has been one of the two main axes of this project alongside the representation of the struggles of the empire in its last century.

Today, the last century of the Ottoman Empire is received with interest and a variety of genuine emotions, including bitterness, hostility, contentment and longing. The collapse of the empire is either celebrated by the many new proud nationalists of the nation-states that replaced the Empire or mourned for what it could have offered to the war-torn twentieth century if some things had gone differently. This leaves both the writer and the reader unavoidably obliged to see the history of the Ottoman Empire from a teleological perspective. Any little detail in the narratives of decline may carry a message for both the writer and reader as to the piled-up reasons that could have prevented the collapse. In this sense, the authors choose the time period, even the traits of their characters, based on a story they wish to tell about Ottoman social conditions. Helplessness in the face of an impending decline is not the only point under discussion; the ultimate result of the collapse is also latent. In this respect, both creative histories and their analyses are heavily contaminated by the contemporary politics in their focus on the ‘decline’ and fall of the Empire. There are multiple ways of reading history.

After all, as Elif Batuman writes,

Kemalism told Turks that they didn’t have to feel humiliated about the Treaty of Sèvres, because it was the Ottomans’ fault; neo-Ottomanism tells Turks that they don’t have to feel humiliated about the Ottomans, because if you go back far enough the Ottomans were the ones doing the humiliating.¹⁵

¹⁵ Elif Batuman, ‘Ottomania: A Hit TV Show Reimagines Turkey’s Imperial Past’, *The New Yorker*, (17-24 Feb, 2014) <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/02/17/ottomania>> [accessed 25 June 2018].

This rift between the dejected, nostalgic and reactionary neo-Ottomanists and the secularising and westernising Kemalists has been pivotal in the representations of the Ottoman Empire. In general terms, the neo-Ottomanist ideology operates on the premise that after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, which might not have occurred save for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the nation has become an intellectual prisoner of the West. Atatürk's Republic is criticised by neo-Ottomanists for destroying *our* culture, traditions, language, history, and religion following the footsteps of the imperialist forces. This throwback to the Ottoman Empire comes as a reaction to the dominant historical narratives of the republican period, which maintain that the Ottoman Empire had entered a period of decline in the nineteenth century due their detachment from scientific developments around the world based on their religious bigotry. Historians of the early republican period, in particular, saw the early nineteenth century reforms, including the *Tanzimat* reforms, as a reflection of the will to introduce a modern organisation of state, which eventually resulted in the foundation of modern Turkey in 1923. The neo-Ottomanists reacting against the dominant republican historical narrative deem Mustafa Kemal Atatürk the authoritarian founder of a modern, secular and democratic state, which destructively and catastrophically broke away from the Islamically grounded Ottoman Empire.

Fiction writers have contributed to this highly politicised subject with similarly varying foci and objectives in mind, from the investigation of Islamic traditions to the critique of nationalist ventures. The first novel examined in this thesis, Jason Goodwin's *The Janissary Tree*, entertains the declinist perspective mentioned above, maintaining that the destruction of the Janissary corps offered a turning point in the history of the empire, presenting a break away from backwardness. Unlike the protagonist of Jenny

White's novels, though, the protagonist of Goodwin's novels does not exhibit a secularising mindset. On the contrary, despite the appreciation of legal changes that bring equality among the Ottoman subjects, he laments the eradication of old customs and celebrates the millet system. Jenny White's novel, on the other hand, is rather more directly engaged with the ideology of Ottomanism. Louis de Bernières, differently from the former two, engages with the transition from multiculturalism to nationalism in a way that explores the limitations and the potential of state power and Ottomanism as its viable form of cohabitation among people from different religious backgrounds.

The question of choosing a time period in history upon which to focus depends not only on what aspects of the history the historian and the historical novelist want to write about, but also on the history they prefer not to discuss. It is just enough to see the setting and actors of choice, such as the Janissaries, the Armenians or a town which has all but perished in contemporary times, to perceive that these are all conscious choices made to convey a legacy in the act of storytelling. After all, this is also in the nature of the novel form; as Agnes Heller suggests, '[a] novel is a novel. It needs to be teleologically constructed. Through all its contingencies, the story finds its way to its end. Whether the end is happy or unhappy, it is the end of a particular narrative'.¹⁶

This aspect of the novel form, that the construction of a narrative requires active manipulation by way of being selective about the data and the input, has led some historians to see historical novels as spreading unhistorical truths. The author of *The Historical Novel*, Jerome de Groot, points to this fact:

Much criticism of the historical novel concerns its ability to change fact, and indeed those who attack the form are often concerned with its innate ability to encourage an audience into being knowingly misinformed, misled and duped. [...] indeed this

¹⁶ Agnes Heller, 'The Contemporary Historical Novel', *Thesis Eleven*, 106.1 (2011), 88-97 (p. 92).

fundamental strangeness is, it is argued, one the most important attributes of the historical novel.¹⁷

Even though sometimes historical novels, like other works of fiction, have been criticised for being shaped by creative and commercial constraints because of the need for the author to write *good* books that sell, the viewpoint of the historical novel in this argument is rather that ‘academic history has tended to be too wary of emotions, too prone to treat historical knowledge as though it were a form of pure reason existing beyond the sullyng realms of passion, fear, hope and sheer pleasure’.¹⁸

De Bernières’s earlier novel, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* (1994) deals with the dilemma of involving emotions when writing history. The attempts of Dr Iannis, one of the main characters in the novel, to write the history of the island of Cephallonia fail because he sets the tone of his book based on the memory of his emotions; therefore, being premised upon his familiarity and relationship with the island, any attempt to create a historical text becomes doomed to be replete with ‘loaded adjectives’ and subjectivity.¹⁹ The doctor’s inability to complete his book stems from his search for the authentic Cephallonian identity since there hardly seems to be one. Therefore, by adding the word ‘the personal’ to the title of the draft of his history book, the doctor frees himself from the burden of objectivity and finds that he can reflect ‘the ancient historical grudges’ and ‘be vitriolic about the Romans, the Normans, the Venetians, the Turks, the British, and even the islanders themselves’.²⁰ In his effort to accept the history of Cephallonia in its entirety, he compares the previous Cephallonian rulers’ *modus operandi* with that of the Turks:

[T]he Romans and the Normans were worse than the Turks, the Catholics were worse, the Turks themselves were probably not as bad as we like to imagine, and so

¹⁷ Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 6.

¹⁸ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 24.

¹⁹ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* (Great Britain: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1994; repr. Great Britain: Minerva, 1995; repr. 1997), p. 5.

²⁰ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 5.

paradoxically, were not as bad as themselves. The Russians were infinitely better and the French were marginally better. The latter enjoyed constructing roads, but could not be trusted – the Turks never promised us anything, and therefore were by definition incapable of perfidy – and the British were worse than the Turks for some of the time, and the best of all of them for the rest.²¹

The doctor is embittered about the centuries of invasions of the island, so builds his own reality and the reality of the island on this whirl of emotions: ‘Why could he not write like a writer of histories? Why could he not write without passion? Without anger? Without the sense of betrayal and oppression?’²² Being too well aware of this conundrum, the doctor accepts the difficulty of writing history. In the narrator’s words:

It was the same old problem; it was not so much a history as a lament. Or a tirade. Or a Philippic. He was struck by the illuminating idea that perhaps it was not that it was impossible for him to write a history, but that History Itself Was Impossible.²³

Doctor Iannis questions the possibility of a sentimental presentation of history. He then arrives at the conclusion that it is actually possible to write a sentimental history so long as the subjective nature of historiography is revealed.

When the doctor’s daughter, Pelagia, decides to finish her father’s project, she gathers data from a variety of resources, including libraries and her correspondence with the learned, experts and the representatives of museums and libraries around the world.²⁴

The act of collation of history from various resources gives her the emotional detachment to the material that her father lacked; a detachment that also gives her the authority to write history. Unlike the doctor, Pelagia is able to complete the book, although in the end the publishing agencies declare that they are not interested in publishing it, because there is ‘no market’ for it.²⁵ Regardless, the narrator describes Pelagia as ‘a substantial intellectual in the great Hellenic tradition’.²⁶ The doctor’s

²¹ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 147.

²² de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 5.

²³ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 278.

²⁴ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, pp. 395-6.

²⁵ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 396.

²⁶ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 396.

search for identity is achieved when Pelagia finishes the book, and the direct connection to the Hellenic roots the doctor had been trying to create is finally established because of her intellectual connection to the island's ancient inhabitants. The rejection by publishers to publish a book which lacked emotional, that is subjective, engagement demonstrates the demand among the common populace for emotional entanglement in order to appreciate history. Historical novels, with their unhistorical truths, bridge this gap between the historical knowledge of the reader and the reader's unspoken emotions by granting them the room for experiencing sympathy, pain and an eventual acceptance of, or coming to terms with, one's own experience of history.

One of the functions of the historical novel, the act of stimulating the right kind of feelings for its consumer, is the key to the expansion of the reach of historical fiction as a genre. It is still widely accepted that the historical novel was born in the early nineteenth century as a result of the 'transformation of men's existence and consciousness throughout Europe' after the French Revolution, which 'form[ed] the economic and ideological basis for [Sir Walter] Scott's historical novel'.²⁷ The historical novel, which was sometimes called historical romance, remained popular throughout the nineteenth century; however, after a plunge of interest in it in the period between the two world wars, the historical novel has again reached a big market today with even more historical material in circulation. As Perry Anderson puts it '[t]oday, the historical novel has become, at the upper ranges of fiction, more widespread than it was even at the height of its classical period in the early 19th century'.²⁸ The historical novel has emerged as 'a product of romantic nationalism', and today, it still acts as a medium

²⁷ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: The Merlin Press, 1989), p. 31.

²⁸ Perry Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe: Perry Anderson on the Historical Novel', *London Review of Books*, 33.15 (28 July 2011), 24-28 (p. 27).

for readers in their search for their personal or national identities.²⁹ This ability of historical fiction to represent the lived experience of its reader rests at the root of the popularity of the genre.

In the same vein, the Turkish TV show *Magnificent Century*, geographically being the most widely consumed cultural product ever produced on the Ottoman Empire, sits at the centre of the debates on the ability of a work of historical fiction to stimulate fascination of audience from a large variety of national background, completely overlooking its implications for contemporary nationalisms. A BBC article grants that '[t]hat it looks back 500 years to the era when Turkish Sultans ruled much of the Balkans and the Middle East is perhaps appropriate, as it has been seen in 47 countries mostly from this region'.³⁰ The show's success lies in its ability to unite the post-Ottoman citizenry beyond their current nationalist persuasions, allowing them to reconnect with the history of their country as part of former Ottoman territories in a way that enables them to appreciate the struggles and complications of their personal and national histories. Gerald MacLean suggests that:

The popularity of *Muhtesem Yuzyil* across widely differing audiences in Turkey testifies to different forms of cultural and nationalist nostalgia certainly, but the massive international take-up of the show indicates that there is more to it than Turks pondering their own past and debating its values.³¹

The reproduction of history as cultural products can actually bring a slow change to the way national histories are written, as the single historical 'truth' and the desire to accept it as it is presented are being cast off. The homogeneity of historical narratives in predominantly homogenous societies, national, religious or gender constructions included, can be ruptured through alternative narratives. The diversification of the

²⁹ Perry Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe', p. 24.

³⁰ Nathan Williams, 'The rise of Turkish soap power', *BBC News*, (28 June 2013) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22282563>> [accessed 6 July 2018].

³¹ Gerald MacLean, 'Remembering the Ottoman Past', p. 146.

imagery of the empire and the increase in its number and the diversity of medium used to create an Ottoman model mean that there can be more than one reality of the Ottoman Empire that the reader, or the viewer, can choose from.

Cultural productions can change the ways the consumers of historical fiction look at history and help contemporary societies benefit from historical recreations in unconventional ways. Creation processes can also bring additional values to our understanding of history, which may be non-existing in the archives or artefacts, or ignored for lack of resources. Elif Batuman mentions in her *New Yorker* article how Leslie Peirce thinks that ‘the show has influenced her biography of Roxelana, drawing her attention to the central role of children, who are often neglected in the historical record’. In Peirce’s words, ‘[t]here are things you understand once you see them acted out in front of you’.³² This is an important example which allows the characters in history, especially the female characters, the possibility to speak out in Turkey’s largely male-dominant social architecture. After all, in societies with hegemonic structures, it is always possible to encounter ‘mistakes’ which are mostly caused by omissions. Reha Çamuroğlu also cautions against too much dependency on the imperial archives, in which, the writer believes, fabrications might have been possible, and documents may have been destroyed.³³ The voice of the archives presents one of the challenges of objective representation.

Apart from the ‘revisionist feminist’ side of *Magnificent Century*, which largely dwells on historical female characters, the series also acts as a postcolonial text which needs to be considered in terms of writing back to the imperialist West, the fight against whom has dominated the declinist narratives of the Empire. The powerful discourse of the film

³² Batuman, ‘Ottomania’.

³³ Reha Çamuroğlu, *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşılığı ve Vaka-i Şerriye* (İstanbul: Kapı, 2009), pp. 8-9.

shows that the East, with all its intricacies, complexities and power struggles, had once been the seat of rule of the world, thus challenging the contemporary rhetoric of dominant West versus weak and uncivilised East, which still occupies the consciousness of both Western and post-Ottoman societies.³⁴ In the same vein, *Magnificent Century* can also be seen as a way of writing back to the early Republican official historiographies that have come to dominate much of Turkish public space, and find their counterparts in post-Ottoman nations in the Balkans and elsewhere. Such a wide frame of reference demonstrates the ways in which historical fiction subtly helps its consumers cope with the traumas of wars and their dissolved and forgotten past realities in the contemporaneity. Such reproductions of history change one's map of realities and help them see alternative realities in past societies. The multiplicity of representations opens the ground for more eclectic and multi-faceted discussions and evolves our own conceptions of history, one sultan, one harem at a time.

The novels in this research project initiate a renewed renegotiation of the ways in which the Ottoman Empire should be remembered today. By using the voice of the Ottomans, both real and imagined characters, they play a key role in the readjustment of the images of a perished Empire and its very real subjects to the social and political modes of our times. Through such representations of Ottoman lived experience, the reader can start to develop empathy for those caught up in past struggles and better understand the conditions that left scars through successive generations. An example of such struggles is the growing nationalism of the nineteenth century which forced the Ottoman subjects to embrace the prospects of having to redefine their own loyalty to the empire and to the sultan, and their identity in relation to both. As a result, the Ottoman subjects of the nineteenth century experienced deep transformations in short spans of time, which led

³⁴ de Groot, *Historical Novel*, p. 70.

to recognition of new identities for some of them and clashes between others. As religion started to lose its central position in the redistribution of power, Islam, which had been the core pillar of the empire for four centuries, started to lose its grip across the empire, slowly becoming one of the many means of reaching a social agreement across the empire.

During this process, the definitions of Ottoman identity and the best ways of governance multiplied. As Ibrahim Kaya puts it,

The rise of the West posed unforeseen questions to the Ottomans: should the West be recognized as a power? Were the Ottomans themselves no longer capable of governing the world? These questions could best be thought of as a search for a new definition of the Ottoman Empire. It is no surprise that Islamism and Westernism, as well as Turanism to an extent, came to be important paradigms in the nineteenth century.³⁵

Furthermore, every *millet* divided into various factions based on the relations of their membership with the imperial centre, and as a result, their financial status, religious representation, and territorial engagements redefined their loyalty to the seat of the Empire. In their descriptions of this period of transition to a more egalitarian and bureaucratic form of government and the emergence of new social formations around affinity-based identifications, a common point of reference in the novels in this study has been the renegotiation of the loyalty of the Sultan's subjects to their Sultans. Many of the characters in the novels studied here negotiate the validity and potency of their loyalties to the Sultan; while some commit acts of violence to defame or dethrone the Sultan, some find ways of reiterating their allegiance to him. The historical and physical backgrounds in the novels, especially the additional complications of criminal activities in the novels of Goodwin and White, and the tension caused by the Great War in de

³⁵ Ibrahim Kaya, *Social Theory and Later Modernities: The Turkish Experience* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 35.

Bernières, contribute to creating richly interesting settings that bring such confusions into the open.

Another common trait among all of the novels studied here is the tests various characters are put through regarding Western modernity. Reactions to European modernisation (technological, institutional, etc.) in the novels vary from fighting, confrontation to acceptance and blindly following, all surfacing in relation to their professed Ottoman identities and positions within the society. The main characters are those who view the Ottoman sense of justice and compassion as the guiding principles of Ottoman modernity. In the first two chapters, we observe the detectives establish a balancing act vis-à-vis the sultans of their time against these sultans' radical policies and actions. While Yashim, Jason Goodwin's protagonist analysed in the first chapter, questions the benefits of the modernisation movement in the empire in the shadow of European powers, Kamil Pasha, the protagonist of the novels discussed in the second chapter, wields his own education in and understanding of law to keep the empire united rather than strictly working through the ordained methods of incredulity and violence.

Chapter One, to a large extent, engages with Ottoman modernity: while the tradition-modernity dichotomy of the *Tanzimat* period is discussed in relation to the 'decline' thesis in *The Janissary Tree*, sporadic examples are given from *The Snake Stone* on the topic of modernity in relation to multiculturalism. The plot of *The Janissary Tree* follows Yashim's unravelling of a series of murder cases, which are connected to two simultaneous coup attempts against the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II in protest at his *Tanzimat* reforms. Against this background, and particularly in *The Janissary Tree*, the writer shares with the reader colourful imagery and historical details about the Janissaries, eunuchs, European-Ottoman relations and Istanbul as a city where Byzantine history converges with the Ottoman.

Jason Goodwin initially studied Byzantine history at Cambridge University before developing an interest in Ottoman history in later years. His interest in the Ottoman Empire developed as a result of a journey he made on foot to Istanbul from Poland in 1990, the outcome of which was his non-fiction book *On Foot to the Golden Horn: A Walk to Istanbul* (1993). This inspirational experience then becomes a point of entry for Goodwin into his long engagement with Ottoman history. In the ‘Introduction’ of his 1998 book on the Ottoman Empire *Lords of the Horizons*, Goodwin suggests that this walk changed his perspective of the European map at a time when Soviet Russia was slowly fading away: ‘I think we caught Europe at a moment of clarity, and what we saw was a world that slanted towards Istanbul’.³⁶ Still relatively influenced by his early experience in Poland, his crime fiction series largely take place in Istanbul with a general focus on topics such as the map of Europe, threats to the monarchy, the trafficking in antiquities, and modernisation versus tradition. After his fiction books gained popularity, Goodwin later published a cook book called *Yashim Cooks Istanbul: Culinary Adventures in the Ottoman Kitchen* (2016) based on the recipes his protagonist Yashim cooks in the novels.

Jason Goodwin’s novels, even if they are set in and about the Ottoman Empire, essentially focus on Ottoman-European relations and the ways Europeans, in general, interacted with the Ottomans. Indeed, one novel, *The Bellini Card* (2008), is even set in Venice, establishing the Ottomans’ ties with Venetians through the painter Gentile Bellini’s (c.1429-1507) connection with Sultan Mehmed II (1432-1481). Jason Goodwin, like Jenny White, likes to blend nineteenth-century Ottoman history with pre-Ottoman history, and with Ottoman history from before the period about which they

³⁶ Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. xii.

write. On the intricacy of the plots of his thrillers, Goodwin says that ‘plot, after all, is just the vehicle. What matters is the scenery, and who’s on board’.³⁷ As it happens, his kaleidoscopic presentations of Istanbul have received enthusiastic reviews placing his writing within the *exoticising* category: ‘When you read a historical mystery by Jason Goodwin, you take a magic carpet ride to the most exotic place on earth’.³⁸ This reception indicates the extent to which Goodwin’s novels can be read as *Orientalist*. Therefore, the question of rational reforms within the empire, or rational debates amongst Ottoman officials, does not play as strong a part in his representations as they do in the novels of Jenny White. While discussing choosing the time period for his fiction, Goodwin reflects on how he was hesitant about making a choice, or taking decisive action, or even choosing a side. He preferred to let things evolve, to remain open to possibilities as they unfolded:

‘There were two periods with an obvious draw. One was 16th century, the Ottoman Empire at the peak of its powers, pushing up to Austria, pushing down to the Red Sea, Suleyman the Magnificent, and all that. The trouble with that is that triumphalism is a kind of dull mode. I think it’s much more fun to write about decay and decline, things growing a bit shabby. The 1830s was an interesting period when you’ve got two moods clashing. There’s the nostalgic one, you know, Where have we gone wrong? And there’s the fearful, Where are we going next? I suppose that just makes for an interesting milieu.’³⁹

The first chapter is particularly interested in looking at this ‘clashing’ of ‘moods’. In this chapter, Goodwin’s presentation of conflict as nonessential and the balancing role his characters play with this regard correspond to the author’s own modest expectations from history.

³⁷ ‘Questions with Crime Writers: Jason Goodwin’ [interview with Jason Goodwin], *Faber and Faber* <<https://www.faber.co.uk/blog/questions-with-crime-writers-jason-goodwin/>> [accessed 6 July 2018].

³⁸ Marilyn Stasio, ‘Ottoman Intrigue’ *The New York Times* (4 Nov. 2007) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/books/review/Crime-t.html>> [accessed 6 July 2018].

³⁹ Noah Charney, ‘How I Write: Jason Goodwin, Best-selling author; Noah Charney interviews great writers about the writing life’, *Versopolis* <<http://www.versopolis.com/interview/160/how-i-write-jason-goodwin>> [accessed 5 July 2018].

The historical context studied in the second chapter allows a more detailed analysis of Ottoman rationality. Jenny White's Kamil Pasha series is different from Goodwin's Yashim series in that the changes in the Ottoman world are more internalised than in Goodwin's novels. There is a decisive position that has been taken through Kamil Pasha regarding a stress placed on the rule of law. Random chance in Goodwin's novels regarding the investigation of crimes gives way to a more ordered, but at the same time more hierarchical worldview in the semi-procedural crime fiction of White. In White's novels, 'the actual methods and procedures of police work are central to the structure, themes, and action'. In the works of both authors, however, romance has an important role to play because of the way these works can be seen as the byproducts of what Scaggs calls 'the hero detectives of bourgeois weakness'.⁴⁰ Within this context, Kamil Pasha represents the 'historical shift' which witnesses '[t]he transition [...] from a judicial process centered on confession and torture to one centered in a trial by evidence'.⁴¹ In this modern experience of fiction, Kamil Pasha's faith in law and Ottoman justice acts as the driving force in the novels.

As contrasted with Kamil Pasha's confidence in rationality, law, and order, Jenny White presents engrossing forces which take their power in the eyes of the general public from spirituality and the potency of immeasurability of authority. In *The Abyssinian Proof*, Kamil Pasha has to come to terms with his guilt over his father's death by embracing his intricate family relations with the help of a Muslim cleric, and not allow his personal connections to get in the way of his search for justice. In *The Winter Thief*, he has to

⁴⁰ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 91; Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity*, 2nd edn (London, Palgrave Macmillan: 2010), p. 229.

⁴¹ Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 2.

come to terms with having to ignore the orders of his Sultan in order to protect the Ottoman subjects from the personal vendetta of Vahid, the secret police chief.

Based on an understanding that Sultan Abdülhamid II's reign is stamped by the monarch's demand of loyalty, in Kamil Pasha novels, the author's enactment of the use of the secret police to counter dissension in Sultan Abdülhamid's reign comes to the fore as a demarcator for Kamil Pasha's loyalty to the monarch and as an indicator of his search for justice for all the sultan's subjects in equal measure. The period of the author's choice provides ample complications for crime fiction, and through Kamil Pasha's belief in law, the weaknesses of Abdülhamid's pan-Islamic policies also appear on display: 'Kamil – the special prosecutor in *The Winter Thief* – is a modernist who believes in the intrinsic virtue of a multi-ethnic, multi-denominational empire ruled by a just and secular bureaucracy. He tries to defend this principle against all odds'.⁴²

Jenny White has taught at Stockholm University's Institute for Turkish Studies after having taught social anthropology at Boston University until 2016. Her point of entry to interest in Turkey came through friends she made when she was studying abroad for a year in Germany. She then went on to Turkey to get a Master's degree in psychology in Ankara. Her academic interest subsequently fell on Turkey; her academic biography on her personal website is self-explanatory about her choices of topic and focus in her novels:

She has published three scholarly books on contemporary Turkey. *Money Makes Us Relatives*, a description of women's labor in urban Turkey in the 1980s, was published in 1994. *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey* was published in 2002. It explains the rise of Islamic politics in Turkey in the 1990s and won the 2003 Douglass Prize for best book in Europeanist anthropology. Her latest book (2012 Princeton), *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* takes a look at the transformations that Turkish Islam and secularism -- and the idea of the nation --

⁴² Aaron Leonard, 'Turkey Yesterday... and Today: An Interview with Jenny White', *History News Network* <<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/124707>> [accessed 9 July 2018].

have undergone in the past decade. What is behind Turkey's leap to international prominence, and what should we make of it?⁴³

In her novels, female characters, lesbian relationships, religion, nationalism and socialism come to the fore as the most-addressed topics. In her approach to history, Jenny White blends popular and scholarly academic histories of such issues, including the story of the Ark of the Covenant, and adapts them to the conditions of an Ottoman setting, allowing the author to ask the questions she wants to ask and convey the kinds of feelings she wishes these speculative narratives to evoke.

The subjectivity of history, artificiality of narratives, and the impossibility of acquiring complete knowledge about history form an important part of the discussions in the third chapter. The third chapter, in which *Birds without Wings* is examined, looks at the ways history is used and abused for the purpose of building nations, rebranding civilisations, and establishing loyalties. Louis de Bernières poses in the novel conjectural questions related to nationalism and irredentism that ravaged the accumulated customs, practices and experiences of transcultural actuality that had made up the Ottoman identity until the advent of the Great War. He is able to manifest the tensions of the early twentieth century in the shadow of an impending world war through the portrayal of everyday lives of the people of an idyllic, but by no means perfect or overly romanticised, town.

In an interview, de Bernières tells how he came to write *Birds without Wings*:

I went to south-west Turkey and there's a ghost town there. It used to be a mixed community, as described in the book more or less, and they obviously had a wonderful way of life, quite sophisticated. The town was finally destroyed by an earthquake in the Fifties, but it really started to die when the Christian population was deported. It was walking around that very special place that gave me the idea.⁴⁴

⁴³ 'Biography of Jenny White', <<http://www.jennywhite.net/>> [accessed 9 July 2018].

⁴⁴ Geraldine Bedell, 'I know I'm not Tolstoy, but I Try', *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jun/20/fiction.louisdebernieres>> [accessed 11 July 2018].

Having already written a historical novel, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, which investigates the impact of the destruction Second World War had on local people of a Mediterranean island, a visit to a coastal town in Turkey became Louis de Bernières's point of entry in which he recognised a 'quite' sophisticated way of life, the Ottoman imperial multicultural model, which had been destroyed by the Turkish War of Independence and population exchange. In de Bernières's novel, the increasing tension and hostility in the Empire among ethnic and religious groups have been approached with a rather nuanced manner than a more usual binary approach that is relatively more common in subjective historical narratives. De Bernières observes the opportunities presented within the Ottoman collective identity, but also demonstrates its limitations in the early twentieth century when commonalities become ruptured by Western imperialist and nationalist forces.

The works of fiction which are the subject of study in this thesis have been examined through an interdisciplinary lens. Even though on the critique of the earlier representation of the Ottoman Empire, a much larger literature exists, a major limitation has been the scant number of readily available critical resources because of the recentness of these works of fiction.⁴⁵ Based on the main points of interest of this research project, I have extensively benefitted from the writings of Niyazi Berkes, Michelle Campos and Selim Deringil to reach a general analysis of modernisation, multiculturalism and nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and of the ways the Ottomans chose to adapt to the changing world around them.

⁴⁵ Please see Nagihan Haliloglu's essay as an example of the scope of contemporary scholarly interest and criticism: Nagihan Haliloglu, 'Istanbul's Multiculturalism Reimagined in Contemporary British Fiction' in *Islam and the Politics of Culture in Europe: Memory, Aesthetics, Art*, ed. by Frank Peter, Sarah Dornhof and Elena Arigita (Wetzlar: transcript, 2013), pp. 61-74.

Goodwin, White and de Bernières tell similar stories about the destabilising relationships that emerged under the banner of *liberty, equality* and *fraternity*, ultimately leading to the homogenisation of identities. These stories, above all, involve the difficulties the Ottoman imperial centre encountered in managing populations from different faith groups, which at times challenged the imperial integrity. The uniquely complex social structure of the Ottomans was bounded, yet manageable and adaptable. Moreover, towards the end of its existence, the empire almost achieved a model which could permeate through the strict boundaries between faiths. Representations of lived experience of hardship as well as treasured commonalities open up to Western audiences this complex past, helping them grasp the disruptions and anxieties of the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire and offering hints about contemporary confusions and resentments. Representations of a shared past promote the possibility of a future based upon the notions of cultural hybridization, exchange and unity. In its most basic formulation, it has been the mission of this thesis to identify and analyse the nuances of such contemporary representations of historical changes and interpretations of Ottoman identity, or identities, in the last century of the Ottoman Empire's history.

Chapter One:
Palace Sleuthing and *Tanzimat* Problematics:
Tradition versus Modernity in Jason Goodwin's Ottoman Detective Fiction

‘We can be modern, Yashim: we must be modern. But do you really think modernity is something you can buy? Modernity isn’t a commodity. It’s a condition of the mind.’¹

In the history of the Ottoman Empire, the nineteenth century is registered as the century of economic deterioration, major territorial losses and empire-wide disintegration. It is also seen as the century of transformation, with the abolishing of the Janissaries in 1826 regarded as the starting point of decisive and impactful reforms that, as interactions with the states of Western Europe increased, expanded by degrees. Jason Goodwin’s fictions shed light on the early development of the nineteenth-century reforms, reflecting a much different character from the later reformation efforts of most interest to Jenny White and Louis de Bernières. The above passage from *The Janissary Tree* embodies a typical model within Ottoman historiography for grasping the confusions and anxieties of the nineteenth century that predominantly originated from the increasing encounters of the Ottoman Empire with Western European countries. Written in the twenty-first century, like the rest of the novels examined in this study, *The Janissary Tree* participates in both an ontological (such as ‘who the Ottomans were, and what and who they were becoming’) and epistemological (‘what they knew about the changes in their identity and how they articulated them’) investigation into the nature of nineteenth-century Ottoman identity. By representing compelling aspects of Ottoman history

¹ Jason Goodwin, *The Janissary Tree* (Croydon: Faber and Faber, 2006; repr. 2007), p. 316.

involving the critical premises of tradition, loyalty and modernity in his series of detective novels, Goodwin highlights the unique difficulties that the Ottomans encountered that distinguished them not only from their peers in other parts of the world, specifically in Europe, but also from the civilisations that preceded them. Through his synchronic and diachronic investigation, the author tackles the issue of modernity predominantly within the context of national, sexual and social identities, and informs the reader of the prevailing Ottoman imperial anxieties at the time, particularly in Istanbul, the imperial seat.

Jason Goodwin is a historical novel writer with an academic background as a historian. He is the author of a popular history book on the Ottoman Empire, *Lords of the Horizons*.² His historical crime fiction series, containing books titled *The Janissary Tree* (2006), *The Snake Stone* (2007), *The Bellini Card* (2008), *The Evil Eye* (2011) and *The Baklava Club* (2014), is centred on the adventures of the palace investigator, Yashim, the Eunuch, who solves murder mysteries that generally have intricate connection to the Palace or tragically to the future of the Empire itself. Chiefly set in Istanbul³ in the years between 1836 and 1842, the novels in this series shed light on the final years of Sultan Mahmud II's and the early years of Abdulmecid I's reigns, which are, in the novels, associated with the early years of a series of social and economic reformations following the *Tanzimat* Edict of 1839. *The Janissary Tree* mainly undertakes to examine the domestic and international reactions to Western-style reform schemes, especially military ones, undertaken in the Ottoman Empire as it, arguably, finds itself in a new kind of relationship with post-revolutionary Europe in the background. *The Snake Stone* addresses itself more specifically to changes to the *millet* system, the

² Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Vintage, 1999).

³ Apart from *The Bellini Card*, which for the most part takes place in Venice.

Ottoman system for enshrining in law religious toleration for Christians and Jews, ‘People of the Book’, and managing a huge multicultural and multi-faith empire. Taken together, these first two novels serve to frame the governing preoccupations of the series as a whole. This chapter will focus primarily on these texts, while attending to others in the series along the way.

1.1. *The Janissary Tree*

The Janissary Tree, the first book in the Yashim, the Eunuch series, is the story of a clash between traditionalist and progressive forces that emerged as a reaction to a series of reforms in major legislative and civic areas, including the military, education and taxation, in the early nineteenth century. The novel takes place in the year 1836, when, ten years after the abolition of the Janissary corps, or *Yeni Çeri* (New Troops), in 1826, Sultan Mahmud II (1785-1839) is about to initiate a series of reforms with an imperial edict. Goodwin devises two groups of coup plotters in his novel who are not content with the sultan’s reforms and plan to end his reign. The first opposition to Sultan Mahmud’s reforms comes from the remaining members of the defunct military organisation, the Janissaries, who collaborate with a group of members of the imperial household, the eunuchs, with the intention of reversing the reforms. On the other side of the Janissary-Eunuch conspiracy, the Seraskier, the head of the new army, comprises a second camp of coup plotters, and finding reforms inefficient and insufficient and seeing the empire itself as a defunct system in the modern world, seeks to replace it with a republic. In other words, while one group fears the uncertainty of their future in a rapidly changing state structure and attempts to depose Sultan Mahmud II in order to protect their *status quo*, the opposite camp deems customs and traditions as ‘just grime that accumulates’ and aims to replace the empire with a more modern mode of

government.⁴ *The Janissary Tree*, therefore, is an attempt to resituate the clash between traditionalists and modernists at the time of the *Tanzimat* (reorganisation or restructuring) reforms through the description of fictional coup attempts corresponding to some of the confusions of the time.

The plot of *The Janissary Tree* follows the daily life of Yashim, the eunuch investigator, who is assigned to investigate two different cases of murder: a series of murders involving four Palace military officers, commissioned by the Seraskier, the commander of the New Guard, the new European-style army, and the murder of a favourite concubine of Sultan Mahmud II, which is commissioned by the Valide Sultan, the mother of the sovereign Sultan. The novel starts with Yashim being called for by the Seraskier, who then informs Yashim about the mysterious death of a promising young officer and the disappearance of three others. The first dead soldier is discovered in a large copper cauldron in the old Janissary barracks after having been boiled. Pondering on the incident, Yashim remembers the presence of a fire-tower on the edge of these barracks, which had been manned by the Janissaries.⁵ Apart from the significant location, the symbolic tool of murder also points to a possible Janissary connection as Yashim recalls that the Janissary ranks used to hold kitchen-related titles such as the Soup-men, the Cook, the Head Scullion, Barrack-room Chief, Quartermaster, Watercarrier and Black Scullion.⁶

As Yashim continues his investigation following this lead, the bodies of the remaining three young officers, murdered with a cooking related tool or method, appear one by one at locations that had allegedly been symbolic for the Janissary corps. The murders

⁴ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 313.

⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 14

⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 98; Raphaella Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1971), p. 35.

being linked with the Janissaries unsettles Yashim profoundly, since the Janissaries' abolition in 1826 was followed by bloody fighting, with an estimated loss of 5,000 Janissaries and 600 loyal troops, and Yashim predicts the possibility of the survivors' vengeful return.⁷ The mission gets even more complicated as, in addition to these cadets' murders, Yashim also has to investigate the mysterious death of a *gözde* ('favourite') concubine at the palace. Yashim, through these two murder investigations, gradually uncovers the connection linking these two sets of murders with the two coup plots designed to overthrow the sultan. At the end of the novel, Yashim's mission to find the murderers of the missing officers turns into preventing a civil disturbance which could result in the regicide of Mahmud II, or even the demise of the Empire.

In the novel, this commotion, forged as a result of the political agendas of the defunct Janissary Corps, the Palace Eunuchs and the Seraskier, is claimed to have been incited in consequence of the reforms set to be initiated by the Sultan Mahmud II. The reform edict that is expected to be proclaimed by the Sultan in 1836 in *The Janissary Tree* is a conjectural fictional experiment based on the Imperial Rescript of Gülhane of 1839, which is a document that concedes the presence of an imperial decline (of 150 years) and urges that the needed changes be carried out based on three foundational precepts: the protection of 'life, honour and property', a fairer tax system, and a reformed conscription system.⁸ Proclaimed on 3 November 1839, the document is an acknowledgement and a short evaluation of the failures of the empire, and a framework

⁷ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 423; Cemal Şener claims in his introduction to Reha Çamuroğlu's *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşılığı ve Vaka-i Şerriyye* [The Bektashi Faith of the Janissaries and the Inauspicious Event] that 3 thousand Janissaries died in Istanbul as a result of the turmoil of 15 June 1826, 7-8 thousand were executed, and tens of thousands of Janissaries were exiled (Cemal Şener, 'Sunuş' [Introduction], Reha Çamuroğlu, *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşılığı ve Vaka-i Şerriyye* [The Bektashi Faith of the Janissaries and the Inauspicious Event] (İstanbul: Kapı, 2009), pp. ix-xii (p. xi)).

⁸ *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, ed. by Jacob Coleman Hurewitz; trans. by Halil Inalcik, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956; repr. 1979), *Volume 2 British-French Supremacy, 1914-1945*, p. 270.

for a vision of a more just future. In *The Janissary Tree*, the Sultan's formulation of the Edict is explained within the context of the imperial throne's commitments to restoring the frail reputation of the Empire by overhauling the systemic faults within its administration and by bolstering the Sultan's sovereign rule in the face of the pressures stemming from 'military weakness[es]'.⁹

Introducing crimes and the means and techniques of solving them in fiction is a very efficient way of unveiling the complications and dysfunctions in a given society. As Heather Worthington puts it, '[w]e see clearly, in crime fiction, the anxieties, the morals and values of the contemporary society'.¹⁰ Goodwin, by having Yashim go sleuthing after the criminals, takes the reader on an inquisitive mental journey related to both the daily life in the Ottoman Empire, and its organisation, including the military system and palace life. In the meantime, through the pursuit of the crime, it becomes possible to witness the changes in society since 'crime is the deviant action of the marginalised individual that defines the normative centre of society'.¹¹ This way, it becomes possible to see how the author delineates through his characters some of the domestic and international actors and conditions that are central to the organisation of the society. In *The Janissary Tree*, these actors and conditions are those that were part of the Ottoman political decision-making in the years right before the declaration of the Reform Edict in 1839. Before moving on to the tradition-modernisation dichotomy of this period, the following sections of this chapter will explore the actors and the themes that have played an important role in Goodwin's vision of the Ottoman Empire at this point in its

⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 229-30.

¹⁰ Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. ix-x.

¹¹ Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. x.

history when its ‘anachronistic political and socio-economic structures’ were being reformed extensively.¹²

1.1.1. The Ottoman Decline, the Powers and the Eastern Question through the Edict

Before the rise of the notorious *Eastern Question*, which was the political quandary among the Western Great Powers presenting a new opportunity from which to draw maximum benefit should the Ottoman Empire disappear, back in the classical period of the Empire, the Ottoman rulers took pride in their military achievements, and by incorporating religious multiplicity into their rule, they consolidated their power in a large geography. Philip Mansel shows how the Ottoman Empire is mentioned as a ‘great power rather than as a Muslim enemy’ in the literature circulated in France from the late fifteenth century to the seventeenth.¹³ Headed by the long-lasting and powerful dynasty members with loyal subjects from a variety of backgrounds, their invincible military capabilities had allowed the Ottomans to perceive themselves as the rulers of the world. The consecutive military defeats, therefore, did not affect their self-confidence in the years to follow even after the advance of the so-called age of decline.¹⁴ Moreover, as Niyazi Berkes argues in his *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, their self-glorification even helped the Ottomans avoid confrontation with the unfavourable realities of their time: the fact that the Ottomans had such strong beliefs in

¹² Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 23.

¹³ Philip Mansel, ‘The French Renaissance in Search of the Ottoman Empire’, in *Re-Orienting the Renaissance*, ed. by Gerald MacLean (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 96-107 (p. 98).

¹⁴ Olivier Bouquet, ‘Is It Time to Stop Speaking about Ottoman Modernisation’, in *Order and Compromise: Government Practices in Turkey from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early 21st Century*, ed. by Marc Aymes, Benjamin Gourisse and Élise Massicard (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 45-67 (pp. 45-8).

the ‘superiority of their own system’ had caused their detachment from the developments in the West where ‘a new civilization’ was rising.¹⁵

Developments in their western neighbours did not alarm Ottoman officials nor inspire Ottoman intellectuals at a capacity that would encourage a grand-scale action; therefore, the Ottomans sustained their status in the world without sizeable exchange taking place with the West. A rare example mentioned by Berkes is İbrahim Müteferrika, who was an early eighteenth-century reformer. According to Berkes’s account, as early as 1731, Müteferrika discusses in his book *'Usûl ul-Hikam fî Nizâm ul-'Umam* (Rational Bases for the Polities of Nations) the reasons for the rise of the West and the necessity for reforms in the Ottoman Empire. In the book, Müteferrika first details the achievements of the ‘Christian’ world, such as the colonisation of the American continent, the occupation of some territories in the Eastern and Western oceans, and the discovery of a new route to the Far East.¹⁶ Berkes explains how Ibrahim Müteferrika thought, as early as the early eighteenth century, that these recent developments in the West created a division in the world between the old world and the new. Contrary to the innovative world of Christianity, the world of Islam had remained stagnant and ignorant. It had neglected to study its neighbours, especially its European neighbours and Russia, which he anticipated would soon attack the Ottoman Empire. Müteferrika believed that the Europeans were transforming into world powers not only because of the new methods they were developing to protect their lands, but also because of the new principles, procedures and laws that they were introducing to improve their society. Ultimately, the Europeans were gradually becoming victorious over the Ottomans.¹⁷

¹⁵ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst and Company, 1998), p. 24.

¹⁶ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 43.

A notion of nostalgia for the stronger days of the Empire and an anticipation of an Ottoman decline can be traced early in the novel *The Janissary Tree*, starting from the first few pages of the book when the conversation between Yashim and the Seraskier, the chief commander of the army, puts emphasis on the territorial losses to the Russians. A sense of longing for the old and strong days of the Empire is emphasized by means of the heavy presence of lament and resentment for the loss of control in the territories covering Crimea, Egypt and Greece. The Russian Empire is introduced as presenting a great danger to the Ottomans, particularly because of the Russian dominance in Crimea as of 1783, following the loss of the protectorate status of the Crimean Khanate in 1774, and the resultant continuing expulsion of the Tatars from Crimea in the nineteenth century. In Yashim's reverie, 'the ghosts of fearless riders', ie. the Tatars, are in the vicinity of the 'shattered palace in the Crimea', reminding him of the ruination of the Khanate, and the lack of power of the Empire to defend them against Russia.¹⁸ In this anachronistic account, Yashim is represented as having been overcome by a sense of defeat and desolation that he witnessed in Crimea, which is no longer under the control of the Tatars, the 'little brothers to the Ottoman states', but of the Russian Cossacks.¹⁹ Even if Yashim manages to run away from the bitter cold of the steppe to the safety of Istanbul, he is still being hunted by the ghosts of the Crimean past in the Ottoman present.²⁰

The Seraskier disdains the diplomatic failure in Crimea that Yashim was part of, although, speaking on behalf of the Ottomans, Yashim confesses that '[w]e failed there [in Crimea - or in their war against Russia] many years ago', invoking early concerns, which were also shared by İbrahim Müteferrika, about the possibility of Russian threat

¹⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 2.

¹⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 7.

²⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 2.

to the Empire.²¹ It is unclear what Yashim's mission in Crimea was, and what the 'little' he did in Crimea refers to, although, considering that it is mentioned in the novel that '[t]he khan himself fretted in exile', the 'little' Yashim did may refer to the finalisation of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774, which gave the Russians dominance over the territory as well as 'the right to navigate the Black Sea, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles'.²² By the end of the eighteenth century, Russia had already secured considerable influence in the Black Sea and the rule of the entire northern coast of the Black Sea. The diplomatic tensions between the Russians and the Ottomans arising from military conflicts are alluded to not only by means of the derisive comments of the Seraskier, but also through the complacent attitude of the Sultan regarding a case of the humiliation of the Russian diplomats that is brought to his attention later on in the novel during a concert at the Palace.²³ Such examples of animosity between the Russians and the Ottomans in the novel result from the succession of recent wars between the Russians and the Ottomans, which generally ended with the Russians gaining control of formerly Ottoman territory.

²¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 6-7; The story of the loss of Crimea indeed goes a few centuries back and epitomises the change in the balance of power that also took place in the Balkans. The Crimean Khanate had been a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, during which time the Crimeans fought for the Ottomans as mounted cavalry, making them 'the only de jure autonomous Muslim administrative unit in the empire' (M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 7). The change in their status started to appear when Russia became strong enough to impose the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) on the Tatars, prohibiting them from raiding and pillage in Russia. The Ottoman dominance over Crimea was eventually terminated by the end of the Russo-Turkish War (1768-74), which was concluded with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. The Treaty gave the Russians dominance over the territory as well as 'the right to navigate the Black Sea, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles' (R. Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 18). Only nine years later, however, Crimea's independent status was annulled when Russia claimed it under Catherine the Great's rule.

²² J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 7; R. Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 18; The mentioned Khan, therefore, may refer to Devlet Giray, who was installed as the khan by the Tatar rebels and had to go into exile after Şahin Giray took over the Khanate, or it could even refer to Şahin Giray himself, who, after the annexation of the Crimea to Russia in 1783, became an exile in Saint Petersburg at first, and then was executed in Rhodes by the Ottomans (J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 7).

²³ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 205-10.

The historical background presented in the novel is the period after which Mehmet Ali, the Albanian, sent his forces to help the Ottoman Empire with the Greek uprisings.²⁴ The Russians had already been backing Greek struggles of independence, which had indeed caused the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29. This war was concluded by the Treaty of Edirne (14 September 1829), which recognized Russia's dominance over the eastern shores of the Black Sea, Georgia and parts of present-day Armenia. However, when Mehmet Ali in the late 1830s secured influence in the region, and he and his son became a threat to the Ottomans, Mahmud II was obliged to ask for outside help to stop the advancement of Mehmet Ali's troops. After the British declined the call for help, the Sultan asked for the help of the Russians, who were eager to intervene as it would mean that they could gain leverage against Western European powers over Constantinople.²⁵ Raphaela Lewis summarizes the ascent of the Russian power within the Ottoman borders giving clues as to resulting anxieties:

The landing of a powerful Russian force in the Asian shores of the Bosphorus was concluded by the Treaty of Hunkar Iskelesi in July 1833 [...]. This marked the breakdown of Turkish dominance in the Black Sea, and also over their Christian subjects, for it gave the Russians an excuse to claim to be protectors of all subjects of the Turkish Empire who were members of the Greek Church.²⁶

This instance of the Ottomans yielding to Russian military force is articulated in the novel by the narrator from the perspective of the Seraskier, whose inner reflections inform the reader that now 'the Russians were closer to Istanbul than at any time in living memory'.²⁷

Expanding Russian influence within state affairs coupled with the economic and military failures of the Empire is a continuing source of anxiety in *The Janissary Tree*,

²⁴ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 66.

²⁵ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 66.

²⁶ R. Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 18.

²⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 8.

not only for the Ottomans, but also for the Western Powers. The author further makes use of this feud to institute a connection between the Russians and the pending fictional 1836 Janissary-Eunuch uprising to register the determination of the Russians to weaken the Sublime Porte and the Palace. Yashim's explanation to the Valide Sultan in the resolution of the novel betrays the writer's attitude regarding the central role the Russians played in Ottoman consciousness, and possibly in the consciousness of the English, too:

They're poised for a takeover of Istanbul, [...] Ever since the days of the Byzantines they've dreamed of the city. It was the second Rome – and Moscow is the third. They wanted anarchy in Istanbul. They didn't care how it happened – a Janissary coup, the seraskier going mad and proclaiming himself ruler, anything. If the House of Osman was extinguished, imagine the consequences! They're camped a week or so away. They'd claim to be restoring order, or to be protecting the Orthodox, or to be being sucked into the vortex one way or another, it wouldn't matter how. Just so long as they could occupy the city and provide themselves with a reasonable excuse afterwards, when the European Powers started kicking up a fuss. The French, the English, they're terrified of letting the Russians in – but once they're in, they'd be here to stay. Look at the Crimea.²⁸

The mention of Russian political ambitions by Valide Sultan within the context of Constantinople's strategic importance helps the author not only to portray the extent of Russian menace, but also to situate the Western powers' involvement in the domestic affairs of the Ottomans.

The involvement of the Western Powers in the relations between the Ottoman and Russian Empires following the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi (1833) is an important moment in history, since the resulting London Straits Convention of 1841, which forced Russia to abandon its privileges regarding the closure of the straits to Western powers, allowed the Powers to be involved in Ottoman internal affairs and cast a policy shift woven around the *Eastern Question*.²⁹ The Eastern Question was considered as a

²⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 328.

²⁹ Pascal Firges, *French Revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire: Diplomacy, Political Culture and the Limiting of Universal Revolution, 1792-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 50.

diplomatic problem by the Western European countries that emerged as a response to uprisings and independence movements in the Balkans, prompting the Great Powers to institute their authority in these complications for the furtherance of their own interests. This not only became part of the expansionist imperial policies of the European Powers, especially due to the difficulties the Ottoman Empire was having managing its domestic issues, but also created tensions among the European states in their race of gaining more control in the world politics.

Along with Russian ambitions, another condition that led to the formulation of the *Eastern Question* was the concern among the Western Powers regarding the status of the Greeks under Ottoman rule. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman lands with a majority Greek population had become a catalyst for the power struggles in Europe, which would eventually extend into the remaining territories of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. Şükrü Hanioglu maintains that the extension of external support by the major powers, namely the French and the British, for the independence of a people under the Ottoman dominion, was specific to the Greek question, which had wider consequences for other Christian populations of the Empire.³⁰ Before the Greek uprisings, the fact that Ottoman Christian subjects were ruled by a Muslim Empire had been typically acknowledged to be ‘an internal affair of the Ottoman state’. The ‘Serbian Question’, for example, had remained outside the Powers’ focus for being a ‘moral issue’ when Russia supported the rebels during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1806-12. The Greek case, however, had a different value in European consciousness, and unlike previous uprisings in the past, the Greek cause had international support. The situation, therefore, had become tricky for the Ottomans, since, when Greek independence was finally recognised by the Treaty of Constantinople

³⁰ Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, pp. 66-69.

in 1832, it formed a precedent for other Christians of the Empire. The Christian world in Europe thereupon started to form strong opinions regarding the problems of the Christian populations in the Empire, and before long ‘internationalization of local grievances’ proved to be a powerful method for the non-Muslim Ottoman subjects to demand independence.³¹

Correspondingly, from the viewpoint of the Sultan, the narrator explains that ‘growing spirit of rebellion’ of the Greeks had been ‘openly fostered by the Russians’, and that their independence ‘had been bought for them by European Powers’, which had established a ‘bad example’ for the rest of the Ottoman communities.³² Despite the attempt of the author to put the Russian and Western Powers on an equal footing, it can be said that the involvement of the Western Powers in the international affairs of the Ottomans is largely portrayed as an agreeable development, in contrast to the possibility of Russia’s claims over Ottoman territories. As noted by Niyazi Berkes, in this early period, ‘both Russia and France showed aspirations, conflicting but from the Ottoman viewpoint identical, of establishing themselves in the Balkans or the Levant’.³³

However, the description of the fairly oblivious and Romantic-nationalist representatives of the British embassy, who are purely interested in the cultural norms of the Ottomans, can be seen as an attempt to evaluate the British Empire as an impartial participant or arbitrator in Ottoman affairs. In the novel, the embassy officials’ coincidental presence at important times and places that result in events that could change the course of history for the Ottomans, such as the death of the Seraskier, when Compston and Fizerly, the two Embassy officials in disguise as traditional Ottoman men, walk onto the roof of the Great Mosque, perhaps a criticism of the ineptness of the

³¹ Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, pp. 66-69.

³² J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 230.

³³ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 51.

British officials, also acts as a display of the nonchalant attitude of the British government. The consequentiality of their effortless intervention and the caricature-like image of the British officials function as a projection of the antagonistic forces around the Ottomans and how even the casual involvement of the British nevertheless has the power to turn around the events.³⁴

It can be said that the general tendency in the novel is to flaunt the difference between the Russians and the Western European countries who support Greek independence with the knowledge that the Crimean War (1853-56) is lying in wait. While the Russian ambitions are employed as an important theme in the novel, the damage done by the remaining members of the Concert of Europe through their participation in Ottoman affairs is largely excused.³⁵ In fact, it can even be said that the novelist is engaged in an act of partial acquittal of the Western powers of any vile political deeds, in opposition to his demonic descriptions of the Russians, which will be discussed at length in the next section.³⁶

1.1.2. The Edict and the Foreign Agents in the Empire

In his formulation of the Ottoman decline in the novel, the author starts with the Empire's inability to defend the Crimean Tatars against the Russian Empire, which indeed resulted in the delivery of hegemonic concessions to Russia in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), an outcome that became symbolic of the shifting power relations in the region in Ottoman historiography and considered as the point the Eastern Question was posed.³⁷ The author also visits through the Seraskier's bitterness the further losses Turkish-Egyptian navies suffered at the Battle of Navarino (1827), the

³⁴ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 317.

³⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 328.

³⁶ Except for the wife of the Russian ambassador with whom Yashim has sexual intercourse.

³⁷ Mehrdad Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: A Historical Encyclopaedia*, 2 vols (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2017), I, pp. 34-35.

Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29 that was triggered by the Greek rebellion for Independence (1821-32), and the resulting acknowledgement of the independence of Greece (1832) by the Ottoman Empire, which were attestations to the increasing supremacy of Great Britain, France, and Russia, over the Ottoman Empire. The novel is framed throughout via the Ottomans' relationship with the Western formulations of the Ottoman decline as it is also maintained throughout the novel that Sultan Mahmud II (1809-1838) was aware of the need for military and social reforms if the Ottomans were to regain their former strength and power in the region, and like his predecessor Selim III, he had enemies who attempted to prevent him from realising his reforms.

As suggested by the novel's title, a key function in the novel has been assigned to the Janissaries in regards to the military weakness and challenges the Ottoman Empire was facing before the onset of the reforms prior to the promulgation of the Edict of 1839. After the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826, Mahmud II actively began social and political reforms which would continue to be implemented after his death in 1839. Among his wide-ranging reforms were the rebuilding of the empire's armed forces, limitation of the jurisdictions of pashas and high-ranking officials by means of expanding the subjects' rights to trial; publication of the first fully Turkish-language newspaper, the *Takvimi Vekayi*; establishment of non-religious schools; and introduction of the first municipal administration in Istanbul which carried out regular police and firemen duties, which had previously been carried out by the Janissaries.³⁸ *The Janissary Tree* is presented as a contest between the institutions that take pride in their traditions and those that are determined to revamp them within the framework of the post-abolition history of the Janissaries, with additional factions in society other

³⁸ John Freely, *Istanbul: The Imperial City* (England: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 267-8.

than the military challenging Sultan Mahmud's reforms, which constitutes the main line of historical inquiry by the author.

Taking these two points into consideration, there are two main spheres of operation in the novel by means of which the rationale and the influence of the Edict are examined, and as such render the decree the backbone of the novel's plot. While the reactions to the idea of change through the Edict produce a combination of responses within the Empire, the evolving relationship of the Empire with the European Powers similarly generates tensions as a result of the possibility of a power shift among Powers. The presence and the portrayal of the foreigners in Istanbul in the novel speak precisely to this point and to the formulation of the Eastern Question. Among the comments on the changes in the empire, Niyazi Berkes speaks of an American bishop who wrote that "[t]he destruction of the Janissaries overthrew the great barrier to the influence of foreigners upon Turkey [...] The doors to a free intercourse have been thrown wide open'.³⁹ The presence of foreigners in the novel can profitably be read as a means of reflecting on both internal developments regarding the reforms and their international reception.

Yashim's friend Stanislaw Palewski, the Polish Ambassador, provides some insights for Yashim regarding the strategic position of the Sultan and the Porte in connection with their relations with the Power countries, while the ambassador himself illustrates the precarious situation of the Ottomans vis-à-vis the Western powers. He makes an important suggestion concerning the dependence of the Ottoman Empire on Western resources to achieve the goals of the sultan. In the novel, the sultan is portrayed as the patron and pioneer of this reform enterprise, through whose promulgation, the Palace is

³⁹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 138.

described to have aimed to attract the financial sponsorship of the Powers. The 1839 Gülhane Rescript is known to have been drafted by the then Foreign Minister, Mustafa Reşid Paşa (1800-1858), in order to generate fundamental changes within the Empire. In terms of its legislative foundation, while Berkes urges us not to presume ‘English or French political impact’ in the formulation of the document, Butrus Abu-Manneh explains how Stanford Jay Shaw finds in the document traces of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789.⁴⁰ Berkes, furthermore, asserts strongly the claim that:

It is obvious that this is the earliest constitutional document in any Islamic country. While the Protocol and Charter did not form a constitution, there is no doubt that they contained the organic law by virtue of which a new political organization would exist. They designated the fundamentals to be incorporated in the organization of the state and its legal structure.⁴¹

This is an important argument for the originary power of the Rescript as a sign of internal Ottoman dynamism and creative response to changing world circumstances. On the other hand, Halil İnalcık from a pragmatic angle argues that the document had been designed out of ‘the practical necessity of resuscitating the empire’.⁴² In a similar vein, Butrus Abu Manneh positions the document alongside the belligerence between Sultan Mahmud II and Muhammed Ali Pasha of Egypt, and argues that as the Sultan was not successful in consolidating his powers through a victory in Egypt, the document was the only option left for the Sultan to accomplish his centralisation efforts.⁴³ Even more damagingly, in terms of the document’s putative status as an originary Islamic

⁴⁰ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 145; Butrus Abu-Manneh, ‘The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript’, *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s., 34.2 (November 1994), 173-203 (pp. 173-4); Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, repr.2002), II: *Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, p. 61.

⁴¹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 145.

⁴² Halil İnalcık, ‘The Nature of Traditional Society: Turkey’, in *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey*, ed. by Robert E. Ward and Dankwart A. Rustow (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 42-63 (p. 57).

⁴³ Abu-Manneh, ‘The Islamic Roots’, pp. 180-181.

constitutional founding gesture, it has been extensively acknowledged by historians that the main aim of the document was ‘to wheedle material assistance out of Britain’.⁴⁴

Conforming with this latter remark, the Polish Ambassador Palewski tells Yashim, who tries to apprehend the foreigners’ role in the Edict, that ‘foreign powers [...] are the whole point: Foreign Powers, foreign loans’, essentially eliminating other perspectives mentioned above.⁴⁵ Palewski informs Yashim that only ‘selected members of the diplomatic community in Istanbul’ had been informed of the pending Edict, which discloses to Yashim the ‘primary purpose’ of the Edict, which is ‘to make the Porte eligible for foreign loans’.⁴⁶ The Ottomans, Palewski helps Yashim and the reader understand, now found themselves in a new arrangement of balance of power in Europe. Reforms are, therefore, principally necessary to form a new alliance with ‘Foreign Powers’ and to get ‘foreign loans’.⁴⁷ Palewski keeps Yashim informed regarding the power structures in Europe and the disingenuous nature of the support the Porte receives from the nations in Europe for its reforms since it leaves questions as to the suitability of the reforms to the empire. Palewski, furthermore, confesses the Edict to be ‘essentially, a Big Power arrangement’, detaching the Ottomans from the reforms, cultivating distrust about the ingenuity and sincerity of reforms.⁴⁸ Conflictingly, it is also implied through the Sultan’s reflections that one of the motives behind the reforms of the Sultan is the prospect of ‘reclaim[ing] his sovereignty over Greece’.⁴⁹ A sense of pragmatic conformity is invoked in the novel alongside a climate of increasing isolation as the political nature of the reforms is tied to the ambitions of the sultan to curb the dissemination of the ‘spirit of the rebellion’ by circumventing the external pressures

⁴⁴ *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, p. 269.

⁴⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 191.

⁴⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 190.

⁴⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 190-1.

⁴⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 190.

⁴⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 4.

encouraging it.⁵⁰ Palewski admittedly discloses to Yashim the breadth of challenges the Sultan faces in his quest for reform when he tells Yashim that he ‘get[s] the impression [...] that the sultan has sleepless nights over this Edict of his. It will make him a very lonely man. He makes a lot of enemies’.⁵¹ In some respects, the novel communicates the international significance of the Edict and the domestic threats evoked as though the edict is coming through as a result of the Sultan’s clutching the straw.

Palewski’s conversations about the edict with Yashim and the Sultan carry the tinge of lack of faith regarding the involvement of the Western governments in reforms since Palewski himself, having been a casualty of the Polish Question, offers a cautionary tale for those who collaborate with Western Powers. A homology is drawn between the current weak state of the Empire and the dismemberment of the Polish-Lithuanian Empire, Palewski representing the remaining Polish/Ottoman strength. This very fact construes a mutual concern between the Sultan and the Ambassador regarding the Powers’ intentions, and at the same time unites them on the idea that, given the lack of options in the face of the economic and military decline, no other option is available other than trying to avoid an ultimate collapse of the Empire by carrying out the necessary reforms. Palewski’s precarious position as the Polish Ambassador in the Ottoman Empire is depicted as emblematic of the lingering concerns of the Porte regarding the intentions of the Powers as part of a broader Eastern Question, rather than evaluating the Ottoman monarchical order as a factor *sui generis*. Palewski keeps Yashim alert to the possibility that the reforms could be a step towards the carving up of the state as had happened to the Polish Empire.

⁵⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 229-30.

⁵¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 249.

Stanislaw Palewski has been received by critics in the image of Sherlock Holmes's Dr Watson because of his role as a companion and an advisor to Yashim in solving his cases.⁵² Palewski's role as an aide to Yashim in crime-solving in some of Yashim's cases builds a secondary detective character for the Ambassador following that of Yashim. His knowledge of European history and politics, his resources at his ambassadorial outpost such as the 'copies of *Le Moniteur*, the Ottoman court gazette', and his eligibility as an ambassador to be present at important events such as a concert at the Palace provide Yashim with a very important source of information as well as a valuable capacity to maneuver in order to discover important information and evidence.⁵³ It is more often than not through his conversations with Palewski that Yashim comes upon new perspectives that salvage his investigations from their clogged progressions. Alongside his assistance in solving crimes in the Yashim series, Palewski's character revolves around Yashim's cases not only because he provides Yashim with an auxiliary intellectual capacity and an elite social circle, but also by being a confidante to Yashim, Palewski poses as an audience and a companion to him, and thus informs the reader of the progress of Yashim's cases.

Both in *The Janissary Tree*, and also in *The Baklava Club*, Palewski's character, by merit of his status as the ambassador of the partitioned Poland to the Ottoman Empire, illuminates the political concerns of early nineteenth-century Europe. An important insight into the changing map of Europe comes through the dismemberment of the Polish Empire. This development was against the political ambitions of the Ottoman Empire; therefore, the Ottoman Empire did not recognise the final partitioning of the

⁵² Nagihan Haliloglu, 'Istanbul's Multiculturalism Reimagined in Contemporary British Fiction' in *Islam and the Politics of Culture in Europe: Memory, Aesthetics, Art*, ed. by Frank Peter, Sarah Dornhof and Elena Arigita (Wetzlar: transcript Verlag, 2013), pp. 61-74, (p. 69).

⁵³ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 104, 200.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by Russia, Austria and Prussia in 1795, and it was the only state to do so. The study of the historical ties between the Polish and the Ottoman Empires has been one that has kept the readers of history of diplomacy intrigued when this period is considered, as the rejection by the Ottoman Empire of the partitioning of Poland has been deemed an important episode that left a positive sentiment in the Polish collective memory and historiography.⁵⁴

By bringing this issue up for a discussion, the author aims to reveal the complications regarding the perception of the Ottoman Empire nearer the inauguration of the *Tanzimat* Reforms. For instance, after the remarkable shift of regional power in favour of Russia as a result of the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Sultan Mahmud II is portrayed as seeking to retain the symbolic historic power of his empire by maintaining the tradition of paying a stipend to the Ambassador and by providing protection for him as the representative of a foreign country:

By a quirk of history, the Polish ambassador was maintained in Istanbul at the sultan's expense. It was a throwback to the days when the Ottomans were too grand to submit to the ordinary laws of European diplomacy, and would not allow any king or emperor to claim to be the sultan's equal. An ambassador, they reasoned, was a kind of plaintiff at the fount of world justice rather than a grandee vested with diplomatic immunity, and as such they had always insisted on paying his bills. Other nations had successfully challenged his conception of what an embassy was about; the Poles, latterly, could not afford to. Since 1830 their country had ceased to exist when the last parcel, around Cracow, was gobbled up by Austria.⁵⁵

The character of the Polish Ambassador is helpful in positioning the Ottoman Empire in its relatively inert moment in history vis-à-vis the Powers, including Russia, whose representatives deem Palewski a diplomatic nonperson.

⁵⁴ On Polish-Ottoman relationships see Jan Reychman and Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz, *Handbook of Ottoman-Turkish Diplomats*, rev. and trans. by Ananiasz Zajaczkowski, ed. by Tibor Halasi-Kun (The Hague: Mouton, 1968); The Polish-Ottoman relationship is further examined in *The Baklava Club* which raises the issues of Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski of Poland and the European centre of the Polish diaspora. See Robert A. Berry, 'Czartoryski's Hôtel Lambert and the Great Powers in the Balkans, 1832-1848', *The International History Review*, 7.1 (1985), 45-67.

⁵⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 104-5.

The Ambassador's indeterminate position carries a weight of warning against a similar outcome for the Ottomans. In *The Janissary Tree*, Yashim makes an observation about the Powers' favouritism, which, he claims, has brought the Greeks their independence, and their discrimination against the Polish which brought the dissolution of their Commonwealth.⁵⁶ This kind of bias, in the final analysis, makes Yashim question the integrity of the 'Frankish laws'⁵⁷ which 'allowed the Greeks to have a country but denied the same convenience to the Poles'.⁵⁸ Yashim's apprehension about the Edict results from the adoption of mainly French legislative models that he fears may not be suited to the Ottoman social and administrative structure. He does not conceive how these laws can be exercised in the Ottoman nation with so much diversity within its territory and such a complex and conglomerate legal system. He questions if these laws could be applied throughout the whole empire on an egalitarian basis: 'would it work as well in the highlands of Bulgaria as in the deserts of Tripolitana?'.⁵⁹ By being wary of the policies which have led to the partition of Poland, Yashim would like to ward off any such important legal changes at the discretion of the Western Powers.

In addition to providing an example of a hostile solution of the 'Polish' Question, the Polish Ambassador upholds a benevolent and tolerant image of the Empire as the last standing power against the dominance of the European powers in the region. Doing so, the Ambassador also complains about lack of consensus and compassion among European Christians:

'We talk of Christian justice,' Palewski would explain, 'but the only justice that Poland has ever received is at the hands of its old Muslim enemy. You Ottomans! You understand justice better than anyone in the world!' Palewski would be careful not to complain that the stipend he received had not changed for the last two

⁵⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 105, 230.

⁵⁷ An evaluation of *Franks*, a general term to indicate Western European people, will be made in the second part of this chapter.

⁵⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 150.

⁵⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 150.

hundred years. And Yashim would never say what both of them knew: that the Ottomans only continued to recognise the Poles to irritate the Russians.⁶⁰

While Goodwin investigates the Empire as a strong but benevolent Empire in the first book of the Yashim series, this particular image of the *generous* Ottomans housing outcasts of Europe is also maintained in *The Baklava Club* (2014), with differing attitude towards the Edict.

Set in 1842, the fifth book in the series, *The Baklava Club* (2014), focuses on ‘Istanbul’s role as a safe haven for European exiles and malcontents’ as the author stages in Istanbul a plot with revolutionaries in hideaway, pardon-seeking exiles and double-betrayers.⁶¹ Jason Goodwin revises the history of Europe through a range of characters, including papal conspirators, youngsters volunteering to work undercover for the unification of Italy, pardon-seeking daughter of a Decemberist exile, the Polish characters seeking Ottoman support to regain their country’s autonomy and Russians plotting against Polish ambitions. Among the exiles, the first group consists of three young men from Italy, namely Giancarlo, Rafael and Fabrizio, who live in Istanbul as expatriates absconding from an apostolic reprisal. These three young men form a clandestine cell taking directions from a secret organisation called La Piuma, which the youngsters trust because they received a warning from the organisation regarding the counter-revolutionary forces’ pursuit of them while the trio was in Rome, and asked them to go to Istanbul. Introduced to the reader first as the acquaintances of Palewski in Istanbul, the three revolutionaries find a note through which La Piuma assigns them to their first secret mission, which, they discover, is the assassination of a person with Papal connections. Disclosed to the youngsters to be an important anti-revolutionary, the target is actually the Polish Ambassador’s special guest Prince Czartoryski, who is

⁶⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 105.

⁶¹ Jason Goodwin, *The Baklava Club* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), p. 281.

in the city to visit the Sultan to campaign in order to receive the support of the Empire in their cause of national revival of Poland and the re-establishment of a Polish nation. The group of the youngsters, the Baklava Club (named after the fact that, during their visits to the Ambassador at his residence, they bring baklava with them as a gift), and the Prince, who is in exile in Paris, are against the Vatican and the Church assuming the powers of a state, yet both the man and the small revolutionary group are convinced that the other is actually against the unification of Italy. This mistrust ends with the tragic and fatal realisation that it is a Russian agent that is actually pitting the revolutionaries against each other.

The Russian agent and the third person belonging to the series of exiles in Istanbul is Natasha, the pardon-seeking daughter of a Russian Decembrist exiled in Siberia. Until the very end of the novel, it is assumed by the reader that, similarly to Prince Czartoryski, who seeks the Sultan's support for a national cause, Natasha is also after Ottoman support for her personal appeal that she and her father be admitted back to St Petersburg. She stays at the Palace as a guest of the Valide Sultan, who instructs Yashim to entertain her guest by showing her Istanbul. During the time they spend together, Natasha tells Yashim about her life in Siberia, which includes unpleasant details about the physical abuse she endured at the hands of her Russian guardians and caretakers. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Natasha had indeed been sent to Istanbul by the Russian czardom on a mission as a punishment after she had killed her caretaker. In Istanbul, she is to set up the killing of the Polish Prince, which she carries out by using the alias Piuma. Natasha, in her act as a Russian agent, tricks the revolutionary youngsters into thinking that the Polish liberator prince is a Catholic agent aiming to extend the influence of Rome in Europe. In order to promote hostility between Catholics and Protestants and leave the Orthodox world to Russian control, the

Russian plot aims both to prevent the rekindling of a Polish state through the murder of the Polish prince, and to suppress a minor opposition of young people to a Holy Alliance headed by Rome. In *The Baklava Club*, Russia is once again represented as a disruptive and manipulative force as it was in *The Janissary Tree*.

The Prince's visit to the Sultan in *The Baklava Club* is a display of trust not only in the Ottoman Empire's power and support for the Polish cause, but also of the strong relationship Palewski has with the Porte. Having been an important point in the first novel, this element in the plot of the later book reinforces the image of the Ottomans as a welcoming host to dissenters in Europe. Indeed, in both *The Janissary Tree* and *The Baklava Club*, the Ottoman Empire is seen as an active agent in international politics and a place of refuge for dissenters, in contrast to the repressive actions of powerful state alliances across Western Europe. The Valide's question to Yashim intends to accentuate this point: 'What are all these Franks doing in Istanbul, Yashim? It didn't use to be like this'.⁶² An important reason for this change is viewed in the novel as stemming from the changing power relations in Europe as much as from the internal dynamics of the Ottoman Empire.⁶³ In Yashim's words, the reason for this is that '[m]any people in Europe [...] want change. Their own governments resist it. People look to the sultan to help them [...] Natasha. Palewski. Even those Italians feel more free here than at home'.⁶⁴

In a similar manner, Niyazi Berkes mentions that many outcasts in Europe were arriving in Istanbul to take refuge in the eighteenth century: 'Hungarians [...] had taken refuge in the course of their struggles with the Habsburg emperors, the leading adversaries of

⁶² J. Goodwin, *Baklava Club*, p. 139.

⁶³ Niyazi Berkes treats this question extensively in *Development of Secularism*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ J. Goodwin, *Baklava Club*, p. 140.

the Turks, for their Catholic persecutions’, or ‘[t]he Huguenots, persecuted by Catholic governments, looked hopefully to the reputedly tolerant Turks for succour and an opportunity to live and worship freely’.⁶⁵ The instances of the conflicts involving various Christian denominations demonstrate not only the ongoing intolerance within Christian Europe for other religions and Christian denominations, but also the tolerance demonstrated for various faiths in the Ottoman Empire. The growth in the number of foreigners in the Empire is, however, mainly explained by the Reform Edict in the novel. The number of population movement towards the East had increased, because, as Yashim ponders, ‘[t]he sultan’s decree placing all his subjects, Muslim or otherwise, on the same legal footing, had emboldened the merchants and the bankers, and stimulated trade’.⁶⁶

In both *Janissary* and *Baklava*, the inclusiveness of the reform legislation is a fundamental point of interest, and this is seen as a favourable development for the economy and for the narrative of interaction with the West in the latter novel. These changes can be observed principally through the Polish example. Yashim’s suspicions of the Edict in *Janissary*, likewise, turn into approval in *Baklava*. This shift can be attributed to the shift in the author’s approach in his formulation of the main themes of his novels, and it can be observed through Yashim. Yashim’s concerns regarding the applicability of the Edict in *Janissary* because of his relativist attitude are eradicated in *Baklava* as he perceives the enforcement of the Edict across the empire as ‘inclusiveness’ in the latter novel. This shift in attitude towards the edict arises from the author’s attempt to formulate the question of the Ottoman decline in his first novel and his focus on the comparative study of the Ottomans with the political landscape in

⁶⁵ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ J. Goodwin, *Baklava Club*, pp. 139-40.

Europe in the latter. The frames of reference of Goodwin's Yashim series are to a great extent informed by the historical developments in Europe. *The Janissary Tree*, as a first instalment preoccupied with the question of Ottoman decline, formulates Ottoman history around the Eastern Question and Western perceptions and influences; hence the prominence given to foreign characters. The Ottomans are therefore seen as weakened and in need of Western European aid to gain financial strength. Moreover, the reforms are introduced to represent a crossroads regarding increased interactions with the West, on one hand, and as lacking any insight into the needs of the Ottoman people, on the other. In his attempt to show the unsuitability of the reforms, the framework of *The Janissary Tree* is predicated on rigid negative bifurcated reaction to the reform movement. The next section examines these two representations of the dissatisfied groups with a view to evaluating the contribution of Goodwin's historical novels to understanding the historical context of the landmark document in Ottoman history, the 1839 Imperial Rescript of Gülhane.

1.1.3. Interactions with Modernity: Traditionalists, Revolutionaries and the Middle Way

In *The Janissary Tree*, the destruction of the Janissaries is observed through the lens of mainstream historiography, which presents the claims that the Janissaries were holding the Ottomans back from introducing innovations and new techniques in the military, resulting in the decline of the empire. The massacre of the Janissaries is therefore seen as an 'auspicious' event that finally allowed the Ottomans to pursue their efforts of modernisation. The Seraskier, for example, mentions how 'everything has changed because the Janissaries are gone' and that '[t]hey were all that stood in the way of – what? The sultan riding on a European saddle'.⁶⁷ This is a different reading from that of

⁶⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 101-2.

revisionist historiographers of the likes of Baki Tezcan or Reha Çamuroğlu, which will be examined in the following sections. Similarly, in the novel, the reforms of Mahmud II are not amply scrutinised through the perspectives of today's contemporary revisionist historiography. In this chapter, a frequently used resource is Niyazi Berkes's *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* since it reads the history of the late Ottoman Empire as one of conflict between the institutions of tradition and modernity, which, according to Berkes, paved the way for the secularisation of the state when the Republic of Turkey was established. This dichotomy, and Berkes's analysis, apart from the argument about Mahmud II's reign being a moment of the start of secularisation, which is of no interest to Goodwin, resonates well with Goodwin's intellectual and narrative frameworks.

The main concern of *The Janissary Tree* is to shed light upon the conditions leading up to the proclamation of the Gülhane Rescript by dwelling on two possible cases of radical reactions to Sultan Mahmud's reforms -- i.e. what some interest groups see as the eradication of traditional customs and institutions, others conceive as slow-paced reforms -- and to debate these through a spectrum of receptive and critical interpretations. This particular way of reading of the Ottoman history tell us a possible way of understanding how the Ottomans saw themselves at this critical point in Ottoman history, within the framework of the reformation efforts in the early nineteenth century. In the novel, while traditional elements are represented through the alliance of the defunct military organisation Janissaries and the palace eunuchs as those clinging to their 'medieval' identities, reformism is illustrated through the Seraskier, the military chief of the modern army, who defends a 'totalitarian ideology' of reforms.⁶⁸ A third bloc represented in Goodwin's novel is the reconciliatory approach, what can loosely be

⁶⁸ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 4.

associated with the theories of ‘alternative modernity’. This mid-way approach is materialised in the main character Yashim, who, as a modern eunuch, epitomises the conflict between modernity and tradition in an unobtrusive way. Below, these three approaches will be examined at length with a view to analyse Goodwin’s presentation of the complexities of this period through an investigative eye for clashing forces of this time.

1.1.3.1. Traditionalists and Anti-Reformists: Against the Edict

The collaboration between the Janissaries and the Eunuchs, who are viewed in the novel as the upholders of tradition in the Ottoman Empire and therefore in opposition to the Edict, is significant since both are part of the system of slavery, one of military and the other of harem slavery. While the Janissaries are emblematic of the military strength of the most powerful days of the Empire, the Eunuchs are evocative of the sumptuous and competitive Harem setting, which is seen as the symbol for the patriarchal influence and power of sultans. After the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826, harem-slavery, which is the royal (and high-class) expression of ‘household slavery’, remains not only the major extant form of slavery, but also an important stronghold of the model of imperial strength conveying the notion of reliance of the Empire on customs and traditional forms.⁶⁹ Hence the reforms carried out by the Porte are predominantly depicted by the author as an attack on perennial hierarchies and traditions. In *The Janissary Tree*, the class of Islamic ruling elite as a strong bulwark of Islamic traditions on which the Empire thrives does not receive tenable attention. The following section will only showcase the traditional institutions discussed in the novel in relation to the modernisation movement in the early nineteenth century.

⁶⁹ Ehud R. Toledano, ‘The Imperial Eunuchs of Istanbul: from Africa to the heart of Islam’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 20.3 (1984), 379-390, (p. 379).

1.1.3.1.1. Eunuchs

The eunuch characters in the novel, namely Yashim, the Kislar Agha and Ibo, the palace librarian, maintain a key role in understanding one of the most ancient institutions of the Ottoman Empire. Yashim's role in the novel, as a manumitted Eunuch, is different from that of the Palace Eunuchs, and will be dealt with later in this chapter in more detail. On the other hand, Kislar Agha, and partially Ibo represent the innermost opposition against the Sultan's Edict. Being a borrowed institution from the Byzantines, some of the tasks and responsibilities of the Eunuch slavery system in the Ottoman Court were altered in order to tailor the Eunuchs' position and function in the Palace to the requirements of Islamic traditions.⁷⁰ Classified as 'Black' or 'White' eunuchs, depending on their geographical origin and skin colour, the Palace eunuchs were, first and foremost, harem-slaves, who were responsible for overseeing and protecting female slaves in the Palace. They had a privileged status in the court as they acted as a conduit between the male and female occupants of the Palace, as well as the outside world.⁷¹

John Freely explains that '[e]unuchs played an important role in Byzantium, and many of them rose to leading positions in the civil, military and religious hierarchies, several becoming patriarch and one becoming *magister militum*, the commander-in-chief of the army'.⁷² Among such roles, the grand chamberlain (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*), which is the equivalent of the Kislar Agha, was also a position held by a eunuch in Byzantium.⁷³ In the Ottoman Empire, apart from being 'in charge of the Harem', the Chief Black Eunuch, of African origin, 'also supervised the primary education of the sultan's sons'; therefore, those in this position had considerable power and a critical role

⁷⁰ Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 379.

⁷¹ Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', pp. 380-1.

⁷² John Freely, *Istanbul*, p. 49.

⁷³ John Freely, *Istanbul*, p. 49.

to play in the future of the Empire.⁷⁴ The ‘political influence’ of the eunuchs had largely depended on the Chief Black Eunuch, and correspondingly, Eunuchs underwent periods of increasing prominence during some of the critical moments of the Empire’s history. Ehud Toledano, recounting from M. Çağatay Uluçay’s *Harem*, published in Turkish, points out that the eunuchs had become more influential in the period between the second half of the sixteenth century and the eighteenth century, which Uluçay calls *Kızlar Ağaları Saltanatı* (the ‘Sultanate of the African Eunuchs’).⁷⁵

During their service, eunuchs developed ‘an especially close relationship’ with their masters and mistresses.⁷⁶ As a result, as Toledano puts it, ‘the more powerful the ladies of the Court were, the more influential the eunuchs became’.⁷⁷ The eunuchs enjoyed a ‘dual structure’ whereby they had to pledge ‘allegiance both to their royal master or mistress and to the senior officers of the [eunuch] Corps’.⁷⁸ Since they were ‘a foreign element in society’, as they were acquired either by purchase or as presents, and they could not establish ‘alternative family ties by marriage’, they retained their ‘loyalties’ on both sides.⁷⁹ Especially the Chief Black Eunuch, or the Kislara Agha as he is called in the novel, was at the confluence of powerful forces, holding a uniquely strategic status in the Palace -- forces which had to be kept in a delicate balance or they might otherwise lead to corruption and damaging intrigue. Uluçay relates the decline and fall of the Empire to the exploitation of the power and influence established by the African eunuchs in the Court.⁸⁰ In the novel, this theory is largely upheld due to the involvement of the Kislara Agha in the coup plot, which can be explained by eunuchs’ pivotal and

⁷⁴ John Freely, *Istanbul*, p. 352.

⁷⁵ Ehud R. Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, p. 382.

⁷⁶ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, p. 381.

⁷⁷ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, p. 382.

⁷⁸ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, p. 388.

⁷⁹ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, pp. 381, 388.

⁸⁰ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, p. 382.

established position in the palace. Ibou's case, on the other hand, presents a different challenge since the Kislár Agha is the uncle and protector of Ibou; therefore, the implications of Ibou's involvement in the coup plot are ameliorated by the suffering and pain Ibou had to endure in order to cross the desert, undergo an operation and finally take up the job offered by his uncle.⁸¹

Since the unique position of eunuchs in the palace is rooted in their powerful connections and the uniqueness of the services they provide, the Kislár Agha shows 'contempt' for those who want eunuchs to be modern. 'How can I be modern?' he asks Yashim, 'I'm a fucking eunuch'.⁸² He is presented as adamant in his belief that eunuchs are out of touch with the outside world and therefore they cannot 'modernise'. Even if Yashim tries to convince the Head Eunuch that he can learn western social etiquette such as 'sit[ing] in a chair' or 'eat[ing] with a knife and fork', the Kislár Agha points out that the *Tanzimat* will require more of him.⁸³ The head eunuch associates the *Tanzimat*, not only with Western modes of behaviour and appearance, but also with the Enlightenment and letters, which can be marked in his assertion that 'modern people are supposed to know stuff. They all read, don't they?'.⁸⁴ His actions rest on the knowledge that reforms bring Western modes of life, which undermine royal customs, and therefore, the requirement to keep a harem. Despite the fact that Islam prevailed as '[t]he core of the tradition' in the Ottoman Empire, this point remains a moot point throughout in the novel despite the fact that in most cases it is the Ulema, 'the corps of the learned men of religion or of the Şeriat', that gets challenged 'by the forces of modern civilization'.⁸⁵ Without giving any reason, such as the secularising effect of

⁸¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 306-7.

⁸² J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 277.

⁸³ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 277.

⁸⁴ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 277-8.

⁸⁵ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, pp. 7, 13-19.

modernisation, but by only displaying hatred for the modernising Edict, the Kislar Agha expresses his concern that failure to defend such customs as his role in the Harem will mean a failure of survival, the end of his very existence: ‘It may not be now, maybe not this year or the next [...] but the time will come when they’ll just turn us out into the street to die’.⁸⁶

The fear and concern of the palace eunuchs foreshadow the abolition of the royal house after the republic came into being in 1923. Goodwin’s approach, in the main, highlights the emphasis given to tradition and empowerment gained through the privileges of proximity to the rulers. On the other hand, it was the case historically that the harem-slavery system remained forceful and effective for a very long time because of the difficulty of amending ‘family laws’ and the influence the Ottoman Royal House had in keeping certain traditions intact for this purpose despite the prohibition of the trafficking of the Africans in 1857 and anti-slave trade conventions signed between Britain and the Ottomans in 1880.⁸⁷ As a result, the practice of harem slavery survived into the early twentieth century despite the enactment of laws prohibiting the trafficking and trade of African slaves. By merit of being at the core of the empire, the household of the sultan prevailed as the last bastion of this system in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, as Toledano claims, being ‘one of the most central and traditionally sensitive institutions in Ottoman society’, harem-slavery, like military-slavery, resisted modernising change.⁸⁸ Toledano defends these lasting harem-slavery practices as ‘culture-bound practices’, and argues that, as they were part of the private realm of society, namely, of ‘family structure’ and ‘relations between the sexes’, they resisted formal legal and political change. Therefore, this aspect of slavery escaped the notice of

⁸⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 278.

⁸⁷ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, pp. 380, 383.

⁸⁸ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, pp. 388-9.

many Ottoman Westernisers who adjusted their traditional outlook along Western lines, as ‘the prestige of the Ottoman House kept its social structure and patterns of conduct out of public criticism and preserved them as a source of emulation for the wealthy and powerful’.⁸⁹

In the novel, as a reaction to the Westernisation process carried out by Mahmud II, Goodwin’s Kislal Agha not only conspires with the defunct Janissary Corps to organise a coup against the Sultan, but also steals the Validé Sultan’s ‘Napoleon jewels’ to equip himself with symbolic powers during his coup.⁹⁰ His effeminate outlook embodied through his stealing of the jewellery for his own use is overshadowed by the Head Eunuch’s concern about the literate people of the West and the Westernisers.

Napoleon’s ‘N’ jewellery not only represents the Head Eunuch’s hatred of the West, but also uncloaks his inadequacy and helplessness in the face of Western modernity, which he tries to compensate with material symbols.⁹¹ The question of modernity, in which there would be no need for eunuchs, is a notion the head eunuch cannot comprehend, and his actions cannot go beyond symbolic connotations and the repetition of the experiences of his co-conspirators, the Janissaries – such as uprising, and even regicide, in the Court.

Kislal Agha associates the jewels with power presumably because of his jealousy of the Valide, although the reason is not very clear. Before they became eunuchs, the Palace slaves would undergo a difficult process of transition, which would include enduring the health and life implications of their surgery and the experience of hormonal and psychological difficulties after their operation, which is believed to have led to ‘peculiar

⁸⁹ Toledano, ‘Imperial Eunuchs’, p. 389.

⁹⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 29, 301, 304.

⁹¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 264-5.

characteristics' and 'eccentric social behaviour'.⁹² Ehud Toledano suggests that their condition may have had an impact on their actions when eunuchs exercised their strategical power in court politics.⁹³ Toledano further suggests that their actions may also have been determined by 'a deep sense of bitterness' and they may have 'sought to avenge the "unnatural crime" perpetrated on their person'.⁹⁴ The narrator in *The Janissary Tree* describes idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of eunuchs in a rather emasculating manner:

The service of barren men, like their desires, began and ended with their death; but in life they watched over the churning anthills of humankind, inured from its preoccupation with lust, longevity and descent. Prey, at worst, to a fondness for trinkets and trivia, to a fascination with their own decline, a tendency to hysteria and petty jealousies. Yashim knew them well.⁹⁵

The effeminate description of the Kislar Agha, with him wearing the Valide Sultan's jewels, also participates in a stereotypically Orientalist discourse, with its images of harems and eunuchs as alienating and effeminising. This type of character, reified in the Kislar Agha's imitation of the Valide Sultan, can be identified as the 'effeminate tyrant', which, as Joseph A. Boone establishes, is one of the dominant 'patterns' of homoerotic tropes in Middle Eastern depictions by Western writers and artists.⁹⁶ The Kislar Agha assumes the most basic characteristic of a tyrant when he kills a concubine for witnessing him stealing the Valide's jewellery in order not to put his coup at risk. This type of effeminising classification of Eunuchs actually tramps on Goodwin's clear intention to undermine Orientalist discourses that sexualise the Harem:

That was how the system worked, Yashim knew. Everyone knew. Everyone had their own ideas about the imperial harem, but essentially it was like a machine. The sultan, pumping a new recruit in the cohort of imperial concubines, was simply a

⁹² Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 382.

⁹³ Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 388.

⁹⁴ Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 382.

⁹⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 36-7.

⁹⁶ Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism: Mappings of Male Desire in Narratives of the Near and Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 51.

major piston of an engine designed to guarantee the continuous production of Ottoman sultans. All the rest – the eunuchs, the women – were cogs.⁹⁷

The correction by the narrator of Western Orientalist discourses about life in the harem contributes to Goodwin's historiographical intervention to rectify earlier Western misrepresentations. However, Goodwin himself does not refrain from sharing in imagery that carries the tinge of Orientalist discourses at times, including the scene of the *cariyes*, the harem maids, showing their bare breasts to Yashim while waxing.⁹⁸ On the other hand, the fact that Yashim is described as able to have sex with women, or the fact that the Sultan is, in a way, forced to spend a night with the *gözde*, the slave girl, so that she would not be disappointed, show harem life from a speculative lens, especially since the author feeds the curiosity of some of his readers by posing and answering some of the questions they may have regarding eroticism in the palace, including the possibility of a sexual life for eunuchs.⁹⁹ This approach possibly presents a commercial compromise on the part of the author, which is based on the profitability of sexual descriptions in a market-driven publishing industry.

Lastly, in addition to the attempts to introduce the system of eunuchs with attributes specific to the Ottomans, the narrator also assigns significance to Ottoman eunuchs through the ties of the system of eunuch-slavery to other civilisations in different ages. The characteristics of eunuchs are described through the institutional history of eunuch-slavery in *Janissary Tree* as below:

Yet men had been gelded for service in the time of Darius and Alexander, too. Ever since the idea of dynasties arose, there had been eunuchs who commanded fleets, who generalled armies, who subtly set out the policies of states. Sometimes Yashim dimly saw himself enrolled into a strange fraternity, the shadow-world of the guardians: men who since time immemorial had held themselves apart, the better to watch and serve. It included the eunuchs of the ancient world, and of the Chinese emperor in Beijing, and the whole Catholic hierarchy in Europe, too, which had

⁹⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 108.

⁹⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 59-60.

⁹⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 4.

supplied the celibate priests who served the kings of Christendom. Didn't the Pope in Rome himself serve man and God?¹⁰⁰

Goodwin employs this informative discussion to highlight continuity and the cross-cultural transference of imperial institutions and traditions. He attempts to connect Istanbul to the rest of the world not only through the practices of eunuch-slavery in the Byzantine Empire, predecessors of the Ottoman Empire, but also through the institution of eunuch-slavery itself in its perennial and universal context. By doing so, he connects and relates Ottoman customs to their ancient precedents beyond and outside their Islamic context. The perennial aspect of this institution makes it more difficult to make a distinction between the Islamic and earlier inherited aspects of these practices; therefore, the practice itself becomes part of Goodwin's overall strategy regarding his tradition versus modernity argument, which side-steps any focus on religion and the complications Islam would introduce into formulating this dichotomy in relation to Ottoman structures of governance.

1.1.3.1.2. The Janissaries

In *The Janissary Tree*, the Janissaries are introduced as the chief suspects for the murders of the four military academy students. The book takes its title from the janissary tree at Etmeydanı (Sultanahmet), notorious as the location where the Janissaries revolted. Attached to the tree, Yashim discovers poems that the Janissaries use to communicate with the Eunuchs at the palace. Like Palace eunuchs, the Janissaries were also the subjects and the slaves of the Sultan. The origins of the Janissaries are believed to go back to as early as the fourteenth century when non-Muslim captives began to be employed as members of the army within the feudal cavalry where they were also taught Turkish.¹⁰¹ As Godfrey Goodwin explains in his work *The Janissaries*

¹⁰⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 36-7.

¹⁰¹ Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries* (London: Saqi Essentials, 2006), p. 27.

(2006), a new army may have been born out of these converts which came to be called *Yeniçeriler* [Janissaries], the New Army.¹⁰² When these men emerged as soldiers in 1416, during the reign of Mehmet I (1413-1421), they also became the Sultan's *kul* (slave), which meant that they had become 'members of the imperial family', whose head, the Sultan, was 'the Shadow of God on Earth'. It was during the reign of Murat II (1421-1444) that the Christian children were first mentioned in a document as the new recruits of this standing army, who were commonly known as Christian Levy or *Devşirme*.¹⁰³ As Godfrey Goodwin describes, the Janissaries were 'a newly recruited caste, educated at the palace or its subsidiary colleges, [were] hardened and then bound to a loyalist brotherhood proud of a growing tradition. It presented a potent force which was eventually to win civil as well as military authority'.¹⁰⁴ The Janissaries were known to have been avid fighters and conquerors for the Ottoman Empire, and so they were respected during the Empire's most successful times for their accomplishments. Due to these qualities, there are quite a few official historiographies of janissaries in which it is suggested that being a Janissary, far from a mishap, had been a prospect looked favourably upon. The fact that these fighters were 'fed by a levy [had] set them apart from the commonalty'.¹⁰⁵

The widely accepted reason for the Janissaries' abolition is their centuries of degeneracy, which had economically and militarily held the Empire back, behind their

¹⁰² G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 27; In Turkish: Yeniçeri. *Yeni* means "new", and *çeri* means "class of soldiers in war, army" derived from *çerig* in Old Turkic (<<http://www.nisanyansozluk.com/?k=yeni%C3%A7eri&view=annotated>> [accessed 21 March 2014]).

¹⁰³ G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 27; Goodwin holds that the tradition of recruiting children finds its precedents in the Mughal, Hindu and Russian traditions of children levies (G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 32). Also, according to Cemal Kafadar, '[t]he Janissary corps and the kapıkulu system bear resemblance to "ghulam/mamluk" organizations of Medieval Islamic states; however, the levy method, the act of gathering soldiers by the state from among its own subjects, is a practice that is unique to the Ottomans' (Cemal Kafadar, 'Osmanlı Siyasal Düşüncesinin Kaynakları Üzerine Gözlemler', in *Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası: Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi*, ed. by Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekinçil, 9 vols (İstanbul: İletişim, 2009), i: *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, pp. 23-8 (p. 27) [translation mine]).

¹⁰⁴ G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 33.

peers in the West. The commonly-discussed reasons for their degeneracy, which are also employed in his novel by Jason Goodwin, include the changing structure of the corps such as their involvement in trades; the recruitment of Turkish people by birth instead of recruiting through *devshirme*; the introduction of new practices of marriage and having children; and lower payments and gains caused by the slowdown of the conquests of new lands and the gradual decline of imperial power which had become tiring for the Janissary fighters and caused their unwillingness to defend the Empire.¹⁰⁶ In Jason Goodwin's words, 'loaded with privilege, they lorded it over the common people of the city', which, according to the narrator of the novel, made the Janissaries 'dangerous'.¹⁰⁷ The out-of-control demeanour of the Janissaries finds expression in Lady Mary's letters, in which the Janissaries outside Istanbul are criticised for displaying tyranny:

the oppression of the peasants is so great, they are forced to abandon their houses and neglect their tillage, all they have being a prey to the janissaries whenever they please to seize upon it. We had a guard of five hundred of them, and I was almost in tears every day to see their insolences in the poor villages through which we passed.¹⁰⁸

The new order of the Janissaries, or their lack of discipline as many would say, often produced major revolts during the eighteenth century, including those led by Patrona Halil Isyani and Kara Ali Isyani.¹⁰⁹ Because of their changing structure, the Janissaries are generally described as amounting to getting so much out of hand that they had even become a threat to the continuation of monarchical rule when they rebelled or scorched the city once their demands were not met, which could even culminate in the deposition of the sultans. In the novel, the Seraskier takes advantage of the Janissary rebellion and

¹⁰⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 24, 85.

¹⁰⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁰⁸ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. by Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn (Toronto, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2013), p. 99.

¹⁰⁹ John Freely, *Istanbul*, p. 253.

the fires started by the castaway members of the Janissary corps to carry out his own coup against the Monarchy. Jason Goodwin writes: ‘it was typical of their degeneration that they had combined their fire-duty with the more profitable occupation of fire-raising, demanding bribes to put out fires they themselves had started’.¹¹⁰ Godfrey Goodwin suggests that their passion for money was stronger than their will to protect the Empire’s interests, and mutiny occurred when long fights tired them.¹¹¹ Jason Goodwin’s humorous depiction of this situation reads as ‘[t]he men who had been sent to terrify Europe made a simple discovery: it was easier – and far less dangerous to terrorise at home’.¹¹²

Godfrey Goodwin stresses that ‘[t]he often repeated tragedy lay in their inability to think ahead constructively or to plot more than a coup or a mutiny’.¹¹³ He suggests that the history of the Janissaries mirrors the Ottomans’ history as a whole, giving clues to the ‘struggles beneath the surface of Ottoman politics, the struggles of the tumultuous majority’.¹¹⁴ This view, therefore, also helps to elaborate the conclusion that the Janissaries remained at the root of the administrative instability as they were infamous for dethroning and even regicide of sultans whenever their demands were not met. Godfrey Goodwin maintains that the professionalisation of the army, had it happened, could have acted as ‘a challenge to the structure of the state’; as it was, there was a strong link between the welfare of the Empire and the interest of the Janissaries.¹¹⁵ The imperial history can therefore be depicted as one of transformation whereby the demeanour of the Janissaries altered by and large in conjunction with the empire from bright to shadowy days. The fact that the empire’s rise and decline went hand in hand

¹¹⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 14.

¹¹¹ G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, pp. 101-2.

¹¹² J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 24.

¹¹³ G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 33.

¹¹⁴ G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 30.

¹¹⁵ G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 33.

with the rise and decline of the Janissaries is considered a sufficient rationale by ‘declinist’ scholars to conclude that the loss of the territories and corruption in the Empire were the result of the degeneracy in the janissary military corps.

Correspondingly, in *The Janissary Tree*, the demise of the Janissaries is discussed in relation to the downfall of the Empire, which is then displayed as the reason for their desire to protect their self-interest, combined with their attachment to their tradition and brotherhood. The narrator is unambiguous in his assertion that, by clinging to tradition and by reclaiming their old power, the Janissaries had caused immense damage to the Empire:

Once the Ottoman Empire’s crack troops, the Janissaries had degenerated – or evolved, if you liked – into an armed mafia, terrorising sultans, swaggering through the streets of Istanbul, rioting, fire-raising, thieving and extorting with impunity. Outgunned and outdrilled by the armies of the west, stubbornly they had clung to the traditions of their forefathers, contemptuous of innovation, despising the common soldiers of the enemy and rejecting every lesson the battlefield could teach, for fear of their grip loosening. For decades they had held the empire to ransom.¹¹⁶

The Janissaries saw reforms as a threat to their traditional structures and the New Guard as their competitor. The story of the end of the Janissaries can hardly be told without its dramatic overtones, and Goodwin’s fiction bears no exception to this tendency. Even the symbolic power of overturning cauldrons had a grandiose effect, signifying a janissary uprising, and as for the narrator, ‘[i]t meant that they wanted blood’.¹¹⁷ The narrator further explains that the very last time the Janissaries overturned their cauldrons was because the Sultan had wanted them to ‘adopt the western style of the New Guard, knowing that they would be provoked and affronted’, and so they were. Goodwin’s narrator explains what happens in 1826:

The sultan issued orders that the Janissaries should adopt the western style of the New Guard, knowing that they would be provoked and affronted. And the

¹¹⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 23.

Janissaries had rebelled on cue. Caring only for their own privileges, they turned on the palace and the fledgling New Guards. But they had grown stupid, as well as lazy. They were loathed by the people. The sultan had made ready. When the Janissaries overturned their cauldrons on the night of Thursday, 15 June, it took a day to accomplish by modern means what no one had managed to achieve in three hundred years. By the night of the sixteenth, efficient modern gunnery had reduced their mutinous barracks to a smouldering ruin.¹¹⁸

Subsequently as the narrator chronicles, ‘on the night of Thursday, 15 June, it took a day to accomplish by modern means what no one had managed to achieve in three hundred years’ – the Janissaries had been dissolved.¹¹⁹ The Janissaries’ rebellion was also the means of their final destruction. Yashim speculates how the incident had been ‘a trauma [...] from which the empire still waited to recover’.¹²⁰ From this, as the narrator states, ‘[c]ertain people might never recover at all’.¹²¹ It is therefore symbolic that the murders Yashim investigates are committed and displayed by using the symbols of Janissary traditions from their ranking system to their spiritual meeting houses.

Jason Goodwin’s novel, to a great extent, follows the mainstream argument of Ottoman historiography in terms of the stress placed on the narrative that the Janissaries became corrupt and did not accept the use of modern military techniques within the corps. They are seen as the albatross around the neck of the Ottomans, holding back the progress of the empire. A recent generation of observers who don’t agree with this thesis, such as Baki Tezcan and Reha Çamuroğlu, argue that the Janissaries actually had an important role to play in the broader democratic corpus within the religious (Sunni sectarian) monarchical absolutist rule. These perspectives tend to see the developments concerning the Janissaries, especially around the year 1826, in terms of internal power struggles rather than as an extension of the East-West, or in other words, traditionalism-modernity dichotomy. Reha Çamuroğlu’s criticism falls on the palace’s mechanisms of

¹¹⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 25-6.

¹¹⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 35-6.

¹²⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 26.

¹²¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 26.

self-preservation and policies of exclusion while Baki Tezcan offers a criticism which sees a stabilising quality in the Janissaries.

Reha Çamuroğlu's interpretation of the events that led to 1826 focuses on the vast power the Janissaries had acquired rather than on how degenerate and dangerous they had started to become. Çamuroğlu does not see the issue of Janissaries' getting married and having children as signs of deterioration and corruption; for him, these practices should be regarded merely as the *humanization* of the sultan's slaves.¹²² According to this viewpoint, the changes in the nature of the Janissary corps started to occur when the Janissaries realized that they had become influential against sultans, an important example of which was the dethronement campaign Selim I (1512-1520) waged against his father Bayezid II (1481-1512).¹²³

As noted by Reha Çamuroğlu, an important power struggle the Janissaries staged was the one with the Ulema, who would have been their superiors if the Janissaries had remained in the faith of Sunni Islam and would have caused the limitation of their powers to some extent. The Janissaries' increasing association with the Bektashi sect, a dervish order that follows the spiritual teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli, which Jason Goodwin calls *Karagozi* in the novel, might therefore be explained by their power struggles with the Ulema. Many critics point to the late sixteenth century as the early formative years of the Bektashi-Janissary association, although there is no agreement on when this connection actually started to ferment.¹²⁴ During the subsequent two

¹²² Çamuroğlu, *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşiliği*, p. 10. Çamuroğlu points out that these were the Janissaries' natural rights as Muslims, based on the Prophet Muhammad's life (*sünnet/sunnah*).

¹²³ Çamuroğlu, *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşiliği*, p. 11.

¹²⁴ As opposed to the idea that the Janissaries had always followed Bektashism, Reha Çamuroğlu supports the idea that the Janissaries started to incline towards Bektashism at the end of the sixteenth century; however, they came to be associated more and more with the sect in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*Yeniçerilerin Bektaşiliği*, pp. 19-20). According to Godfrey Goodwin, the "official recognition of the Bektashi connection with the janissary corps" is dated to 1591-2 (G. Goodwin, *Janissaries*, p. 148).

centuries, the Janissaries gained strength by being present in the palace as armed functionaries and statesmen, as well as in public as craftsmen and tradesmen, enabling them to hold strong positions in both public and state functions.¹²⁵ Çamuroğlu establishes that ‘as this union [of Janissaries and Bektashis] progressed, it would grow into a more civilized disobedience that would incrementally reproduce itself against the state’.¹²⁶ Therefore, although it is generally acknowledged that the formal change the Janissaries underwent was induced by their own success in gaining power within state, in Çamuroğlu’s view, this change, or *corruption* as some say, would still have taken place, even without the imperial defeats. According to this reasoning, the change in the Janissaries did not depend on the West developing new military technologies and tactics or the diminishing resources of the Ottoman Empire so much as it depended on the lessening loyalty of the Palace to the Janissaries. Çamuroğlu thus sees this *corruption* to be internal rather than external, and their uprisings not as efforts to stop Westernisation, but to maintain their own power within the administrative bodies.¹²⁷

Berkes points out that by the end of the eighteenth century, the Sultan did not have unfettered influence within his administrative cadre anymore, and correspondingly, ‘the struggle for power’ had surfaced within the bureaucratic groups who were attached to tradition and isolated from society.¹²⁸ There are three main factors according to Berkes that explain the atmosphere and the various types of mindset when the Janissary revolts developed. First of all, the Ulema and military leaders were enjoying self-acquired prosperity in a corrupt bureaucracy and they had become insensitive to the problems causing instability to the welfare of the state. Secondly, the new techniques in the

¹²⁵ Çamuroğlu, *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşiliği*, p. 13.

¹²⁶ Çamuroğlu, *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşiliği*, p. 14, translation mine.

¹²⁷ Çamuroğlu, *Yeniçerilerin Bektaşiliği*, p. 11.

¹²⁸ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 17.

military were seen as against tradition (Şeriat) and were taken to be signs of further decline. In addition to that, new technological developments were also seen as a threat to the worsening economic conditions among the craftsmen, who served the military, and were in danger of being uprooted if the traditional structure were to be upset.¹²⁹ All these developments comprised sufficient excuse for the Janissaries to revolt against the reforms made along European lines. When compared to Berkes's analysis, Çamuroğlu's defence of Janissaries omits Berkes's structural economic perspective on the period, and instead focuses on the microeconomic and status benefits of interest groups, and on their opposition against the bureaucratic Islamic elite.

Baki Tezcan provides another structural perspective to approach the question of the Janissaries' relationship with Western modernity. While Çamuroğlu argues for the Janissaries' power domination from the perspective of their religious sectarian affiliations and institutional intolerance to heterodoxy in the empire, Tezcan analyses the issue from the vantage point of the form of government itself, which is the unquestioned legitimacy of monarchical absolutism. Baki Tezcan presents his research question as it had been asked by Andrews and Kalpaklı in their earlier study and asks '[w]hy movements towards limitations on monarchical absolutism are seen as an advance in the one case and as a decline in the other'.¹³⁰ Tezcan argues that, until very recently, the mainstream historiography has tended to see the regicide of sultans in terms of imperial decline discourse in which each deposition hampered the Empire's progress vis-à-vis its counterparts.¹³¹ Although the Ottomans did not have a parliament that compares with the English system, Tezcan argues that the depositions and regicides

¹²⁹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 63.

¹³⁰ Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 5; Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 322.

¹³¹ Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 5.

should not simply mean that they were carried out by ‘some soldier-turned-bandits’. By arguing thus, he asserts that it shouldn’t be considered that the Janissaries’ perceived out-of-order actions ‘lacked any formal constitutional components’.¹³² He justifies his argument by supporting his perspective with that of a Frenchman, Victor Fontanier, who claimed that the Janissaries were standing in defence of the population in the face of the devastation caused by ‘absolute power’.¹³³ Seen this way, the Janissaries can be understood in terms of their limited democratic contributions.

Baki Tezcan proposes that this period of transition, in which the Janissaries gained a voice against the absolute power to the extent that they safeguarded the economic interests of the people, providing an unfettered environment for competition, corresponds to the post-medieval and post-patrimonial period of the Ottoman Empire, which he calls the Second Empire (1580-1826) in direct opposition to Berkes’s and Goodwin’s notions of what constitutes Medieval and early modern polities:

Although modernity came to be closely associated with capitalism and colonialism and this came to be seen as a European phenomenon imposed on the rest of the world, I suggest that early modernity can be defined much more globally and has to do with the relative democratization of political privileges as a result of the political empowerment of economically affluent commoners. If one were to define early modernity using these parameters, the Second Empire would definitely be an early modern polity. That does not mean, however, that it did not fall into decline. The Second Empire’s future was determined by the interaction of its present with its past. The institutions it inherited from the past were truly transformed by the developments of early modernity. Yet at the end of this transformation, these institutions were no longer able to fulfil their original functions properly, which left the Ottomans vulnerable in the face of European imperialism.¹³⁴

Focusing, on the one hand, on the mechanisms of a gradually emerging market economy in this ‘early modern polity’ of the empire, and the transformation of land politics on the other, in his *The Second Empire*, Tezcan proposes that the absolute rights

¹³² Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 5.

¹³³ Victor Fontanier lived in the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century (Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 6).

¹³⁴ Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 13.

of the monarch in this period were, at any rate, being confronted by the court, the viziers, the Ulema and the Janissary order, although the latter had particularly gained an important capacity for creating social and economic transformation in the Second Empire. In the post-Janissary period, when the *New Order* had established itself in the Ottoman and Turkish consciousness, the Janissaries eventually became the symbol of the Ottoman ‘*ancien regime*’ and were regarded as the chief culprits of the Ottoman decline.¹³⁵ For Tezcan, the New Order represented the revenge of the state on pre-1826 structures and forces, and its historians denounced the Ottoman *ancien regime* as accountable for the decline of the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁶

In *The Janissary Tree*, neither the economy-polity related focus, like Baki Tezcan’s, nor the sectarian focus, like Reha Çamuroğlu’s, is examined in depth in relation to the ‘decline’ of the Empire. The transformation of the Empire is investigated in terms of reformations in the military and the cultural transformations along Western lines, which take precedence over other developments in the Empire related to the Gülhane Rescript, such as the farm tax reform. The Seraskier’s New Army corresponds the *New Order* mentioned above, even if in the novel the Janissaries are not seen as having democratic significance. Through the Seraskier, who advocates the Edict when he talks to Yashim about it, the premises of the reforms are associated with structural and executive changes: ‘Changes will be made in many areas. Equality of the people under a single law. Administration. Ministers instead of pashas, that sort of thing. It will follow the way the army has been reformed in western lines, and it will not be enough. Naturally’.¹³⁷ The Seraskier’s prospective administration of the Ottoman Empire as republic forms a precedent for the later leadership of the Young Turks, especially that of

¹³⁵ Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 191.

¹³⁶ Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 194.

¹³⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 147.

Enver Pasha, who led the Empire to the Balkan Wars and the Great War, which caused the suffering and displacement of a big portion of the Ottoman population, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Tezcan's thesis of the New Order describes the Young Turks, who were responsible for the:

modernizing autocratic government that developed in the New Order, both in response to *and* hand in hand with European imperialism, [and] fostered the development of new political elites whose members eventually took over the leadership of the empire and oversaw its dismemberment.¹³⁸

This short description of the direction of the Empire in the nineteenth century, in which the rise of the modernising elites is criticised for taking the modernising project to an extreme, is a prospective backdrop for the modernising Seraskier of *The Janissary Tree*, who offers a solution of intense remodelling of the stumbling empire along military lines. He is, therefore, a precursor of a group of intellectuals, who, by incorporating the European Enlightenment into the Ottoman intellectual framework, paved the way later on for the empowerment of a group of military decision-makers, namely Enver Pasha and his associates, who came to rule the empire through the rise of the Committee of Union and Progress in the early twentieth century.

Until recent years, the abolition of the Janissaries had generally been accepted as a cut-off point for a new era as a general rule-of-thumb in Ottoman studies. Even if views differ on the categorization of the life span of the Ottoman Empire into epochs, it is possible simply to categorise the lifetime of the Empire into the stages of rise, stagnation, decline and collapse. After the increase in new perspectives in the study of the empire in recent years, Christine Woodhead argues that the revisionist 'Ottomanist historians have largely jettisoned the notion of a post-1600 "decline"'.¹³⁹ Baki Tezcan

¹³⁸ Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 6.

¹³⁹ Caroline Woodhead, 'Introduction' in *The Ottoman World*, ed. by Caroline Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 5.

also explains that the decline period of the mainstream declinist historiography has now been replaced by new revisionist approaches:

Ottomanist historians have produced several works in the last decades, revising the traditional understanding of this period from various angles, some of which were not even considered as topics of historical inquiry in the mid-twentieth century. Thanks to these works, the conventional narrative of Ottoman history – that in the late sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire entered a prolonged period of decline marked by steadily increasing military decay and institutional corruption – has been discarded.¹⁴⁰

As the declinist view has been predominantly positioned around the failure of the Janissaries, the study of the Janissary corps has been an important part of the mainstream historiography for a generation of writers. As has also been demonstrated by Çamuroğlu and Tezcan, there have emerged different ways of understanding the Janissary rebellions, with narratives that see them acting as safeguards against religious sectarian monopoly, and acting as pioneers for a more democratic administration by limiting the purview of the autarkical rule of the Sultan. These approaches provide supplementary examples to Jane Hathaway's claim that 'historians of the Ottoman Empire have rejected the narrative of decline in favour of one of crisis and adaptation'.¹⁴¹ In light of these works, Goodwin's fiction remains within the framework of declinist historiographical narratives, which see the Janissaries as the force that prevented the modernisation of the Empire.

1.1.3.2. Against the Edict: Revolution and the Seraskier

Through the character of the Seraskier, Jason Goodwin situates the Edict within the context of the Ottomans' military defeats against technologically more advanced opponents. Feeling humiliated by the military losses, the chief of the army is portrayed to be eager to start his own project of modernisation by instituting a Republic along

¹⁴⁰ Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, p. 9.

¹⁴¹ Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 8.

military lines after the fashion of French revolutionaries. The continuing success of the Russians in warfare is explained by their being ‘formidable opponents with up-to-date equipment and modern armies’, while in Egypt, Mehmet Ali Pasha, the Albanian, had used ‘the experience of the Napoleonic invasion to train the fellahin as soldiers, western-style’, as a result of which ‘[t]hey had drill, and discipline; they had tactics and modern guns’.¹⁴² The Seraskier’s resentment at the lack of a competent Ottoman army is witnessed in his train of thought: ‘No more than peasants in pantaloons, led by quarrelsome windbags, even the Greeks had proved to be more than a match for the New Guard’.¹⁴³ The Seraskier’s army is seen in competition against these armies since it had been introduced as a countermeasure against further territorial losses: ‘The sultan read the message and began to train his own, Egyptian-style force: the seraskier’s New Guard’.¹⁴⁴

The position of the chief of the army is a rather precarious one as he is presented throughout the novel as a military commander preoccupied with the Review of his army by the Sultan despite the fact that it is discovered, towards the end of the novel, that behind the scenes he has been preparing a military coup against the Sultan and the Empire itself. As a result of lack of confidence in the Sultan’s reforms, the project of modernisation takes an extreme character in the Seraskier’s vagary of following the image and fashion of Napoleon. On the surface, the Seraskier attracts Yashim’s sympathy for his tentative situation, between wanting to be modern and lacking the education and manners to be able to become so. On this account, Yashim feels sorry for

¹⁴² J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 8, 25.

¹⁴³ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 25.

the Seraskier for believing too much in the symbolic power of his French military kit, the 'Ferenghi magic' as Yashim calls it in his reflection.¹⁴⁵

Yashim felt a wave of pity for the seraskier, in his western kit, his efficient boots, his buttoned tunic. These were symbols he endured, not knowing exactly why, like one of those simpletons in the bazaar who feel that no medicine is good unless it causes them some pain. Magic boots, magic buttons.¹⁴⁶

Yashim is critical of the fact that by wearing the French military kit, the Seraskier thinks he and his soldiers can look and be modern, which is expressed in the Seraskier's words as modernity being 'a condition of the mind'.¹⁴⁷ The fact that the Seraskier takes modernisation at face value is juxtaposed with the scepticism displayed by Yashim regarding so-called Western modernity, and his sense that the Ottomans will never really be accepted in the league of Powers:

A dangerous party: always a guest, never a player. Only obliged to stand by, confused and helpless, as the old, grand battle raged, a battle that would never be won between the old and the new, reaction and renovation, memory and hope. Coming in too late, when last night's manti were already curling at the edges.¹⁴⁸

This feeling of missing-out seems to be a weighty emotional burden for the commander of the army, who bemoans the absence of the French dictionary until a couple of decades ago even if he appreciates its novelty.¹⁴⁹

From the viewpoint of the Seraskier, Ottoman losses are assessed with a view to the Ottomans' belated dialogue with European modernisation. The sultan, the narrator tells us from Yashim's point of view, 'was a born moderniser. He'd taken to the European saddle faster than anyone. The change that had come over the city went beyond the gradual but continuous disappearance of turbans and slippers, and their replacement by the fez, and leather shoes'.¹⁵⁰ The Seraskier's concern about the delay in military

¹⁴⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 316.

¹⁴⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 322.

¹⁴⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 146.

¹⁵⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 239-40.

modernisation and Yashim's criticism of the rapid adoption of Western fashions in daily social practices are viewed in manifest contrast regarding the Ottomans' place among their peers and neighbours. While for Yashim a total cultural transformation is not necessary for military achievements, for the Seraskier, the feeling of academic and cultural inadequacy vis-à-vis the French and the Russians is an extension of their military supremacy:

'I could pretend that none of that matters. There was a time when we met our enemies on the field, and crushed them underfoot. We were very good. But times have changed. We are not as fast as we were, and the enemy has become faster. [...] We can't afford to ignore them – Russians, Frenchmen. Yes, even those Egyptians can teach us something, but not if we suck on narghiles here, in Istanbul, trying to imagine what they are like. It's for us to go out and learn how they think'.¹⁵¹

In order to be active in this learning process, the Seraskier admits to having set up a meeting between his young officers and the Russians, which, even though no detail is offered in the book regarding how it came off, presumably abets the Janissary coup by hiding the kidnapping of the young men from Yashim.¹⁵²

Despite being a product of the most recent military reforms carried out by Mahmud II, the Seraskier is portrayed as sceptical of the upcoming reforms as he finds the Edict to be 'just another worthless piece of paper'.¹⁵³ He confesses to Yashim his belief that reforms are not enough, and that the sultans and eunuchs aren't 'important' as the core of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵⁴ Instead, he wants to form an Ottoman republic, since in order to be modern and strong, it is simply required to change the old system, the *ancien regime*, for a new Republic.¹⁵⁵ The Seraskier is presented by Goodwin as an example of the revolutionary mindset which was protested in Edmund Burke's influential criticism of the French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In this

¹⁵¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 146.

¹⁵² J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 116, 145-8.

¹⁵³ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 147.

¹⁵⁴ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 313-315.

¹⁵⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 316.

work, Burke's criticism targets the idealist republicans and revolutionaries of France who carried the French nation from anticipations of liberty to dictatorship.

In his Introduction to Burke's *Reflections*, Leslie George Mitchell mentions that, for Burke, '[a]ny practice that had shown itself capable of binding men together in political communion for any length of time was entitled to respect'.¹⁵⁶ Contrary to Edmund Burke's convictions, 'the French had shown a complete contempt for all the accumulated wisdom and evidence in their political history'.¹⁵⁷ In other words, based on his belief in the unpredictability of humanity's nature, in his defence of the *ancien regime*, Burke maintains that, as noted by Mitchell, 'given the diversity of man's political character, any existing institution should be approached with reverence'.¹⁵⁸ Burke believes that, in Mitchell's words, '[e]mancipated from the constraints of historical prescription [...], the French had become wreckers'.¹⁵⁹ In the novel, similar to Burke's depictions, the Seraskier attempts to destroy the Palace through his violent plan and build a republican state to replace the empire using imported European methods. Europe is seen by the Seraskier as the source of reason, which Thomas Paine (1737-1809) sees as the foundation of 'good government' in his *The Rights of Man* (1791-2). Duncan Wu summarises Paine's defence of the republic through his conviction that 'democracy – a society in which all men have equal rights and in which leadership depends on talent and wisdom – is better than aristocracy'.¹⁶⁰ Goodwin's interpretation of the unfolding historical events echoes Burke's *Reflections* in his scepticism about any new republic's capacity to protect individual liberties. Yashim's position is one of

¹⁵⁶ Leslie G. Mitchell, 'Introduction', in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. vii-xix (p. xv).

¹⁵⁷ Mitchell, 'Introduction', p. xvi.

¹⁵⁸ Mitchell, 'Introduction', p. xv.

¹⁵⁹ Mitchell, 'Introduction', p. xviii.

¹⁶⁰ Duncan Wu, *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 3rd edn ([Oxford]: Blackwell Publishing: [2006]), p. 23.

trying to preserve certain customs, and protect his fellow subjects in their multiplicity, according to certain measures that are part of the existing system. His questioning of, and growing antagonism towards, the Seraskier's republican idealism can be seen as a reflection of this nuanced position, which we could call an 'alternative modernity'.

Since modernity is only 'an arrangement of power' for the Seraskier, he looks up to Napoleon and the Russians for their military strength to achieve modernity. He also believes that equality will be achieved through a military regime, by being 'shoulder to shoulder with the men beside you, taking orders'.¹⁶¹ The Seraskier, in other words, is an enlightened dictator. Goodwin's fiction provides us with an opportunity to think about the Napoleonic scare and the new arrangement of power in Europe by means of situating the Ottomans' military and structural reorganisation attempts in the early nineteenth century within this context:¹⁶²

Most of the foreign instructors in the New Guard, Yashim knew, were Frenchmen, or others – Italians, Poles – who had been swept into the enormous armies the Emperor Napoleon had raised to carry out his dreams of universal conquest. Fifteen, ten years ago, with the Napoleonic Wars finally at an end, some of the modern indigent remnants of the Grande Armée had found their way to Istanbul, to take the sultan's sequin. But learning French was a business for the young, and the seraskier was pushing fifty.¹⁶³

According to general consent, the Ottomans have generally been seen as unresponsive to the French Revolution until the conquest of Egypt by Bonaparte's forces in 1798 when the revolution directly influenced them. Until then, the Ottomans have been

¹⁶¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 146, 313-4, 316.

¹⁶² Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*; Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (London: Norton, 1982), p. 52; also see Ali Budak, 'Fransız Devrimi'nin Osmanlı'ya Armağanı: Gazete Türk Basınının Doğuşu' [The French Revolution's Gift to the Ottomans: The Newspaper: The Emergence of Turkish Media], *Turkish Studies*, 7.3 (September 2012), 663-81; Fatih Yeşil, 'Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman Eyes: Ebubekir Ratib Efendi's Observations', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 70.2 (2007), 283-304.

¹⁶³ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 11.

regarded to have stayed outside the influence of the ‘mass experience’ of their European counterparts with respect to the French Revolution.¹⁶⁴

Niyazi Berkes remains tentative regarding the way the Western Enlightenment was translated into Ottoman experience. He does not find in the historical accounts of Ottoman historians Cevdet or Asım substantial reference to the rational philosophy and ideology of the French Revolution, Napoleonic campaigns, or intellectual and scientific movement of ‘Enlightenment’. Even of ‘the French penetration’, he finds unclear expressions of opinion regarding ‘the appearance of the Frankish manners and ideas’.¹⁶⁵ In particular, the vague nature of the wording of Cevdet Paşa’s observations in his *Tarih* regarding the new influence of the countries of Western Europe doesn’t escape Berkes’s notice:

In Istanbul appeared many French affairs and several European things which were necessities of civilization. The grandees of the sultanate and too-eager government officials exceeded reasonable limits and initiated French ways in everything. They began to follow European ways, necessarily or unnecessarily.¹⁶⁶

Berkes sees this vague expression as to the cause of the adoption of French innovations as insinuating that it results from undiluted appropriation and imitation by the reforming elite, which could lead to an unnecessary shift from Sharia ways and customs.¹⁶⁷ So, for Berkes, Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas, both by means of their dissemination and in terms of their after-effects, primarily influenced only the Ottoman elite in their intellectual and cultural interactions with the French and other Europeans, who now appeared in greater numbers. These new styles of encounter with Western European visitors and residents accelerated the acceptance of the idea of Western superiority in the areas of ‘knowledge, technology, industry and economic power’, which is what the

¹⁶⁴ Fatih Yeşil, ‘Looking at the French Revolution’; Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1962; repr. 1989), p. 23.

¹⁶⁵ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁶ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁷ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, pp. 83-4.

Seraskier and the narrator from the viewpoint of the jewellery thief, that is Kislar Agha, repeatedly refers to when they say ‘new ways’.¹⁶⁸ *Janissary* brings criticism to the understanding of Western civilisation as an unattainable entity through the character of Kislar Agha while the Seraskier and his ambitious westernisation project is used as a means to criticise the idealisation of the Western civilisation. Another approach that advocates an exclusively Ottoman modernity is presented through the protagonist Yashim, who embraces a model of intellectual engagement, which will now be examined.

1.1.3.3. Middle Way: Yashim

Between the extreme models of dependency in the security of tradition as well as the belief in the corrupt nature of the Western modernisation (Occidentosis), and the extreme belief in the potentiality of a wholesale modernisation, Yashim presents as a mid-way character, by both illustrating the aspects of the Empire that indeed cannot be transformed and the changes that can be adopted. Having been freed from his duties at the palace by Sultan Mahmud II, Yashim lives outside the Palace, but he still keeps his organic connection to the Palace as he tends to the requests coming from the Sultan or the Valide (mother of the) Sultan.¹⁶⁹ Acting as a conduit between the immured world of the Palace harem and his liberated world outside it, Yashim could still carry out many of the responsibilities of a eunuch, since:

Apart from the sultan himself, and the palace eunuchs, he was the only man who could take up an invitation to enter the women’s quarters. The only man in the whole empire who could come and go at will. And when the palace turned to him for help it was his duty to oblige.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 48, 66.

¹⁶⁹ Jason Goodwin, *An Evil Eye* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 58.

¹⁷⁰ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 107.

It has been noted that the manumission of eunuchs did not actually make much change in terms of the eunuchs' employment status, because, as Ehud Toledano observes, 'the wealth and prestige which attached to the position of Palace eunuchs required no coercion on the part of their masters', so they would willingly work for their masters.¹⁷¹ In view of this point, it is possible to argue that, like many other eunuchs, Yashim too is 'advantageously positioned at the crossroads of sensitive information, privy to the innermost secrets of many Court figures', and this helps him in his duties as the Palace investigator, as does having a friendly and trustworthy relationship with the Valide Sultan.¹⁷² Having been manumitted, Yashim can also conveniently avoid the complications of delicate 'balance of loyalties' that existed in such a highly competitive environment as a harem; and this allows him to act as an independent agent.¹⁷³

We learn in Jason Goodwin's later novel *An Evil Eye* (2011) that Yashim's castration was carried out by some unknown people who also raped and killed his Greek mother.¹⁷⁴ Yashim's father being a governor, Yashim's status in the Palace as a white eunuch, unlike that of other, African, slaves, is less clear-cut. His job as an investigator in the service of the Sultan as a non-black eunuch aptly betrays a different background, despite the fact that his freedom remains considerably limited even after his manumission, as Ehud Toledano points out: 'The physical damage inflicted upon them [the eunuchs] could not be remedied by a mere certificate of manumission; their employment and prosperity were practically guaranteed by their handicap'.¹⁷⁵ The narrator talks about Yashim's coping strategy with his out-of-place position in the changing world with a solemn tone. Yashim chooses to remain invisible in his brown

¹⁷¹ Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 387.

¹⁷² Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 388.

¹⁷³ Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 388.

¹⁷⁴ J. Goodwin, *An Evil Eye*, p. 240.

¹⁷⁵ Toledano, 'Imperial Eunuchs', p. 387.

cloak, finding shelter in detachment, since if he wore European clothes he would no longer have a real place in the emerging world: 'Perhaps detachment was a mannerism he had adopted because the agony was too biting and too strong to bear without it. A very fragile kind of make-believe'.¹⁷⁶ Despite the fact that he enjoys his liberation being in the company of his friends outside the palace, shopping and cooking, and enjoying the products of modernity outside of the palace, such as reading French books he borrows from the (French) Valide Sultan, Yashim has reservations about the ways modernity has been transformed in the Turkish experience.

Yashim's position in *The Janissary Tree*, overall, resembles that of the 'middling' hero type character of Georg Lukacs in his *The Historical Novel*. Hamish Dalley details two types of character in Lukács's analysis of the historical novel. The first character type, 'historical-social types', are the typical figures that can be found in Sir Walter Scott's novels as representatives of 'social trends and historical forces'. Hamish Dalley suggests that 'this mode of characterization enables the depiction of large-scale processes of change via narratives of fictional individuals', which means that they manifest some kind of political and historical significance.¹⁷⁷ In *Janissary*, the main 'extreme opposing social forces' are represented by the traditionalists (the eunuchs and the Janissaries) and a revolutionist (the seraskier).¹⁷⁸

The second type of Lukács's classification, the 'middle-of-the-road' or the 'middling' hero type, on the other hand, 'is defined by the relative absence of positive qualities'.¹⁷⁹ This hero of the historical novel is given a neutral character, which provides him/her the

¹⁷⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 34.

¹⁷⁷ Hamish Dalley, 'Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel: Epistemologies of Contemporary Realism', *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 1.1 (March 2014), 51-67 (pp. 58-9); Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁷⁸ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 36.

¹⁷⁹ Dalley, 'Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel', p. 59.

flexibility to operate between clashing ‘historical-social types’ with contrasting expectations.¹⁸⁰ Yashim, with his flexibility to move between the court and the public spaces (between the seraskier of the New Guard, the Bektashi tekkes, the harem and the köçek dancers) is able to interlace different layers of the society. It is the heroes’

task to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact with one another. Through the plot, at whose centre stands the hero, a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another.¹⁸¹

In addition to bringing together the contenders of a given society, the middling hero also operates between the past and the present. Jerome de Groot describes some of the characteristics of Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverly* as representing history as a *bildungsroman*, as a personal history:

In the same way that Lukacs talks of the masses achieving historical consciousness the hero of the *Bildungsroman* achieves a sense of ‘then’ and ‘now’ in relation to his personal identity. Yet *Waverly* himself is, as Lukacs points out, entirely middling as a character. This is key for Lukacs in that it allows Scott to explore the ‘reality’ of history through a figure who is without prejudice.¹⁸²

Yashim’s is the voice raised to refuse the choice between the two extremes and the limited view of the world that is trapped between this dichotomy. By giving Yashim the characteristics of a middling protagonist, Jason Goodwin is able to produce ‘a narrative that posits society as a totality of contradictory forces’.¹⁸³

The theme of contradictory traditional and progressive forces in *The Janissary Tree*, namely the surge of contradictions created by political and social changes in a closed society that functions based on a deeply traditional system, had been an important topic for Ottoman intellectuals in previous centuries but coalesced with a new urgency in the

¹⁸⁰ Dalley, ‘Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel’, pp. 58-60, cited from Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 35–36.

¹⁸¹ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 36.

¹⁸² Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 40; Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 29.

¹⁸³ Dalley, ‘Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel’, p. 59.

early nineteenth century.¹⁸⁴ By consolidating characteristics of this turbulent political climate by means of characters and social groups in the novel, the author translates historical circumstances into deeply felt expectations and disillusionments.

1.1.4. The Crisis of Modernity in *The Janissary Tree*: A Condition of the Mind

As opposed to the staunch traditionalist perspective of the Janissaries, both Yashim and the Seraskier are portrayed in favour of the Sultan's modernisation even though they don't receive the importation of the French laws, expertise and culture with equal confidence and eagerness. Despite the difference in their attitudes in this matter, however, they both identify their relation to modernity as 'a condition of the mind'.

Yashim's brown cloak as his choice of attire is explained by his wish to remain inscrutable, which is defined as a 'talent [...] [m]ore likely [...] a condition of mind'.¹⁸⁵

His avoidance of European clothes gives him a degree of anonymity and an appearance of neutrality. The Seraskier, on the other hand, sees the French military kit he wears as a symbol of modernity, and defines modernity as 'a condition of the mind'.¹⁸⁶ The concept, therefore, is associated with the acts of both welcoming and disregarding change.

Even if he does not follow European forms in his appearance and attire, Yashim appreciates French culture and literature. One of the books Yashim reads in French is Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, which describes the plans of two ex-lovers to manipulate and seduce an innocent aristocratic girl. In the epistolary novel, the seduction of the girl is carried out in the name of giving her an education. In Yashim's dream, Marquise de Merteuil tells Yashim 'depravity is not a word we recognise in the

¹⁸⁴ For an exemplary earlier instance of Ottoman discussion of 'decline', see Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

¹⁸⁵ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 316.

Academie [...] It is a condition of mind'.¹⁸⁷ The Marquise achieves liberation from social forces around her by redefining morality and social norms; therefore, it can be said that de Laclos's book is essentially about liberation from social constraints. Nonetheless, this book is also about the decadence of the French aristocracy nearing the French Revolution, and Merteuil is characterised as a corrupt person who abuses 'entrusted power', that is her discretion, 'for private gain'.¹⁸⁸ In this sense, the decadency of French society is demonstrated in juxtaposition to 'depravity' being 'a condition of mind'. The comparison Goodwin conveys between depravity and modernity is carried through when Yashim gets surprised upon hearing from the Seraskier these same words he hears from the Marquise. This may mean that, from the viewpoint of Yashim, the Seraskier is at the root of the decadence in society, proving that being corrupt is a feature that does not solely apply to corrupt elements within status-quo defenders. The Seraskier is viewed in this vein as guilty as the traditionalists, who are rebellious against the Sultan's reform edict.

Another pattern of corruption in the Seraskier's representation can be found in the alliance of the Seraskier with the Russians. A definition of 'corruption' that speaks to this arrangement can be found in Mark Philp's work on the same topic: 'A public official (A), acting for personal gain, violates the norms of public office and harms the interests of the public (B) to benefit a third party (C) who rewards A for access to goods or services which C would not otherwise obtain'.¹⁸⁹ One of the key features of this definition is '[t]he idea that three actors are normally involved or affected by corrupt activity: the occupant of the public office (A), the intended beneficiary of that office

¹⁸⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸ 'Anti-Corruption Glossary' in *Transparency International* <<https://www.transparency.org/glossary/term/corruption>> [accessed 27 March 2018].

¹⁸⁹ Mark Philp, 'Corruption Definition and Measurement' in *Measuring Corruption*, ed. by Charles Sampford, Arthur Shacklock, Carmel Connors and Fredrik Galtung (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 45-56 (p. 45)

(B), and the actual beneficiary of the particular exercise of that office (C)'.¹⁹⁰ The act that is described as corrupt is defended in the novel by the Seraskier as being in a certain state of mind. This plot structure is a strong reminder of a Cold War-style treachery story pattern. The Seraskier (A), who wants to gain power like that of Bonaparte in order to impose modernity, instead of serving the Sultan and his subjects (B), collaborates with Russians and hides information regarding their culpability from the investigator (C), who would exploit and benefit from the chaos created in Istanbul from the murder of the officers by the Janissaries. In order to conceal his coup plans, the Seraskier tries to hide his knowledge of the French language, although Yashim learns from Palewski that the Seraskier can speak French fluently, and interestingly, this gives Yashim a clue regarding the Seraskier's intention of dethroning the Sultan. For the Seraskier, the change is unavoidable and the Janissaries are just a hurdle: 'We've seen those weak old fools for the last time. Blathering about tradition! Padding round in their own nest, like silly chickens. Defying history'.¹⁹¹ His idea of the Ottoman Empire is that it is sunken and corrupt, like a disease, whereas modernity and his revolutionist coup bring cure: 'Think of it as . . . surgery. It hurts, of course. The surgeon's knife is ruthless, but it cuts out the disease. [...] For the patient the agony brings relief'.¹⁹² The Seraskier sees a noble future in transitioning to republic by removing the sultan; therefore, he doesn't deem himself as corrupt for causing the death of the officers and a commotion in Istanbul.

¹⁹⁰ Mark Philp, 'Corruption Definition and Measurement', p. 45.

¹⁹¹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 316.

¹⁹² J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 316.

In *The Janissary Tree*, the concept of ‘modernity’ in the period leading to the *Tanzimat* is entertained as fraught with conflict and crisis. The standard for modernity in the contest between radical forces is the anticipated reform edict, which, in line with the author’s conventional declinist approach in his historical analysis, provides a definitive point for embarking on grand-scale of reforms following the abolition of the Janissaries. Jason Goodwin brings forth his scepticism concerning the way reforms were implemented through his main character, Yashim, who can be perceived as one of the oddities of the Ottoman Empire from the perspective of a Western European observer. In his attempt to demonstrate the unique character of the Ottomans at this crossroad of changes, Jason Goodwin has created and employed other exceptional characters, including the Valide Sultan with French origin, Preen, a köçek, transvestite dancer, and Palewski, an ambassador with no country. These characters, partially representing the Ottoman social tapestry, constitute the groundwork examples for Goodwin’s formulation of cultural diversity in the Empire. These characters and the presentation of their daily lives attest to the author’s formulation of a model for alternative modernity. On the other hand, the Ottomans’ struggles at the time are formulated only in connection with the developments in Europe and the involvement of the Western European countries in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire, allowing the author to fall into the quagmire of the Eastern Question vis-a-vis Ottoman weakness. This results in a clash between the approaches of the obsolete Ottoman decline rhetoric and the alternative modernity approach.

Any attempt at providing a comprehensive analysis of *The Janissary Tree* gets even more challenging because of the contradictory presentation of cultural exchange, as observed in the exchange of cultural attire. While the author’s suspicion of the Ottomans’ use of European style garments is exemplified abundantly through the

Seraskier, Yashim, the vegetable-seller George and the Valide Hanım, this attitude becomes an issue of a masquerade when the two officials from the British embassy, Fizerly and Compston, are clad in Ottoman attire and disguise themselves as Turks. Yashim, presumably in order to appease the Seraskier, tells the chief of the army that the duo who appear on the roof of the Great Mosque, are '[m]uch more modern than they look, I imagine. And efficient, as you say'.¹⁹³ The complexity of the question of modernity and cultural relativist perspective will be further discussed at length in the following section, which treats *The Snake Stone* principally in relation to the writer's viewpoint on the *millet* system. Here we can begin to see more clearly the limitations of Goodwin's attempts at intervening in Ottoman historiography by means of historical detective fiction.

1.2. *The Snake Stone*

1.2.1. The *Millet* System

An important aspect of Mahmud II's reforms was that they laid the basis for the secularization of the government kicking off the *Tanzimat* (Reorganisation, or Reordering) period and planted the seeds of a political and social movement called Ottomanism, which is an ideology that flourished at the turn of the twentieth century and saw democracy and equality among the people of the Empire as the most viable alternative to the *millet* system in order to prevent the nationalist and separatist movements.¹⁹⁴ Stretched over three continents, the Ottoman Empire accommodated people from a variety of religious and ethnic groups called *millets*. These conglomerate

¹⁹³ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 318.

¹⁹⁴ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 90; Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 2-3

non-Muslim communities were simply divided into communities according to their major religious variation, such as the Greek-Orthodox *millet*, the Armenian-Catholic *millet* and the Jewish *millet*. *Millets* were administered by their own religious leaders in legal matters which were resolved within their individual judiciary system unless they were criminal cases or cases where the involvement of a Muslim was in question. This is why millets can be said to have held a partially self-governing entity. Non-Muslims were also liable to pay taxes called *cizye* which secured them exemption from military duties. Ottoman society was divided into two classes: The ruling (*askeri*) class were Muslims who carried out the governmental tasks and this category included the officers of the court and the army, civil servants, and *ulema*, the learned people of Islamic law.¹⁹⁵ The rest of the population were called the *reaya* and were composed of both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals.¹⁹⁶

The Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were considered to have privileged status because Islam was the official religion in the administration of the Empire and this was the determining factor of social class. This prerogative underscored a model that has most often been called ‘tolerant’ since it functioned even in the most hostile conditions in Europe since the system of Islamic core permitted the pre-Islamic Abrahamic religions to be recognised as ‘people of the book’.¹⁹⁷ Karen Barkey explains the function and the use of this system by indicating that ‘[t]he Ottoman state, like the Russian, throughout its history tried to use a policy of containment rather than letting religious rivalries get out of control’.¹⁹⁸ Gerald Maclean discerns the Ottoman system from that of their peers

¹⁹⁵ Şerif Mardin, ‘Power, Civil Society and Culture in the Ottoman Empire’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 11.3 (Jun. 1969), pp.258-281 (p. 259).

¹⁹⁶ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁹⁷ Donna Landry, ‘Said before Said’ in *Debating Orientalism*, edited by Ziad Elmarsafy, Anna Bernard and David Attwell, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 65.

¹⁹⁸ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 117.

in Europe through the concept of ‘imperial envy’, which he uses to describe a ‘structure of feeling’ that developed in Europe at the height of the Ottomans’ beneficial engagement with an exuberant cosmopolitanism.¹⁹⁹ MacLean maintains that the English began ‘to develop a new sense of their own place in the world’ through their cultural encounter with the Ottoman Empire, which gave way to ‘imperial envy’.²⁰⁰ Laila Abdel-Rahman El-Sayed outlines envy as the feeling that constitutes a person’s view of ‘his equal as a rival in politics or in any arena’.²⁰¹ According to her, MacLean’s use of the concept denotes to a ‘language of fascination’ which can be detected ‘in the writings of early modern English visitors to the Ottoman empire’, and which was actually used as ‘the facade for imperial envy, which entails rivalry besides fascination’.²⁰² MacLean describes the attitude of the English towards the Ottomans as ‘an explicit declaration of the malicious hatred of Ottoman imperial success’, and in El-Sayed’s words, also as ‘a negotiation between fear and fascination’ resulting from the tolerant image of Muslim rulers.²⁰³

In addition to resuming the structural reorganisation of the military that had been initiated during Selim III’s reign, Mahmud II also launched some modifications in the traditional customs and practices in daily life. When Mehmet II conquered Constantinople in 1453, he had declared that each community would dress the way that was ascribed to them. Jason Goodwin describes the specifics of these garments in his *Lords of the Horizons*: ‘Greeks wore black trousers and slippers; the Armenians violet

¹⁹⁹ Landry, ‘Said before Said’, p. 62.

²⁰⁰ Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. xi.

²⁰¹ Laila Hashem Abdel-Rahman El-Sayed, ‘Discourses on Emotions: Communities, Styles, and Selves in Early Modern Mediterranean Travel Books: Three Case Studies’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kent, 2016), p. 219.

²⁰² Abdel-Rahman El-Sayed, ‘Discourses on Emotions’, pp. 218, 220.

²⁰³ Gerald MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 131.; Abdel-Rahman El-Sayed, ‘Discourses on Emotions’, p. 182.

slippers and purple trousers; and the Jews sky-blue trousers and slippers, and certain very privileged non-believers were allowed to wear yellow slippers and red trousers, like a Turk'.²⁰⁴ In Mahmud's time, the imperial subjects were encouraged with a decree issued in 1829 to change their robes and turbans that symbolised the historical and religious affiliations. In the decree it was demanded that everyone in the Empire, including the sultan himself, wear red fezzes, western boots and the stambouline, a cutaway coat, although it did not involve the clergy, who were allowed to wear their robes and turbans.²⁰⁵ This was the new modern outlook of an Ottoman man.

Jason Goodwin in his novel *The Snake Stone* (2007) frequently addresses the issue of the decree on clothing. The narrator voices Yashim's reflections on these changes:

It seemed to Yashim that he had once been able to glance at people's feet to tell who they were, and where they belonged. In Fener, or Sultanahmet, perhaps; but in Pera, no longer. The distinctions blurred; the categories no longer held. That lanky figure in a Frankish suit – was he Russian? Belgian? Or an Ottoman, indeed – a Bosnian schoolmaster, perhaps, or a Russified Moldavian shipping agent?²⁰⁶

In this passage, Yashim seems to lament that the distinctly Ottoman cosmopolitanism is vanishing and the Ottoman man is no longer distinguishable by his appearance. For him, the 'origins' of the Ottomans now seem to be 'so clouded and confused'.²⁰⁷ Goodwin portrays the difficulty of leaving one's habits and customs in the multi-faith society Ottomans lived in in the scene in *The Snake Stone* in which the narrator introduces the conversation between the investigator Yashim and the Greek Ottoman grocer George as below:

Almost ten years after the sultan had told his people to dress alike, George stuck to the traditional blue, brimless cap and black slippers which defined him as a Greek.

²⁰⁴ J. Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons*, p. 96.

²⁰⁵ Donald Quataert, 'Clothing Laws, State, And Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 29 (1997), 403-425 (p. 403).

²⁰⁶ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 260.

²⁰⁷ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 260.

Once, when Yashim asked him if he was going to adopt the fez, George had drawn himself up quite stiffly:

‘What! You thinks I dresses for sultans and pashas all of my life? Pah! Like these courgette flowers, I wears what I wears because I ams what I ams!’

Yashim had not asked him about it again; nor did George ever remark on Yashim’s turban. It had become like a secret sign between them, a source of silent satisfaction and mutual recognition; as between them and the others who ignored the fez, and went on dressing as before.²⁰⁸

On this topic, Goodwin agrees with Niyazi Berkes who notes that ‘[c]onfusion and even anarchy threatened when the elaborate traditional system of attire became severely damaged. People did not know what to put on; the streets assumed a carnival appearance [...] in the absence of a new uniformity’.²⁰⁹ According to Berkes, it was during the time of Mahmud II that the ‘gradual-separation between state and religion’ was initiated as it was in his time that ‘Western attire, and certain social practices relating to etiquette, taste, and the like’ were beginning to be accepted. These changes were slowly rendering everyday religious symbols and distinctions irrelevant, and concerning this, Goodwin’s narrator points out that, with these changes, Mahmut II ‘had meant all men to receive equal treatment’.²¹⁰ In Niyazi Berkes’s account of the development of secularism in Turkey, the reactions of Western observers to such changes had in the majority been negative. Berkes argues that these observers ‘bemoaned the disappearance of what they believed to be peculiarly oriental. The great champions of equality between the Rayahs and the Turks complained of their new-found difficulty in distinguishing one from the other’, an example of which we can see in the conversation between Yashim and the Greek grocer above.²¹¹

The fact that the disappearance of the outfits with Oriental character should receive any criticism might well be understood as deriving from orientalism, with its exoticising and

²⁰⁸ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, pp. 11-2.

²⁰⁹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, pp. 123-4.

²¹⁰ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, pp. 90, 122.; J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 16.

²¹¹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 122.

essentialising tendencies. In her critique of postmodernist discourses on Black identity politics, Bell Hooks calls for an ‘African-American resistance struggle’ which is ‘rooted in a process of decolonization that continually opposes re-inscribing notions of “authentic” Black identity’.²¹² Such a demand can also shed light on the various interpretations of authenticity in both historical and contemporary accounts of Ottoman identity. Even though Goodwin’s novels have been written in the twenty-first century, under the influence of postmodern discourses which celebrate otherness and difference, applying such ideas within an early nineteenth-century context can, nevertheless, be considered anachronistic. In terms of the postmodern critique of homogeneous, uniform, and universal modern identities, which in the Turkish case has acquired an utmost form in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s early republic due to population exchanges following the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), as well as homogenising reforms during this period, the idea of rejecting an erstwhile eventual uniformity before the advent of the postmodern celebration of heterogeneity would be an unrealistic expectation, considering, in Anthony Giddens’s words, the ‘inherently globalising’ characteristic of modernity.²¹³ After all, as Berkes puts it, ‘[t]he traditional costumes of a changing society were bound to disappear under the force of actual conditions’.²¹⁴ In the Ottoman case, changes to the appearance of its people came as a consequence of the rise of national insurgencies, which forced the concept of *toleration* to evolve into a consensus amounting to *equal opportunities and obligations* from the viewpoint of the ideal of Ottomanism.

The author displays a somewhat Romantic and exotic view of Ottoman culture, which fails to promote the assessment of the new Ottoman outfit in its social and political

²¹² Bell Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), p. 28.

²¹³ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Gateshead: Polity, 2004), p. 63.

²¹⁴ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 122.

context, i.e. as an attempt to centralise Sultan Mahmud's government by blurring the boundaries of the classes that are rooted in the *millet* system, and which aims to consolidate the loyalty of his subjects. The *millet* system unavoidably produced a 'closed group' structure in the administration of the state even though it continued to mutually benefit the society and the Palace by ensuring that each group carried out their function in the society within their religious and professional capacity, securing the continuation of the empire.²¹⁵ During the times of religious strife throughout the Europe, this system guaranteed the safety of all people in the empire; however, as such closed class-based systems proved to be limited in the face of nationalist movements, the reformations that commenced within military organisations exceeded their original intentions in time. On this issue, Niyazi Berkes argues that the outlook of people significantly followed Sultan Mahmud's reforms:

Headgear was a mark of religious, vocational, and national identity as well as an insignia of one's rank and status. [...] The disappearance of the old orders, or the changes in their status, and the rise of new classes necessitated the adoption of new dress. The appearance of the horse-drawn carriage, the decline in certain trades, changes in the structure and in functions within the government, business, industry, and even education, and the appropriation of certain new amenities in home furnishings imposed upon the people the search for a new appearance.²¹⁶

This craving for new patterns and variety is criticised in Goodwin's fiction predominantly from the Valide's eyes as 'a planter's daughter on the French island of Martinique' who preferred 'the comforts of oriental tradition'.²¹⁷ Her scepticism of the adoption of the French modes of living and fashion is given as purely limiting, without style and 'fashion-plates'.²¹⁸

The accounts that have an essentialised view of the Ottomans and strive to keep them situated within an unchanging identity disregard the mutual exclusivity of establishing

²¹⁵ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 12.

²¹⁶ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 123.

²¹⁷ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, pp. 100-101.

²¹⁸ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 235.

universal equality and keeping traditions originating from the *millet* system intact. The project of Ottomanism ultimately intended to overcome this contradiction. At the beginning of the following century, as writers such as Michelle Campos and Raja Shehadeh show, this ideal of ‘peaceful coexistence’ in a highly nationalistic setting was almost accomplished, but shortly this dynamism backslid into nationalist fervour.²¹⁹ Berkes refers to Mahmud II as ‘the founder of a new Ottoman state’ which presents an understanding of ‘Ottoman sovereignty’ that is based on ‘the people’.²²⁰ He is seen by Berkes as a seculariser of the state:

He threw away his cloak of sacred power with all its trappings and made himself not the defender of the faithful but the enlightener of the Ottoman citizenry. He founded an absolute monarchy supported by a centralized bureaucracy and a state army recruited from among commoners and formed with a new, secular, and progressive orientation.

It was during Mahmud's time of greatest weakness that the idea of an Ottoman nationality composed of all the subjects of the Empire irrespective of their origin, language, and religious affiliation, and the idea of the Padişah as the temporal ruler of the Ottomans began to form.²²¹

An important aspect of the *millet* system was that the rule of the empire was based on the Islamic organisation of the state. The Ulema, ‘the corps of the learned men of religion or of the Şeriat’, were charged with assuring that ‘the ruler's legislation, administration, and justice agreed with the Şeriat’, which meant ‘the preservation of the traditional order’, i.e. *nizam*.²²² In 1826, after the abolition of the Janissaries, *şeyhülislam*, the head of Islam, was offered *Ağa Kapısı* Palace, the defunct office of the master of the Janissaries, which was later turned into a ministry during the *Tanzimat* period (1839-1856), the result of which was the hampering of the *şeyhülislam*'s direct

²¹⁹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*; Raja Shehadeh, *A Rift in Time: Travels with My Ottoman Uncle* (London: Profile, 2010); Landry, ‘Said before Said’, p. 66.

²²⁰ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 92.

²²¹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 92.

²²² Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, pp. 14, 16.

influence in political matters.²²³ With the establishment of *rüşdiye* schools (military middle schools) alongside the old religious schools called *medreses*, the education system was also being relatively secularised during the reign of Mahmut II. Moreover, the establishment of *Mekteb-i Tibbiye* (Medicine School) (1827) and *Mekteb-i Harbiye* (Military School) (1834) marked the reformation attempts of the imperial army. All these new schools in which positivist education system was exercised contributed to the rise of future secular and Westernised bureaucrats.

Such transition, whose effects will be further examined in the following chapter in relation to Jenny White's novels, came as a result of the centralisation efforts that made it possible to end the distribution of power among interest groups such as the Janissaries and the Ulema after the eradication of the former in 1826. Treating each group within the empire impartially would put the state and the sultan in the centre and above all religious and ethnic differences. Mahmud II's efforts to centralise power and then to redistribute it in this vein constituted milestones towards a more 'civil'ised, secularised and centralised government in which the sultan held the absolute power and allowed a new kind of loyalty to the throne. The sultan undermined the religious class for the sake of installing a civil bureaucracy, which would give him more power and eliminate to an extent the religious intrusion in state policies, and in doing that, he favoured the supporters of reform and westernisation for the government posts.²²⁴ In Goodwin's novel, it is possible to find descriptions of this moment of transition in Ottoman history, albeit with a taste of cynicism and repulsive imagery:

It was several years since the sultan had begun to encourage his subjects to adopt western dress; the results were mixed. Many men had swapped their turbans for the

²²³ 'İl Müftülüğümüz', T.C. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Eyüp İlçe Müftülüğü < <http://eyupmuftulugu.gov.tr/icerik/il-muftulugumuz> > [accessed 27 March 2018]; G. Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, p. 226.

²²⁴ Mustafa Gökçek, 'Centralization during the era of Mahmud II', 21 (2001), 237-255 < <http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/oa/article/view/5000116507> > [accessed 27 March 2018]

scarlet fez, and their loose robes for trousers and the stambouline, a curiously high-necked, swallow-tailed jacket, but few of them wore European lace-up boots. Some of Yashim's neighbours on the divan resembled black beetles, in bare feet; all elbows and pointy knees.²²⁵

In the final analysis, the lack of mention of the socio-political significance of religious symbols in the daily lives of the Ottomans whose lives are rather segregated by religious boundaries gives a sense of incompleteness in the author's description of the Ottomans.

1.2.2. The Ottoman Cavalry and Horsemanship

In Jason Goodwin's crime fiction series, the detective Yashim presents both eagerness and suspicion towards the reform movement at the same time, raising questions regarding what modernity means. To begin with, it is possible to contend that Yashim's cynicism towards Westernisation every so often serves as a means for Goodwin to display the kinds of attitude prevalent in nineteenth-century Western accounts that showcase the ways in which the Ottomans sought to reconcile themselves with and to Western lifestyles in their daily lives. In one of these accounts, in his book titled *Cavalry; Its History and Tactics*, dated 1853, Captain Louis Edward Nolan, an officer in the Light Cavalry of Britain, emphasises the forceful and artificial nature of reforms:

The late Sultan Mahmoud must needs have his cavalry disciplined *alla Franca*, or in Christian fashion; and he imported a number of French, Italian, and German non-commissioned officers to teach his men to ride with long stirrups, and to form, dress, and look like Europeans. To the disgust and even dismay of his Moslems, he buttoned them up in close jackets and put them into tight pantaloons. With a most perverse determination the system has been continued and extended these last twelve years, under his son and successor, the present Sultan Abdul Medjid, and it may now safely be said that the Turkish cavalry is no longer the best in the world. The men, always accustomed to sit cross-legged, and to keep their knees near the abdomen, cannot be taught to ride with the long stirrup, *à la française*. They are always rolling off, and are frequently ruptured.²²⁶

²²⁵ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 4.

²²⁶ Captain L. E. Nolan, *Cavalry; Its History and Tactics* (Columbia: Evans and Cogswell, 1864), p. 15.

Captain Nolan's tone carries a measure of empathy mixed with disdain and complacency. The word 'safely' denotes the fact that the Ottoman cavalry no longer posed a threat to the Christian West as it notoriously did in the past. The new modern and westernised army, *Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye* (The Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad), was formed following the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826, approximately two decades after Sultan Selim III's *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Order) was abolished after the Janissary coup of 1807. Captain Nolan writes about the Ottoman army in the above passage with an unconcealed sense of derision since the Ottoman army had been a source of admiration in the early modern period in Europe, which was amply proven in Western military and diplomatic histories and travel writings. Especially in the mid-16th century, 'the discipline of Süleyman's army' was being praised by dignitaries such as the French King's commissioner Jacques Gassot and the Austrian ambassador Baron de Busbecq.²²⁷ The military training and discipline of the Janissaries had been a source of fear in Eastern Europe from the 15th to 17th centuries. This being the case, Captain Nolan's caricatured description of the cavalry makes a telling point about the unwieldy transition to a desired level of technical expertise. As opposed to Captain Nolan's descriptions, the new military force also attracted comments praising it from the perspective of functionality:

The dress of the modern Turkish soldier has partaken of the general change which has occurred within the last ten years [from about 1820], and whatever it may have lost in picturesque effect, it has certainly gained in effectiveness for military duty. Instead of loose, slipshod slippers, he now wears stout serviceable shoes securely fastened by leather strings. The huge baloon chaksheers [trousers], which impeded his every movement have given place to woollen trowsers, still rather ample about the nether man, but not so large as to prevent him from making a rapid charge upon the enemy, or from running away. The glittering and flowing jubbee [gown] and bayneesh [robe] are well exchanged for a smart tight-bodied blue jacket, closely hooded in front, and allowing perfect freedom to the limbs; while the turban, infinitely varied in shape and colour, often ragged, and frequently dirty, suggesting the idea of walking toadstools, has forever disappeared. In its place the soldier

²²⁷ Philip Mansel, 'The French Renaissance', p. 98.

sports a tidy red cap, with a blue tassel gracefully depending from its crown. With the exception of the cap, and the still lingering amplitude of the trowsers, the Turkish soldiers could scarcely be distinguished from the regulars of any European nation.²²⁸

The reason for the general disappointment in the new army among Western travellers can be explained by the nostalgia felt for the unique contribution the Ottoman army brought to the literature and history of military art and science.

The travellers' appreciation of the discipline of the Ottoman army as the source of Ottoman power in earlier times was also expressed in their admiration for the Oriental horses. Therefore, the disappointment in the Ottomans for their lack of mastery of that for which they were once most greatly admired extends to their horses as well. Arabian, Turkish and Barb horses were in demand by notable and royal figures because of these 'imported horses' quality – their beauty and chiselled fineness of limb, but also their power and speed'.²²⁹ Donna Landry notes that

Between 1650 and 1750 more than 200 stallions and mares were imported into the British Isles from the Middle East from ports in the Ottoman Empire or its regency spheres of influence on the North African coast. [...] Yet all these horses were so remarkably different from the northern European types with which English people were familiar, that a cultural shift occurred, beginning with horsemanship and equestrian culture but soon permeating the culture at large.²³⁰

The reason for this cultural shift is the fact that the Ottomans, or Islamic culture more broadly, helped the Europeans substantially transform their treatment of the equine. In the early modern period, the European horses were being exploited and brutally handled by their grooms and masters in order to get the most out of their capabilities because of a belief in brutality as the best way to communicate with 'brutes', non-human animals.²³¹ Busbecq claimed that the excessive use of the voice and club or horse-whip

²²⁸ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 123.

²²⁹ Donna Landry, 'Majestelerinin Soylu Atları Osmanlı'dan' [The Ottoman Origins of English Modernity], *Derin Tarih*, 20 (2013), 34-9 (p. 37) [The English title is taken from the original text in English which was written for *Derin Tarih*].

²³⁰ Landry, 'Majestelerinin Soylu Atları', p. 35.

²³¹ Landry, 'Majestelerinin Soylu Atları', pp. 37-8.

‘makes some Horses even to tremble when their keepers come into the Stable, so that they hate and fear them too’.²³² On the other hand, Busbecq found that ‘the *Turks* love to have their Horses very gentle, that, at a word of Command, they may fall down on their Knees, and in this Posture receive their Riders’.²³³ Busbecq praises these horses but also their masters’ humane treatment of them: ‘There is no Creature so gentle as a *Turkish* Horse; nor more respectful to his master, or the Groom that dresses him. The reason is, because they treat their Horses with great lenity’.²³⁴ From the late sixteenth century through the eighteenth century, such travellers’ accounts created awareness in Western societies of Ottoman and Islamic difference in attitudes towards animals as fellow creatures, and the ‘lenient’ treatment of the Turks of their horses started to receive appreciation in time.

It can be said that, alongside the shifting understanding towards the human-like traits and ‘mental capabilities’ of horses, both the breeding of the English Thoroughbred horse and the distinctive riding fashion of the English gentlemen – which had been known in the sixteenth century as the ‘Turkey fashion’ and which was meant to proclaim ‘their mercantile and cultural superiority to the rest of the world’ – have Ottoman origins.²³⁵ Essentially, Donna Landry calls such fashions adjusted from the Ottoman Empire ‘the Ottoman origins of modernity’; professes the Ottomans’ contribution to the European Enlightenment; and also asserts that ‘[t]he superiority of Eastern horses was seen as representative of the potential superiority of the great Eastern empires and of Islamic culture’.²³⁶ It is within this context of ideas that Captain

²³² Donna Landry, ‘Anglo-Ottoman Enlightenment?: Thoroughbreds and the Public Sphere’, in *Britain and the Muslim World: Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Gerald MacLean (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 69-84 (pp. 72-3).

²³³ Landry, ‘Anglo-Ottoman Enlightenment?’, p. 73.

²³⁴ Landry, ‘Anglo-Ottoman Enlightenment?’, p. 73.

²³⁵ Landry, ‘Anglo-Ottoman Enlightenment?’, pp. 69-70, 72.

²³⁶ Donna Landry, ‘English Brutes, Eastern Enlightenment’, *The Eighteenth Century*, 52.1 (2011), 11-30 (p. 14) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41468124>> [accessed: 27 March 2018].

Nolan is able to show in the mid-nineteenth century how easily the regression of the Ottoman cavalry can be recognised and traced by means of observing even the Eastern horses themselves when he says:

Their [the Ottomans'] horses are now wretched *rosses*. The good breeds have died out; and the Imperial, centralizing tyranny — masked under the names of reform and civilization — which has been raging with more or less intensity these last fifty years, has not left on the surface of the empire a man of hereditary rank and wealth, or any private country gentleman, with the means of restoring the lost breeds, or of supplying such good light cavalry horses as existed in abundance at the commencement of the present century.²³⁷

Captain Louis Edward Nolan saw that the French training had a negative effect on the Ottoman cavalry because ‘the Turks had lost the benefit of their old ways without mastering the advantages of the new’, and as a result, ‘this effective and really brilliant cavalry [was] reduced, by the spirit of imitation and ill-understood reform, to a condition beneath contempt’.²³⁸ The criticism of the misappropriation of French culture has been a common theme in Western literature about Ottoman reforms, and it can be observed in other material developments as well, which will be discussed below.

1.2.3. The Franks

Westernization practices of the Ottomans and these ‘ill-understood’ reforms, in a way, resemble the French *mission civilisatrice*. In this practice, the European colonizer justified its invasions and presence in the colonized countries and its exploitation of local people and resources by means of the concept of ‘civilizing mission’, which involved the imposition of the culture of the colonizer on the colonized.²³⁹ The Ottoman Empire had been an ally of France for three centuries but never its colony, yet the French culture permeated the Ottoman Empire, especially in its imperial seat, Istanbul.

²³⁷ Captain Nolan, *Cavalry*, p. 16.

²³⁸ J. Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons*, p. 309; Captain Nolan, *Cavalry*, p. 15.

²³⁹ Selim Deringil, ‘Redefining Identities in the Late Ottoman Empire: Policies of Conversion and Apostasy’, in *Imperial Rule*, ed. by Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), pp. 107-130 (p. 108).

It had all started with the end of ‘French crusading tradition’ when François I, surrounded on all sides by the Habsburg House of Austria, resorted to Süleyman the Magnificent in the hope that a protracted defense against the Turks would weaken Austria.²⁴⁰ The unlikely Franco-Ottoman alliance was subsequently consolidated with the arrival of the first French ambassador, Jean de La Forest, in Istanbul in 1535. The embassy ‘functioned as Europe’s window on the Islamic world’ and because of the large number of visits by French travel writers to the empire, both France and Europe in general became well informed about the Ottoman culture. As a result of this long political and literary interest, Philip Mansel observes that Paris had been ‘the centre of Arabic and Turkish studies’ and was also the site of ‘Europe’s first school of oriental languages’, as a result of which ‘Paris received the first students from the Muslim Middle East’.²⁴¹

Most importantly, the alliance between Sultan Süleyman and François I resulted in the expansion of Capitulations to France. This trade agreement composed one third of the total maritime trade of France, which, owing to the struggle of power in Europe, caused the Levant to be regarded as ‘our Indies’ as early as 1660s by the Chevalier d’Arvieux, French consul in Saida.²⁴² Surprisingly, as Philip Mansel notes, ‘with the exception of the interlude 1798-1806 following Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt’, the French-Ottoman relationship remained stable until 1914.²⁴³ Capitulations, however, also expanded in time to include many other European states and began to be exploited by Ottoman subjects who were indiscriminately awarded citizenship or protégé status. Capitulations granted foreign citizens and protégés noninclusion in the Ottoman legal system and

²⁴⁰ Philip Mansel, ‘The French Renaissance’, p. 97.

²⁴¹ Philip Mansel, ‘The French Renaissance’, pp. 96, 106.

²⁴² Philip Mansel, ‘The French Renaissance’, p. 105.

²⁴³ Philip Mansel, ‘The French Renaissance’, p. 105.

gave them the opportunity to turn to the ‘consular courts’. These foreign residents were also exempted from Ottoman taxes, which attracted local Christians and Jews to become foreign citizens or protégés. The narrator of *The Snake Stone* draws attention to the blurred boundary between the foreign citizens resident in the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman subjects:

Centuries ago the Ottomans had allowed foreign ambassadors to judge and sentence their own nationals – an errant sailor, a thieving valet – in the intelligent belief that the foreigners understood one another better than they could hope to do; they didn’t want foreign miscreants clogging the wheels of Ottoman justice, either. Now that there were so many foreigners in the city the situation had grown out of hand. Many of the people claiming extraterritorial rights were scarcely foreigners at all – Greek-born Englishmen, for instance, whose papers were in order but who had never been closer to England than the Istanbul docks; Corfiotes who could claim protection from the French ambassador without speaking a word of French; island Greeks who flew the colours of the Netherlands on ships which never sailed beyond the Adriatic. Half the native shipping in Ottoman waters was formally beyond Ottoman jurisdiction.²⁴⁴

The Capitulations and ‘bilateral treaties between the Ottoman Empire and various European countries that were originally intended to give foreign merchants resident in the empire extraterritorial privileges’ resulted in the exploitation of these privileges.²⁴⁵

This situation administered injustices between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, and as a result, tensions between the ‘protected’ and ‘regular’ Ottoman subjects surged.

Although far fewer in number, there had been cases where even Muslim subjects benefitted from these privileges since the dependency of the Muslim beneficiaries on these countries would help the latter to expand their influence in the empire.²⁴⁶

Thanks to their increased presence in the Empire, mainly as a result of Capitulations, the French inadvertently came to represent the rest of Western Europe in cultural terms: all Westerners were generally called by the Ottomans the ‘Frankish *millet*’ or

²⁴⁴ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 61.

²⁴⁵ Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 62.

²⁴⁶ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 62.

‘Franks’.²⁴⁷ Capitulations made sure that the material developments were indeed part of the beginnings of informal imperialism instead of an honest attempt to gain from the knowledge of Europe. With time, cultural adjustment of the Ottomans to become more like Franks accompanied material developments. French culture started to permeate Istanbul, not only because of the high number of French citizens living in Istanbul at the time, but also because the French language and culture had been adopted by many of the elite residents of Istanbul. The Ottomans had long been aware of the importance of the French presence throughout the centuries during which the two had been allies, but the nineteenth century brought a new susceptibility or receptivity to French customs, French fashions and the consumer culture of Paris among the upper classes. Even the new palace in Beşiktaş had been notably influenced by European styles and standards. In *The Snake Stone*, even Mahmut II's French mother, the Validé Sultan, complains about her son being influenced by Western traditions:

‘*C'est bizarre*, Yashim. As he gets older, my son grows more and more infatuated by the European style – yet I, who was born to it, find the comforts of oriental tradition. He hardly comes here any more, only to see me. His new palace delights him. I find it looks like a manufactory.’²⁴⁸

The narrator of *The Snake Stone* makes certain that the reader is aware of the fact that the Validé Sultan, having been born French, but then having fallen ‘captive of Algerian corsairs, [...] been delivered here, to the harem quarters of the aged sultan Abdül Hamit’, knew the European style very well, yet preferred ‘the comforts of oriental tradition’.²⁴⁹ The Validé Sultan is portrayed as keen to protect her identity and culture as the mother of the monarch in the old Topkapı Palace. The new Beşiktaş palace, on the other hand, is introduced as the place where a certain vanity associated with European

²⁴⁷ Freely, *Istanbul*, p. 198.

²⁴⁸ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 100.

²⁴⁹ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 101.

culture, but also a certain vulgarity associated with mass-production of consumer goods, permeates:

The ladies bobbed politely as she began climbing the stairs. How very trivial they looked, the validé reflected in their French gowns and corsets, their shawls and silk pumps: no more consequential than a tray of Belgian chocolates. A manufactory: yes. In her day, at Topkapi, how she and the others had prided themselves on their style – the way they wore colour, the arrangement of their hair, the artful collage of shawls and pelisses, silks and furs. Then they had paraded like a pride of she-tigers, jewels ablaze, loose-limbed and glorying in their fine skin and perfect teeth! Not like these girls, these fashion-plates, these trained canaries in their cage.²⁵⁰

Jason Goodwin's fiction projects modernisation, for the most part, as being imposed upon the Ottomans by themselves, confining them in their self-constructed Western colonialism. Goodwin's work of nonfiction mentions how the alienating effect of reforms was observed in a controversial way in an account of 'Count Helmuth von Moltke, who in 1835 was brought from Prussia to train the army':²⁵¹

A Turk will concede without hesitation that the Europeans are superior to his nation in science, skill, wealth, daring and strength, without it ever occurring to him that a Frank might therefore put himself on a par with a Muslim.²⁵²

In Goodwin's *The Snake Stone*, Alexander Mavrogordato, the son of a Greek banker, represents Moltke's idea of the submissiveness of the Ottomans to Western practices. In a similarly critical tone regarding Mahmut II's reforms to that of the Seraskier in *The Janissary Tree*, Mavrogordato tells Yashim:

'You wouldn't understand. The Fener. The Bosphorus. The Bazaar – you think it's the world, don't you? You all do. And just because the sultan makes a few changes here and there, you think you're living in the most modern place on earth. Rubbish. Constantinople's a backwater. You'd be surprised, efendi. The rest of the world – they laugh at us. Paris. St Petersburg. Why, in Athens they even have gas lighting in the streets! A lot of the streets. They have – politics, philosophy, everything. Concert halls. Newspapers. You can buy a newspaper and sit and read it in a café, and nobody looks twice. Just like the rest of Europe. People have opinions there.'²⁵³

²⁵⁰ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 235.

²⁵¹ J. Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons*, p. 301.

²⁵² J. Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons*, p. 303.

²⁵³ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 110.

Yashim is portrayed to be disheartened by such disparagement of the unique Ottoman identity as opposed to the wholesale cultural appropriation of exportations from the West. He answers Mavrogordato's comment by saying, '[a]nd they read newspapers which have the same opinions?'.²⁵⁴ However, Mavrogordato, convinced, goes on to say: 'We'll be completely free. You wouldn't understand.' For Yashim, Mavrogordato's ideas about European freedom do not seem to be sufficiently nuanced by any awareness of their totalising affect. Yashim believes that there is no room for diversity in the concept of freedom Mavrogordato offers: 'if freedom meant taking your opinions out of newspapers and dressing up like everyone else then it was certainly something he would never understand. A pleasure, perhaps, he would never be entitled to enjoy'.²⁵⁵

In this section of the novel, the author discusses the politics of Ottoman cultural dissolution entailed by Western cultural influence through Yashim. The criticism he presents here is not only about the fear of the globalising effect of modernisation, but also of cultural imperialism. Yashim's fear is that the Ottoman society is transforming towards a system which destroys the ability of the Ottomans to exist regardless of their belief or appearance, including people like himself. The direction towards singularity in cultural sphere, especially in the shadow of the Western cultural hegemony, is a road Yashim wants to avoid since it doesn't possess a vision for inclusionary social structures. Aware of the fine balance of alliances in the West, Yashim cautions Mavrogordato against western colonialism and a complete submission to Western cultural influences. He urges Mavrogordato to be a better judge of the historical forces that attempt to influence and turn the youthful minds of the Ottomans. By doing so,

²⁵⁴ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 110.

²⁵⁵ J. Goodwin, *The Snake Stone*, p. 110.

Goodwin offers a cultural reading of the Ottomans within the context of their cultural exchanges with the Western powers.

1.3. In Defense of Early Ottoman Cosmopolitanism

The examination of Jason Goodwin's novels in this chapter has primarily centred on the analysis of the Ottoman Empire's attempts at adopting European modernity as a way to cope with its military failures, and on the effects the changes carried out for this purpose had, or could have had, on its cultural diversity. The author frames his first historical detective fiction particularly around the way the Ottomans negotiated the project of reformation of *Tanzimat* that substantially transformed the Empire's long-established traditional values. The primary framework of *The Janissary Tree* is positioned in relation to the readiness of the Ottomans to welcome social engineering projects that aim to pursue large-scale westernisation. In this regard, the two extreme positions taken against the reform edict are the forces of tradition, on one hand, which are formed of the alliance of the Janissaries, a defunct military organisation, and the palace eunuchs, representing those clinging to their 'medieval' identities, and on the other hand, the progressives, exemplified by the Seraskier, the military chief of the modern army, who is representative of a 'totalitarian ideology' of reforms.²⁵⁶ A third bloc in the novel is the reconciliatory vision of an 'alternative modernity', which materialises in the main character Yashim, who as a eunuch, embodies many possibilities of the complexities and idiosyncrasies of being a modern Ottoman man, and therefore epitomises the conflict between modernity and tradition.

In his exploration of Ottoman reactions to the early to mid-nineteenth century reforms, the author significantly draws on the shifting balance of power in post-Revolutionary

²⁵⁶ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 4.

Europe as a key problem. This comparative aspect in his formulation of the setting for his characters allows the author to speculate about the after-effects of the Napoleonic wars, both on the Russians, who, in the aftermath of the war initiated a rapid modernisation project, and on the Ottomans, who thus became vulnerable again to the conflicting ambitions of the Powers. The author's frame of reference primarily pertains to the Western formulation of the *Eastern Question*, which is interpreted in relation to the emergence of Russia as a regional power and the nationalist insurgencies of the Greeks. The threat to the Ottomans coming from the Powers, therefore, is primarily conceived as the result of the empowerment of Russia and its rise as a hostile force following the Napoleonic Wars, from which it emerged as victorious. The characters created by Goodwin, and specifically the Polish Ambassador Stanislaw Palewski, are particularly devised in order to situate the Ottomans within this complex *Eastern Question* paradigm in *The Janissary Tree*.

Palewski's position in the Empire as the ambassador of partitioned Poland is highly instrumental in illustrating the Ottomans' status vis-à-vis the Western Powers. The ambassador, by virtue of a diplomatic gesture of the Ottomans, who support Polish interests against the European Powers that have devoured Poland, or remained silent about this carving up, epitomises the remaining strength of the Ottomans as an international actors. Based on the Polish experience of reformation which proved to be inadequate in the face of a lengthy military and economic decline, the author also aims to foster a climate of cynicism regarding a total Ottoman capitulation to Western modernisation, especially evident through the dialogues between his main characters Yashim and Palewski. Alongside this scepticism, the two characters display a cautious awareness regarding the intentions of the European Powers since in the novel it is

claimed that these reforms are carried out to appease the Western European countries in order to be able to receive their financial support.

This point about Sultan Mahmud's intention to attract financial support presents one of the major landmark assertions as well as the contradictions in *The Janissary Tree* regarding the position of the author in his analysis of the Ottoman dialogue with Western modernity. In the novel, the Sultan is portrayed favourably for being resolute at the crossroads of his reforms and his increased interactions with the West. However, the author doesn't seem to ascribe goodwill, insight or sincerity to Mahmud II regarding his adoption of Western style modernisation as the Sultan is suggested to be carrying out the reforms in order to be eligible to receive financial aid. The author's lack of belief in the sincerity of reforms is also discernible through his selective mention of the cultural shift, including the drinking habits of the Sultan and the change in traditional outfits of individuals.²⁵⁷ The Ottomans are therefore predominantly portrayed as being a party in a tumult of naïve cultural appropriation. Through the Seraskier, the author criticises the early modernisers for erratically trying really hard, adapting new costumes and ending traditions. Through the exposure of the Enlightenment, which has transformed Europe, as being naively appropriated by the Ottomans in such a way that it becomes a hollow concept, the author essentially limits the benefits of 'enlightenment' for the Ottomans. Goodwin also questions the elite's will to change and adapt to the new demands of the world in fundamental ways. He essentially denies some of the participants of the modernisation movement the sincerity and understanding required by fundamental cultural change, thereby questioning the very nature of the reforms that were initiated during the *Tanzimat* period. Such disavowal undermines the actually existing project of

²⁵⁷ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, pp. 267-8.

Tanzimat reform, or even the possibility of any viable, sensible, gradual strategy for positive change.

The Janissary Tree criticises the idealising of Western civilisation through the character of the Seraskier, who has an ambitious westernisation project, as well as criticising, through the Kislak Agha, the complete dismissal of the West and the possibility of mutual influence (he disregards Western knowledge as being unattainable or inconsequential). Because of the emphasis on the representation of these extreme responses in the wake of the modernisation project, Goodwin's arguments remain within the well-worn dichotomy of tradition and modernity. Because of the author's choice to present the *Tanzimat* reforms in a blanket or monolithic manner, only resistance to change seem validated. This approach gives rise to an oversimplification of the debates on modernity and tradition while some other crucial elements in this debate are ignored, including the practical role of religion in Ottomanisation and other strategies for greater cohesiveness and equality in the empire. Niyazi Berkes suggests that '[t]he core of the tradition which we find being challenged in Islamic countries by the forces of modern civilization (by no means unrelated to the rise and development of Western secularism) was Islam'.²⁵⁸ Goodwin's fiction rejects Berkes's analysis, which grounds the modernity-tradition dichotomy in increasing religious attachments, as there is little mention in the novel of Islam or the Ulema in the early reformation movement.²⁵⁹ By particularly focusing on this issue, the novels by Jenny White and de Bernières provide a more comprehensive and detailed reading of the issue of cultural diversity in the Ottoman Empire thanks to their focus on religion, which proved essential to the administered social consensus in the Ottoman Empire. In Goodwin's

²⁵⁸ Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, p. 7.

²⁵⁹ J. Goodwin, *Janissary Tree*, p. 208. The Ulema is mentioned only once in *Janissary* for their backing the decree forbidding the practice of duels.

novels, particularly in contrast to White's, religion is viewed in its cultural context, but not as a political institution or structural force. It can therefore be said that the enduring representation of the empire promoted by early Republican authors such as Berkes did not register with Goodwin or even seem to him to require his attention.

On a related note, through his examination of the legislative and social changes in the Empire in the early nineteenth century, Goodwin also presents the reader with the unique and rich qualities of a cosmopolitan Ottoman culture and history, including the rich history of the Janissary and Eunuch institutions. The author gives an international context to the anxieties of the Ottomans of this period, and also gives a historical account of Istanbul's connection to the rest of the world and the layers of civilisations beneath it. Through his protagonist Yashim, the author also shows the possibility of an alternative modernity, unphased by the developments applied from above, from the Palace, while remaining protective of certain Ottoman social practices. Overall, in this chapter, I have intended to provide a framework for understanding this English writer's assumptions as to how the Ottomans viewed themselves and also his projections as to their potential in the early nineteenth century, amidst the staggering socio-political developments in the period in question in these novels.

Chapter Two:
Syncretism, Socialism and Abdülhamid II's Reign of Terror:
The Well-Protected Domains of Kamil Pasha in Jenny White's Detective Fiction

In her Kamil Pasha novels, Jenny White aims to create a platform that can bring into discussion some of the most significant historical controversies of the much-debated reign of Abdülhamid II which has left a mixed and contested legacy in our times. Set in the late 1880s, the Kamil Pasha novels manifest the Ottoman idealism and optimism that aspired to bring justice and compassion to the conflict-ridden domains of the Empire. The series so far consists of three books, namely *The Sultan's Seal* (2006), *The Abyssinian Proof* (2008) and *The Winter Thief* (2010). The majority of the action of all three takes place in Istanbul, bringing together the genres of detective fiction and the urban historical novel.¹ Kamil Pasha is a magistrate at the new court in Beyoğlu district, the increasingly commercialised, fashionable and europeanised part of Istanbul. He is a prosecutor who represents the unbiased justice of the empire, even if he finds himself in situations he is cynical about and others in which he nearly succumbs to despair, but rises to the occasion with desperate action, performing some erratic heroic acts in his role as a magistrate.

In the first section below in which *The Abyssinian Proof* is examined, an analysis of proselytistic practices of religion and the desire for syncretism in the Empire will be the focal point while Macedonian insurgence and Muslim refugees pouring into the capital seeking protection from religious and ethnic clashes emerge as the background theme. The analysis of *The Winter Thief* will similarly focus on ethnic clashes, specifically the Armenian and Kurdish struggles, this time placing Sultan Abdülhamid II's firm regime

¹ *The Winter Thief* partially takes place in the Kackar Mountains, Erzurum.

under the spotlight. The primary mission of Kamil Pasha in both novels is to ensure that the empire remains strong and safeguards its subjects despite the increasing contention at the turn of the century. I have focused on *The Abyssinian Proof* and *The Winter Thief*, and not *The Sultan's Seal*, which deals primarily with English embassy and imperial palace intrigues and the possibility of an Anglo-Ottoman romance. White's project has developed dramatically since that first, rather conventional novel, with its focus on 'foreign' characters and tensions they arouse in Istanbul. The latter two books are far more interesting for my investigation here, given their explicit engagements with the central issues of most lively debate within Ottoman history and historiography, especially the question of multiculturalism.

2.1. *The Abyssinian Proof*: An Investigation into the Possibility of Religious Reconciliation

The Abyssinian Proof (2008) is set amidst and against religious and ethnic dissension across the empire. Kamil Pasha's mission is to prevent civil unrest by solving a case of thefts from sacred places of sacred objects, and to stop the ferment of increased mistrust among various religious groups. The narrator gives a preliminary view of the worsening climate in the empire between the Muslims and other religious groups by noting that '[t]hese days, the mood in the city was as brittle as tinder. Muslim refugees from the embattled Balkan provinces had been teeming into the city, thousands of them'.² The first case to which Kamil Pasha attends involves a Macedonian assassin who had killed 'an aide to the Ottoman governor of Macedonia', from where Muslim refugees flood into Istanbul.³ This tense atmosphere, in which the declining economy and rising nationalisms in the empire cause increased mistrust among various *millet* groups, is

² Jenny White, *The Abyssinian Proof* (London: Phoenix, 2008), p. 12.

³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 13.

further provoked by the lootings of artefacts from churches, synagogues and mosques. Moreover, these artefacts are later found in European markets. Amidst the increasing mistrust among the various groups of believers towards the Muslim state officials, the Ottoman government is blamed for organising the thefts, despite the fact that mosques are also being burglarised.

Kamil Pasha is commissioned by Nizam Pasha, the Minister of Justice, to stop the lootings and to break the organised crime gangs of antiquity smugglers before a commotion erupts in the empire. Nizam Pasha expresses the urgency of the situation to Kamil Pasha by saying that '[t]he minorities have tasted blood in the provinces and now they're rioting in the capital. These thefts pour oil on the fire'.⁴ During his investigation of the thefts, the magistrate discovers the link of the thefts to an Abyssinian communal sect, as a result of a murder that takes place in a mosque. Kamil Pasha not only solves the mystery of the antiquity thefts and the murder, but also unearths the secret of the religious sect, the relic Proof the sect is protecting, the significance of which will be explained later in this chapter. The Proof presents an opportunity to bring a solution to the worsening split of the empire into religious factions, but such an expectation falls short as its protector is murdered. In the following section, the ethnic conflict, as the background story to the novel, will be the primary focus of the analysis, followed by a description of the significance of the Proof, and an evaluation of the author's inquiry into the possibility of establishing an interfaith dialogue.

2.1.1. Ethnic Conflict in the Empire: The Macedonian Case

Before moving on to the investigation of the thefts that revolve around the Abyssinian story, Jenny White starts her novel by giving a picture of interfaith and interethnic

⁴ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 33.

conflicts in the Empire through a case of assassination of a government official. The narrator informs the reader that ‘the news of the assassination’ had caused Muslims, whose ‘numbers [were] swelled by desperate refugees’, and Christians to clash at the site of the Aya Sofya Mosque, still venerated as ‘the Byzantine cathedral’ by Christians, resulting in the death of ten people.⁵ The murder of an Ottoman official is evidentially perceived by the Muslim populace as a religious blasphemy that deserves retribution. Amidst this chaos, Kamil Pasha is assigned to oversee an operation in which the assassin is to be taken into custody without further stirring-up the Christian communities in the vicinity. The sensitivity of this mission is emphasised by the narrator with the assertion that ‘[t]he last thing the government wanted was to arrest Christians in broad daylight’ -- in order to prevent the rise of further enraged reactions from non-Muslim communities.⁶ The narrator points out that ‘Kamil preferred not to think about what would happen to him’ after the assassin was captured – he would simply disappear –, since justice, the narrator remarks, would have to be violently but secretly enacted for killing a government official.⁷

Jenny White illustrates the failure of the Ottoman legal system to protect all its subjects indiscriminately through a conversation between Kamil Pasha and Marko, the assassin, when Kamil Pasha goes into the assassin’s house in an attempt to negotiate with him. Here, the author gives voice to Marko, who explains that the assassination of the government official was a revenge for his sister’s defilement. Marko couldn’t accuse the perpetrator in court, since, as the narrator, speaking of Kamil Pasha’s thoughts, explains, ‘[t]he Balkan provinces were in such chaos that the rule of law had ceased to be applied, and judging by the tales of refugees, rape was probably a daily occurrence,

⁵ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 13.

⁶ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 13.

⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 13-4.

one of many unspeakable crimes committed by each side against the other'.⁸ Marko justifies the crime he committed by assassinating the government official as well as his membership of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation by suggesting that the Empire is ruled by corrupt and arbitrary people: 'You must imagine thousands upon thousands of hands, each cleansing the space before them. We will win because each man's ambition is the same. You will lose, pasha, because your empire is driven by the greed of a few men'.⁹

The control of the Balkans had been a major subject of hostility between the Russian and Ottoman Empires by the end of the nineteenth century, with this tension eventually spreading to new territories after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, including the Macedonian region, igniting new regional rebellions.¹⁰ By the early twentieth century, 'the Macedonian Question' had emerged in the Empire as a result of contesting interests among Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs who wanted to subdue the Christians in Macedonia. Marko's assertion that 'We Macedonians won our liberty from your empire, but now it has pulled us back like an abused wife who has run away and must be punished' speaks to the process of the rise of the Macedonian national revolutionary struggle that emerged as a result of the scramble for gaining control of the Ottoman territories with largely Christian Macedon populations in the Treaty of San Stefano (1878), which had concluded the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War, largely incorporating Macedonia into the new Bulgaria.¹¹ The Ottoman Empire later on took back the control of Macedonia with the Congress of Berlin (1878), which amended the Treaty of San Stefano. This instability and fragmentation during this process elicited the formation of

⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 21-2.

⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 22.

¹⁰ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 129-30.

¹¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 21.

the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) in Salonica in 1893 and the External Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (EMRO) in 1895.¹² Marko's attitude that asserts that the Ottoman governor 'is simply the greatest of the bandits pillaging our land' illustrates the author's intention to establish that the legitimacy of the Ottoman Empire as the ruler of these territories is coming to an end.¹³ Even though he respects Kamil Pasha's loyalty to the empire, Marko's admission that 'one people's just cause is another people's lost territory' addresses shifting loyalties within the empire.¹⁴

In the Empire, the spread of movements of liberation to new regions 'posed greater difficulties than ever before' since it also caused the expulsion of Muslims from the Balkans to Istanbul and beyond.¹⁵ By introducing Marko, who kills himself defending Macedon liberty at the start of the novel, White actually brings the underlying problems within the multi-ethnic society of the Empire at this time up for a revision. The tensions are not only resulting from the conflict between the followers of Islam and Christianity, but also from a mistrust between the rulers and the ruled. Since the Ottoman administration is perceived by the non-Muslim community as representing the interests of the Muslims only, the Islamic core of the Ottoman Empire is contested in the Balkans through nationalist uprisings. In the novel, Marko considers himself as serving his people instead of betraying the Ottoman government while the government intends the issue to fade away by making the assassin disappear at night in order not to attract the rage of the Christian community. It is frequently Ottoman scholars' contention that the increase in the perception of the imperial identity as being a singularly Muslim one in the late nineteenth century was the result of foreign intervention in the matters that

¹² Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 126.

¹³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 21.

¹⁴ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 22.

¹⁵ Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, pp. 129-30.

concerned the Christian populations. From slavery to conversion, the European powers, the British first and foremost, interfered with the internal affairs of the Ottomans whenever they could throughout the nineteenth century under the pretext of protecting Christian populations, which, in some cases, resulted in the exertion of more pressure on the non-Muslim communities to convert.¹⁶

Muslim refugees being an uncommon phenomenon in Western European historiography of the late nineteenth century -- and a subject about which less is known than is known about their non-Muslim counterparts generally -- Jenny White, by focusing on the stories of refugees and the stories of the people those refugees are escaping from, discloses the extent and the complication of the ethnic troubles towards the end of the nineteenth century. The reader is encouraged to reflect upon the consequences of the support of the Europeans through Kamil Pasha's mental representation in which the narrator conveys that incoming refugees from the Balkans

bore the scars of massacres, neighbour killing neighbour without mercy. European countries were quietly supporting Christian populations that wished for independence from the empire, fanning the flames of nationalist movements that devoured everything in their way, friend and foe alike. Istanbul was a tinderbox of enraged Muslim refugees who had lost everything and angry minorities who were afraid of losing as much.¹⁷

The increase in intolerance and schism between the Muslim and the Christian subjects of the empire is explicitly stated in this passage to have fomented under pro-nationalist, divisive European influence. In relation to foreign support, the author places Kamil Pasha's mission to investigate the thefts of the artefacts within the framework of the clashes among various faith groups across the empire. Nizam Pasha, the minister of

¹⁶ Selim Deringil, "There Is No Compulsion in Religion": On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839-1856', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42.3 (July 2000), 547-575 (p. 556).

¹⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 34.

justice, explaining the case of the thefts to Kamil Pasha, accentuates the sensitivity of the situation:

‘The entire situation is out of hand. Yesterday the Greek Orthodox Patriarch suggested that the government is involved in the thefts [...] he actually accuses us of ransacking their churches to pay for the wars. And now the Jews are starting to complain that their places of worship are being looted as well. They’ve lost sight of the fact that mosques are being stripped too’.¹⁸

The author bases ethnic or religious clashes on a binary Muslim centre and non-Muslim population as the narrator, conveying Kamil Pasha’s point of view, points out that the theft of an icon from the Patriarchate ‘had raised the level of tension more than any other as, he [Kamil] supposed, the Christians believed their divine protection had thereby been revoked’.¹⁹

For the Porte, the priority is to prevent a new national uprising and commotion from taking place. The Ottoman Empire’s ability to protect the non-Muslim population is important in terms of keeping its sovereignty and preventing foreign countries’ involvement in its internal affairs using the excuse of protecting Christians. Up to this point in history, the Ottoman Empire’s ability to protect its Christian populations had been challenged not only by Western European countries, but also by the expanding Russian empire. The Ottoman Empire had been confronted throughout the century about how it handled the problems related to its populations, including slavery and conversion.²⁰ The antiquity thefts from religious sanctuaries reveal the fears in the administrative cadre as to the consequences of its inability to provide assurance to its subjects. Therefore, Nizam Pasha’s strict bidding of Kamil Pasha to solve the mystery

¹⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 33.

¹⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 14.

²⁰ Selim Deringil, ‘Redefining Identities in the Late Ottoman Empire: Policies of Conversion and Apostasy’, in *Imperial Rule*, ed. by Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), pp. 107-130; Selim Deringil, ‘There Is No Compulsion in Religion’; Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1998).

of the thefts is the result of his desire and obligation to protect the identity and the sovereignty of the Empire²¹: ‘It’s not enough that the Europeans are taking our provinces and emptying our treasury [...] They’re stealing our culture too. There’s a long pipe sucking the treasures of the empire into Europe and I want you to find it and shut it down’.²² Kamil Pasha’s mission is, therefore, no less than to save the Empire not only from the fetters of the Europeans, but also from the destruction that the clashes of religion are causing.

2.1.2. Protectors of the Proof

Kamil Pasha starts his investigation of the antiquity thefts with the incident of a theft of a silver reliquary and a prayer rug from the Kariye Mosque in Balat, Istanbul, whose caretaker is his friend, Malik.²³ Malik is a learned man with whom Kamil Pasha is portrayed to have good relations alongside a shared love of orchids.²⁴ Aside from being an Abyssinian, Malik is also presented as a descendent of the Byzantine patron of the Kariye Mosque. The author receives her inspiration to use the Kariye Mosque for such a setting from the fact that the Kariye Mosque was originally a church in Byzantine times, which was later converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In the early fourteenth century Byzantine Empire, the patron of the Chora monastery was Theodore Metochites (Theodoros in Greek), an important statesman, who made ‘extensive restorations and new tectonic additions to the monastery’ during his patronage.²⁵ In the novel, Theodore Metochites is deemed to have been entrusted by

²¹ On this topic, Deringil writes: ‘The Ottoman fallback position in all these cases was to argue that the concern was first and foremost *their* concern. [...] If there were privileges of non-Muslims which needed protecting, why, it had always been the historic tradition to do precisely that. For both the Ottomans and the Western Powers the issue of prestige was nothing less than a matter of contested sovereignty’. (Deringil, ‘There Is No Compulsion in Religion’, p. 567.)

²² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 34.

²³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 37.

²⁴ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 38.

²⁵ According to the architectural history of the Chora monastery in Anne Karahan’s book, ‘The only surviving edifice of the Chora monastery is the Chora church, which has a tectonic history of the

the Byzantine emperor with the protection of the Proof and other valuables.²⁶ The statesman then hands down this mission to his descendants, who maintain this role for generations until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, when some new measures for the protection of the Proof have to be taken.

In the novel, during the battle in the city at the time of the conquest, Isaak Metochites, supposedly a descendant of Theodore Metochites and the caretaker of the relic at the time of the invasion of Constantinople, entrusts the sacred treasure to Michael, his son, and Melisane, his illegitimate daughter from an Abyssinian slave, as he bids them to seek refuge with Melisane's Abyssinian relatives, because '[i]f the Turks took the city, Isaak believed, the Abyssinians were less likely to be put to the sword than the noble families of Byzantium'.²⁷ The most important relic of the treasure, 'the Proof of God', having been moved for its safekeep after the conquest to the protection of the Ethiopian relatives of Melisane because of its connection to Metochites, is kept in the Chora Church, which later becomes the Kariye Mosque (in Chora²⁸). The Abyssinians henceforth become a secret sect, the Melisites, named after Melisane, protecting the relic, hence the title of *The Abyssinian Proof*, referring to the special relationship between the relic and its protectors. Therefore, at the centre of the novel is the story of a Habesh (Ethiopian or Abyssinian) family, who now live as the leaders of a closed community 'in the Sunken Village, next to Sultan Selim Mosque'.²⁹

substructures, that goes back to the sixth and the ninth centuries, while its superstructure is dated to the twelfth century. The irregular form that we see today is, however, primarily the result of the rebuilding that Metochites undertook ca. 1316-21' (Anne Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images – Transcendence and Immanence: The Theological Background of the Iconography and Aesthetics of the Chora Church* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers and Department of Oriental Studies, 2010), pp. 31-2.).

²⁶ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 233.

²⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 7-8.

²⁸ According to Malik, '[t]he name, Saint Saviour in Chora, referred to the fact that in those days it was in the country, outside the original city walls' (White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 57).

²⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 46.

2.1.3. Slavery in the Ottoman Context: A Story of a Foregone Conclusion

An introduction to the *Sunken Village* involves a scene with three young boys looking down to the village of Abyssinians and chattering about its villagers: ‘They’re slaves,’ tells one of the children and he adds, ‘[y]ou know what they do in Africa? They cut off their *yaraks*.’³⁰ The fact that White chooses to place an Abyssinian family at the centre of her novel and assign to them the protection of the Proof of God results from a practical consideration for a number of reasons. This primarily helps the author to connect Istanbul with its layers of history through the institution of slavery. She constructs this relationship through the characters’ connection to the Metochites family; more specifically, through the question about the history of slavery posed by Kamil Pasha, who ‘wondered about the history of Malik’s family. Had there been Abyssinians in Istanbul during Byzantine times? Perhaps they had been desired as slaves even then’.³¹ Another factor in White’s choice is related to the brother-sister pair of next-generation potential protectors, especially in terms of Amida’s articulation of his place as an Abyssinian in the Ottoman Empire. Amida’s confusion in juxtaposition to his sister Saba’s espousal of the Abyssinian cult’s traditions, representing a dichotomy between modernity and tradition, offers a conducive axis for the novel’s plot. The third, and most important, reason is the significance of Ethiopia within the theories upon which the history of the Ark of the Covenant is based, which shall be explored at length in later sections of this chapter. In this section, the first two causes mentioned above will be briefly examined.

Slavery in the Ottoman Empire has been a contested issue although the efforts to understand the structure and the types of slavery have only started in the last part of the

³⁰ *Yarak* is a Turkish slang word meaning ‘dick’; White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 67.

³¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 62.

twentieth century.³² One reason for the lack of involvement in studying this issue was that the Western notion of slavery had been rigid and ‘closed’ in the nineteenth century, as the abolitionist view ‘tend[ed] to universalize the condition of plantation slaves in the United States South and le[ft] no room for alternative, milder manifestations of slavery’.³³ The concept of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, however, was multi-layered, and not as rigid as in the case of African chattel slavery in the Americas. There were four types of slavery in the empire which were inherited up to the mid-nineteenth century: ‘military-administrative slavery, *harem* slavery, domestic slavery, and agricultural slavery’.³⁴ In line with this advanced structure, a rich vocabulary developed to denote these types of slaves, but not all of these words in essence meant servility or enslavement; moreover, some even had undertones of ‘power and dominance’.³⁵ This latter kind of slavery was used for individuals employed in administrative or military positions, which were known as *kul*, that is, the sultan’s slaves.³⁶ The typical examples of slaves in the Western sense were the domestic and the agricultural slaves while, as Ehud Toledano suggests, *kul/harem* slaves were virtually ‘indistinguishable’ from their free peers. However, since the Western vocabulary did not boast an equal amount of terminology for kinds of servitude or ‘slavery’, a ‘uniform, undifferentiated view [...] of that rather complex Ottoman institution’ was accepted in Western scholarship.³⁷

³² The scholars best known in the field of slavery in the Ottoman Empire include Bernard Lewis (*The Political Language of Islam*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Ehud R. Toledano (*The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression: 1840-1890*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982 and *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, Seattle & London: the University of Washington Press, 1998), and Y. Hakan Erdem (*Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its demise, 1800-1909*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

³³ Toledano. *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 15.

³⁴ Toledano. *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 165.

³⁵ Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, p. 65.

³⁶ Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, p. 65.

³⁷ Toledano. *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 168.

The Ottomans' first attempts to abolish slavery were part of the *Tanzimat* reforms. Although some of these reforms relating to the abolition of slavery 'evolved independently and out of Ottoman internal needs and considerations', they were, like many other reform movements in the Empire, also partly carried out as a result of European engagement with the issue and the increasing susceptibility of the Ottoman Empire to European intervention in their internal affairs, especially with regard to matters relating to the position of non-Muslims in the Empire.³⁸ In the case of slavery, Britain was specifically acting as a moral compass, with a certain 'civilising mission' on her agenda. Britain's banishment of its own slave trade took place in 1807, with slavery in her Caribbean possessions being terminated by 1833. Following this, by mid-century many other slave-holding states of Europe entered 'a treaty network' under the initiative of Britain in order to stop slavery traffic in Africa and to keep the market forces in balance.³⁹ The suppression of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, however, took longer, and the British were actively involved in this process, beginning in the 1840s.⁴⁰

According to Ehud Toledano, the pressure coming from the British Empire led the Ottomans to issue and enforce decrees that forbade the slave trade of both Africans and Caucasians as part of the *Tanzimat* reforms.⁴¹ As a result of these decrees, the slave trade was prohibited in the Persian Gulf in 1847 and in Africa in 1857. Finally, an Anglo-Ottoman convention to suppress the slave trade was signed in 1880 and the anti-slavery Brussels Conference Act was signed in 1890.⁴² However, despite the positive outcomes of these long term joint efforts, Toledano criticises the way the suppression of slavery was handled and the way it progressed. He holds the view that there had been a

³⁸ Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression*, pp. 9, 12.

³⁹ Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Ehud R. Toledano, 'Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)', *Poetics Today*, 14.3 (Autumn, 1993), 477-506 (p. 484).

⁴² Toledano, 'Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery', p. 484.

lack of dialogue between the British and Ottoman Empires throughout the process.

According to him:

Ottoman slavery and the Ottoman slave trade were never seriously debated, on either the political or the intellectual plane. It was as if one party barged in, fully armed with moral, economic, social, and political arguments and imbued with a strong sense of justice, while the other timidly turned its back, refusing to engage in a dialogue and claiming that there was basically no common ground, no common language, no frame of reference through which a true discussion could take place.⁴³

As explained earlier, this lack of dialogue results from the difference between the rigid definitions of slavery made by the Western Europe at the time as well as the Ottomans' unwillingness to classify the Sultan's household using the vocabulary of serfdom.

Toledano argues that 'it was the defense of the kul and harem types of slavery that delayed full adoption of a clear abolitionist stance by the Ottoman governing elite'.⁴⁴

Policy makers at the time and those who theorised these relationships afterwards may have been unwilling to accept these classifications because of their long-established affinity with their respective institutions, both in the West and in the Ottoman Empire.

Toledano's criticism in this paragraph, however, is actually aimed at Britain, which, on the one hand, developed monolithic concepts solely based on its own experience and then imposed the same experience on others; and on the other hand, in reality, ignored much bigger injustices and 'various forms of abuse and violation of human rights' that they may have actually been tolerating or even paving the way for.⁴⁵ Slavery remains an underrepresented issue, and although the institution has been recognised in many cases to have an important role in the Ottoman Empire, slaves imported from outside the empire receive little attention in terms of the formulation of their status from their own

⁴³ Toledano, 'Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery', p. 488.

⁴⁴ Toledano, 'Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery', p. 487.

⁴⁵ Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression*, pp. 283-4.

perspective; therefore, the language used in such representations and analyses still remains that of the Empire.

The Abyssinian Proof, in its description of the Ethiopian community, marks an attempt to overcome the limitation of representations that focus solely on palace life. White's story takes place in 1887, when slaveholding was not only still legal, but also 'socially acceptable', although by that time the slave trade had already been prohibited by law.⁴⁶ In line with this, the Abyssinian village is described by the police chief Omar as composed of free subjects who 'have been there for generations' and those 'new ones [who] join all the time – retired and escaped slaves'.⁴⁷ By means of such references, the narrator makes mention of both eunuchs and those in domestic service. While Omar mentions the eunuchs by saying 'Allah knows where they all come from. The village reminds them of home, I guess. Although you'd think the eunuchs wouldn't be so eager to remember their homeland', Kamil Pasha remembers 'the Habesh slave in his father's household when he was growing up'. In this reminiscence, he remembers that '[h]er skin had the burnished glow of early chestnuts. He had been in love with her'.⁴⁸ There is no suggestion in the novel that the elite contemporaries of Kamil Pasha still keep slaves. On the other hand, Avi's condition as an orphaned child labourer from the Jewish community is left ambiguous in the novel, in terms of whether such a condition might in fact have been widespread. The case of Avi presents an example of not only the lack of tools for the protection of children from abuse in the legal system at the time, but also the extent to which slavery could be exploited. While slaveholding was 'legal and socially acceptable' until late in the nineteenth century, 'cases of cruelty and ill-usage'

⁴⁶ Toledano, 'Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery', pp. 483-4.

⁴⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 46-7.

⁴⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 46-7.

raised moral reactions.⁴⁹ Kamil Pasha's defence of Avi against the tanner as '[y]ou can't purchase a free subject of the empire. The boy isn't a slave. And as far as I know, both his parents are deceased' can be seen in this light.⁵⁰ This could mean that either Kamil Pasha is trying to save Avi from falling into the hands of the still rampant slavery mechanisms or he is giving a lesson to the tanner (and to the reader) that slavery is now an outmoded system that people once upon a time used to exploit others; or possibly both.

2.1.4. Exchange Systems

When Amida, the son of the priestess Balkis and the nephew of Malik, tells his mother about the changes he wants to see in the Abyssinian community, his mention of slavery touches the broad assumptions regarding Ethiopians, the general outlines of which are made clear through the exchange that takes place among the three young boys, mentioned above. Amida tells his mother, 'if you let me, I could modernise things. We could make decent money and build proper houses, instead of these shacks. Make Habesh a term people respect, instead of assuming we're all slaves'.⁵¹ Amida's desire for change is derived from his past experiences. Firstly, the confines of being former-slaves is a force that drives him to question the class system many Ottoman subjects with Ethiopian background had been an unwilling part of. Secondly, he opposes his family obligations since they are tied in with the religious traditions, customs and the creed of the Melisite society, which he deems outmoded and baseless. Not only does he protest against the prospect of his being the safe-keeper of the Proof, as opposed to the leader of Melisites, like his sister Saba, but he also voices his objection to his mother based on other villagers' views: 'Nobody believes that Melisite crap anymore. The

⁴⁹ Toledano, 'Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery', pp. 483-4.

⁵⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 82.

⁵¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 104.

young men in the village are Muslims. They don't plan on raising their kids in the old way'.⁵²

'The old way' Amida is referring to is the dual belief system and practice of Islam and Christianity, which the Abyssinian community embarked on in an attempt to protect their Christian unity around the Proof, while to the outside world they were Muslims. The dynamics of this change will be discussed in more depth in the following sections. Amida's remark pertains to the lessening degree of commitment to the values and the traditions of the Melisite sect. According to Bainbridge and Stark, religions can be thought of as exchange systems, whereby the exchange of rewards and costs establishes the main pattern, and on this account:

Faced with rewards that are very scarce, or not available at all, humans create and exchange compensators – sets of beliefs and prescriptions for action that substitute for the immediate achievement of the desired reward. Compensators postulate the attainment of the desired reward in the distant future or in some other unverifiable context. Compensators are treated by humans as if they were rewards.⁵³

On this account, Bainbridge and Stark argue that the formation of a cult⁵⁴ requires an active involvement of creation and social acceptance.⁵⁵ The cult of the Melisites offers to its adherents a special kind of empowerment as a compensator through the sense of importance assumed from the mission of the safekeeping of the Proof in secrecy. Moreover, the tradition goes back four hundred years to their Byzantine relatives, as well as to their Ethiopian roots via Melisane (the connection of Ethiopia to the Proof will be studied in the following sections).⁵⁶ The decreasing level of attachment to the

⁵² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 104.

⁵³ William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, 'Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models', in *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*, ed. by Lorne L. Dawson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 59-70 (p. 59).

⁵⁴ Although the term used by Bainbridge and Stark is 'cult', I will be using 'cult' and 'sect' interchangeably here since the definitions of these two words both accurately describe the Melisites.

⁵⁵ Bainbridge and Stark, 'Cult Formation', p. 59.

⁵⁶ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 110, 125.

Proof and commitment to its protection can be seen as a sign of estrangement from their roots.

An important factor for Amida's wish for change is caused by his lack of belief in the existence of the Proof. Amida's rejection of his family traditions and values is primarily driven by his traumatic experience at the monastery in Ethiopia where he was sent to receive education about Ethiopian Christianity and culture. There, he was sexually abused by the monks and seemingly lost his faith in the power of the Proof as a result of this experience.⁵⁷ Amida struggles to defend the traditions of the Melisite sect, despite his being in a leadership position in this cult, because he does not believe the Proof exists since he is not allowed to see it. He voices his disbelief by saying: 'You can't draw milk from a dead sheep [...] Anyway, I told you I don't want to be caretaker of a mosque where nothing ever happens. It's a waste of time'.⁵⁸ By selling the valuables of his family which give the Abyssinian cult its legitimacy, Amida aims to gain respect for the Habesh community in the modern world outside the village, but more importantly, to have access to European goods for himself, including the piano, being his passion. As he looks out for his personal gain, however, he becomes part of an international organised crime gang by providing antiques to European smugglers.

2.1.5. Protecting the Empire's Antiquities

By the late nineteenth century, the theft and smuggling of archaeological artefacts had become a real problem in the Ottoman Empire. As a reaction to the thefts from the Ottoman territories and in order to protect the empire's sovereignty from European domination, a series of laws were introduced in the Ottoman Empire towards the end of the nineteenth century in order to protect the cultural material of the empire from being

⁵⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 378.

⁵⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 104.

ransacked by the imperial and national ambitions of the western powers. The European curiosity regarding artefacts, especially those from ancient civilizations, had its point of origin in the national struggle among European countries since artefacts had come to translate into ‘national symbols, and the subsequent French and British competition for such loot served the useful national function of filling up both the Louvre and the British Museum’.⁵⁹ Philip L. Kohl, in his article on ‘Nationalism and Archaeology’, suggests that ‘[a]rchaeologists, employed as colonial officers in imperialist settings, were engaged in a form of nationalist archaeology in the sense that their work was used to puff up the glory and sense of self of their employer’. According to him, this kind of understanding of the past can be characterised as ‘simultaneously imperialist, colonialist, and nationalist’.⁶⁰

As a result of this archaeological obsession, the concurring advancement of Western influence and Ottoman indebtedness, both economic and cultural, which was causing the Empire to be stripped off of its archaeological artefacts, the principle of national ownership was introduced in the Ottoman Empire through the antiquities laws of 1874 and 1884.⁶¹ The aim of these laws was simply to prevent the lootings of artefacts, exportation of antiquities and arbitrary excavations by foreigners. While the 1874 Act regulated ‘the movement of antiquities uncovered during archaeological excavations’ and entrusted ‘the ownership of the cultural heritage’ to the Ottoman Empire, the 1884 Law ascribed the property of all the artefacts excavated within its territory to the Imperial Museum in Constantinople. These laws were indeed an indication of the

⁵⁹ Philip L. Kohl, ‘Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the Reconstructions of the Remote Past’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27 (1998), pp. 223-46 (p. 227).

⁶⁰ Kohl, ‘Nationalism and Archaeology’, p. 227.

⁶¹ Morag M. Kersel, ‘The Changing Legal Landscape for Middle Eastern Archaeology in the Colonial Era, 1800-1930’ in *Pioneers to the Past: American Archaeologists in the Middle East, 1919-1920*, ed. by Geoff Emberling, 30 (Chicago: Oriental Institute Museum Publications, 2010), pp. 85-90 (p. 86).

contention among the parties who claimed the ‘ownership of the past’.⁶² In the novel, the futility of such attempts is pointed out through a conversation between Kamil Pasha and Omar, the police chief, in which Kamil Pasha expresses his expectation that the antiquities ‘be put in the Imperial Museum for safekeeping’ and to avoid such thefts to which Omar replies ‘like throwing chickens to the foxes when all the museum directors were European’.⁶³ Indeed, with a view to the difficulty of providing local excavation teams, the antiquity laws authorised the director of the Imperial Museum to carry out the primary assessment of the artefacts and then to place the foreign excavators under the supervision of an imperial authority.⁶⁴ After Kamil Pasha’s reference to this rule in the new antiquities law and his mention of Osman Hamdi Bey as the new manager, Omar replies to him, saying ‘[s]o we have teeth but nothing to bite.’⁶⁵

This remark by Omar speaks to Morag M. Kersel’s observation that in practice ‘the Ottoman government did not have enough officials to oversee and implement the various regulations of the 1884 law’ simply because the range of Ottoman territories was too wide.⁶⁶ Therefore, in the Istanbul of 1887 in *The Abyssinian Proof*, three years after the second piece of legislation on antiquities had been decreed, the frustration of Kamil Pasha and Police Chief Omar at the fact that the artefacts are kept at the churches, mosques and synagogues without protection, instead of under lock and key in the imperial museum, comes as a result of the fact that the capacity of the empire to handle and protect its cultural heritage was indeed limited.⁶⁷ As the Director of the Museum, Osman Hamdi Bey’s words in this fiction offer a testimony to this fact:

⁶² Kersel, ‘The Changing Legal Landscape’, p. 86.

⁶³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ Kersel, ‘The Changing Legal Landscape’, p. 85.

⁶⁵ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 51-2.

⁶⁶ Kersel, ‘The Changing Legal Landscape’, p. 86.

⁶⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 51, 65.

‘Think of the empire as a plump piece of baklava. Each layer is studded with artefacts, entire civilisations, [...] ancient cities, temples, enormous stone sarcophagi, friezes, mosaics, statues, an endless array of objects. [...] There aren’t enough museums in the world to house our treasures. [...] We are embarrassingly rich’.⁶⁸

As a real-life personage, the presence of Osman Hamdi Bey in the novel can give authenticity to both the wealth of the empire and the actions the Empire is undertaking in order to develop better protection and management of this wealth, despite limited capacity and resources. Despite Osman Hamdi Bey’s efforts, in the novel, it is made clear that because of this richness and the limited capacity to oversee the operations, ‘[a]n intricate smuggling network developed through the region’.⁶⁹

The novel introduces the Charshamba district as famous for its thief and smuggler inhabitants, while the Abyssinians living there are depicted as involved in the smuggling business as middle men, providing goods to the bazaar.⁷⁰ When new smugglers appear in the city, Amida would like to do business with Kubalou, the foreign ringleader of the new international smuggling gang which runs the latest antiquity thefts. Kubalou’s crew includes an English member named Ben and some local men from the Charshamba district. As the reader finds out, Kubalou turns out to be Magnus Owen, the cultural attaché at the British Embassy in Istanbul, who has access to resources that allow him to make the necessary arrangements for the dispatch of the stolen items to Britain without either customs checks or any other official scrutiny. The reader is instructed by the narrator that ‘Ottoman customs agents had few rights to search British citizens, leaving huge loopholes in the antiquities laws’; and because of this, Kamil, in his first meeting with Owen at the Embassy, where he asks the attaché for his cooperation, asks for ‘permission to search the cargo of any vessel leaving for

⁶⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 177-8.

⁶⁹ Kersel, ‘The Changing Legal Landscape’, p. 86.

⁷⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 70, 105, 184.

England'.⁷¹ The Embassy official shows a 'lack of enthusiasm' to collaborate to meet Kamil Pasha's expectations.⁷²

As shall be examined in the next section, taking foreign loans comes at a hidden price of allowing the subjects of the Sultan to be treated as second class citizens, also upsetting the legitimacy of the Sultan. The example of Magnus Owen as an embassy official who is also capable of running a smuggling chain because of his official position shows how the unequal arrangement of power between two states can be exploited. This abuse comes as an extension of the 'informal imperialism' exercised by Victorian Britain, which, in John Darwin's definition, 'relied upon the links created by trade, investment or diplomacy, often supplemented by unequal treaties and periodic armed intervention, to draw new regions into the world-system of an imperial power'.⁷³ As Darwin claims, '[n]o other power developed more varied and far-reaching imperial relationships than Victorian Britain'; and therefore, the arrogance of Magnus Owen can be justified through his country's position vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire's. In any case, the narrator's statement that 'Kamil knew the British wanted a strong Ottoman Empire to stand between themselves and the Russians. The empire was the prey that kept the bear occupied' speaks to John Darwin's conclusion that the British Empire's ambition was not limited with its interventionist policies, but the power of the British Empire was indeed limited against its rivals⁷⁴:

Informal imperialism was thus not a policy nor even a recognized formula for the assertion of influence. It represented a pragmatic acceptance of limited power. Far from being the best of all possible imperial worlds, informal empire could be a tense and unstable relationship whose purpose was the often painful and sometimes violent transformation of an 'undeveloped' economy and its socio-political institutions. It is easy to exaggerate the smoothness of collaboration: the instinct of

⁷¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 114.

⁷² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 114.

⁷³ John Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *The English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), 614-642 (p. 614).

⁷⁴ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 114-5.

private British interests was to force the pace towards political and economic change where they could, where they dared and where they commanded the support of the imperial centre.⁷⁵

In White's novels, Kamil Pasha's well-meaning endeavours to prevent crime also have strong implications concerning the sovereignty of the empire. White, therefore, frequently employs a pattern in which Western European corrupt agents like Magnus Owen exploit lenient Ottoman jurisdiction and control.

2.1.6. *Hunger for the Proof: Profiling Interest Groups*

Morag Kersel explains that the enactment of the 1884 law legislating the requirement to obtain permission from the Imperial Museum in order to be able to export artefacts met with rigorous disapproval by many 'foreign archaeological missions'. Kersel suggests that '[a]n intricate smuggling network developed through the region' while '[p]ublic awareness of artifacts as commodities and consumer demand played integral roles in the legal and illegal movement of artifacts'.⁷⁶ Kamil Pasha knows that the demand for the antiquities comes from London, because the London Metropolitan Police Force has provided Kamil Pasha with a list of *oriental objects* that have recently been sold by Rettingate and Sons, Oriental antiques dealers in London.⁷⁷ Although Magnus Owen, a.k.a. Kubalou, cannot appreciate the value and significance of the Proof and tells Kamil Pasha that the Proof is 'only a packet of old papers. It's beyond me, really, why anyone should care', he also confesses to Kamil Pasha that '[t]he buyer in London belongs to some kind of group that reveres – I'm not exaggerating, *reveres* – this thing. It's utterly ridiculous'.⁷⁸ The identity of this group remains unclear; however, the buyer of the artefacts is said to be ready to spend enough money 'to finance a small kingdom'.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians', p. 619.

⁷⁶ Kersel, 'The Changing Legal Landscape', p. 86.

⁷⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 80.

⁷⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 420.

⁷⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 420.

White leaves a breadcrumb trail to help the reader speculate about the reach of this group's influence and power as her strong character Ismail Hodja, Kamil Pasha's friend and 'a learned Sufi sheikh and leader of the Nakshibendi order', warns Kamil Pasha about the groups who are interested in the Proof in England.⁸⁰ He tells Kamil that

'[i]t's not the dealers you should worry about. There are groups whose hunger for the Proof of God goes back hundreds of years, just like the Melisites. People who believe the Proof is the Ark of the Covenant or a rich treasure, or any number of ignorant legends. If their members heard it had been found, they'd stop at nothing to get it. They'd never sell it. It would simply disappear'.⁸¹

It seems to Kamil Pasha that 'the whole world wants it'. He reasons that '[i]t would be worth a fortune in Europe, not just to antiquities dealers, but to people who believe it's a sacred object'.⁸²

The groups Ismail Hodja refers to here can be located within the scope of the confluence of informal imperialism and the plunder of antiquities that particularly characterised the later nineteenth century. This development is to some extent blueprinted in Margarita Diaz-Andreu's *A World History of Nineteenth-Century Archaeology: Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Past*, in which the author gives some insights into the institutionalisation of archaeology in the nineteenth century. Diaz-Andreu argues that the interest in the past, particularly throughout the nineteenth century, evolved concurrently with nationalism and interest in forging a civilizational lineage from Ancient Greece, and was also bolstered by the ideas of colonialism and imperialism. Antiquities, as has already been explained above and shall be further explained in the next chapter, had become associated with national pride, and had

⁸⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 14, 407.

⁸¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 238.

⁸² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 243.

emerged as a token of civilisation as Ancient Greece and Rome were acknowledged ‘as the prototypes of the great nations and the ancestors of modern civilization’.⁸³

Another important factor during the nineteenth century that led archaeologists and antiquarians to carry out excavations in the territories under Ottoman rule was the increasing interest among the Europeans and Americans in establishing their biblical roots in the areas which were alluded to in the Bible, including modern Egypt, Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and parts of Iran), Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey.⁸⁴ As a result, ‘[t]he value of the ancient remains was firmly connected to their role in the history of Judeo-Christian religions’.⁸⁵ As religion became a separate area of aspiration for archaeological expeditions across the predominantly European Christian world, aside from the imagined civilizational supremacy acquired from the Greek and Latin Classics, Biblical archaeology also developed into a means and an end for imperial supremacy and control of the East while excavating parties searched for the roots of religion. In other words, Biblical archaeology became an extension of ‘informal imperialism’.

Although the State Interventionist model was not employed in Britain in the field of archaeology until the 1870s, the Ottomans still remained a target of foreign groups who were not only after self-acclamation of their nation or religion, but also their own individual group identities.⁸⁶ The Utilitarian model adopted by the state in Britain before the 1870s ensured that the sense of belonging generally gained in societies through either nationalism or religion was also likely to be formed through individual

⁸³ Margarita Diaz-Andreu, *A World History of Nineteenth-Century Archaeology: Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 12.

⁸⁴ Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, p. 131.

⁸⁵ Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, p. 132.

⁸⁶ Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, p. 16.

groups who recognised a common self-interest.⁸⁷ After all, religion still occupied an important place in the post-Enlightenment period in the formation of groups aimed at education and sociability, despite the limitations on the role of the Church and increased civil power.⁸⁸ Missionary societies were among these new groups. Besides, a certain kind of sociability inherited from the eighteenth century consisted of new clubs and learned societies, which helped the formation of group identity for antiquarians, the predecessors of archaeologists. Diaz-Andreu explains the importance of sociability in terms of rationalism:⁸⁹

The growth of associations during the eighteenth century can be linked with rationality and its connection with sociability. As Porter explains, ‘to be a rational gentleman a fellow had to be sociable, or [...] clubbable. Clubs [...], masonic lodges, tavern meetings, coffee houses and friendly societies flourished in the name of company, fellowship and credit, free republics of rational society’.⁹⁰

Among these groups religious symbols had a particularly important role. The Ark of the Covenant is one of these symbols that had an important role in archaeological ventures, to the extent that it has become an important part of popular fiction, movies and video games. Its significance in *The Abyssinian Proof* will be explained in the following section.

⁸⁷ Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, p. 11.

⁸⁸ Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, pp. 132-3.

⁸⁹ Diaz-Andreu on the consequences of rationalism argues: ‘the belief in reason as a means to systematically organize the world was underpinned by a novel way of reading the Classics and a new importance given to their antiquities. Increasingly, the work of the antiquarians was felt important for the progress of their countries, and there emerged a sense of group identity which crystallized in their organization in learned societies. Rationalism also led to the creation of the first museums’ (Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, p. 12).

⁹⁰ Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, p. 53; Roy Porter, ‘The Enlightenment in England’, in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. by Roy Porter and Mikulàs Teich (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1981), pp. 1-18 (p. 15).

2.1.7. Abyssinian Connection

2.1.7.1. *The Background Story of the Ark of the Covenant*

The Ark of the Covenant as a Biblical story takes place in the Old Testament, in which the Ark is traceable only ‘up until the time of Solomon (970-931 BC)’, and after which point no reference is made to the ark.⁹¹ Whereas its disappearance is regarded as one of the great unresolved puzzles of the Bible, according to Graham Hancock, this makes the Ark ‘conspicuous only by its absence’.⁹² Graham Hancock in his popular history book *The Sign and The Seal: Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant* (1992) tells the story of his quest for the Ark and investigates the veracity of the legend of the Ark’s abduction from King Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem to Ethiopia by Menelik, the alleged son of the Queen Sheba and the King Solomon.⁹³

As opposed to the Ethiopian Christian belief that the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Ethiopia by Menelik, Graham Hancock proposes that it was removed from Solomon’s Temple during the reign of the King Manasseh (687-642 BC) because of the king’s idolatrous paganism.⁹⁴ The Ark was then brought to a temple on Elephantine, an island in upper Egypt, for about two centuries before it was taken to Ethiopia.⁹⁵ In Graham Hancock’s book, it is claimed that after the Ark was brought to Ethiopia, it was removed from its hiding place only when there was threat to its safety, one of which is told to be the *coup d’état* by the Jewish tribal chieftainess Gudit around AD 980.⁹⁶ At the time Jerusalem was seized by the Crusaders in 1099, the Zagwe dynasty (c.1030-

⁹¹ Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal: A Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant* (Great Britain: Mandarin, 1992), p. 7.

⁹² Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 7, 285.

⁹³ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 4, 25, 44, 71, 132; The story of the abduction is recounted in *Kebrā Nagast* (‘Glory of Kings’), the oldest surviving written source of the story of Solomon and Sheba, dated from the thirteenth century AD, and forms Graham Hancock’s primary source of reference (Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 25).

⁹⁴ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 418-21, 426-7.

⁹⁵ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 439-41.

⁹⁶ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 103, 110, 227-8.

c.1270) was still in power in Ethiopia. When the Templar order arrived in Jerusalem in 1119, they settled ‘on the site of the original Temple of Solomon’.⁹⁷ According to Hancock’s theory, the Templars must have been looking for the Ark there, and when they couldn’t locate it in Jerusalem, they were led to Ethiopia by the Ethiopian Prince Lalibela, who was in exile in Jerusalem until 1185 for a quarter of a century, and supposedly with the help of the Templars, he gained the throne by deposing his half-brother, the King Harbay.⁹⁸

According to Hancock’s book, around a century later, Wedem Ara’ad, the third-generation king in the House of Solomon that followed the rule of the Zagwes, sent a large delegation to Pope Clement V at Avignon in 1306.⁹⁹ One year later, the Templar order was hunted down by the French King Philip and other European heads of state. Hancock speculates that the embassy from Ethiopia might have given ‘the Pope and the French king (Philip IV) an urgent motive to destroy the order’, such as the menace the Templars could present if they had the Ark with them.¹⁰⁰ Hancock continues his theory:

After all, it was a period when deep superstitions ruled the popular imagination. With so sacred and so powerful a relic in their hands the Templars would have been in a unique position to challenge both the secular and religious authorities of the land – and those authorities would certainly have taken any steps they could to prevent such an eventuality.¹⁰¹

The rest of this narrative in *The Sign and the Seal* gives an account of the destruction of the Templar order by the French King Philip, and the probable resurrection of their quest for the Ark among the ranks of the Freemasons.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 107.111

⁹⁸ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 94, 103-5, 153.

⁹⁹ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁰ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 164.

¹⁰¹ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 164.

¹⁰² Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 155, 166-7.

2.1.7.2. The Journey of the Proof: The Proof of Authenticity by the Historian

The story of the Proof, as recounted by Ismail Hodja, the Sufi sheikh from the Nakshibendi order, whom Kamil Pasha respects and consults, remarkably agrees with Hancock's Ethiopian story of the Ark and the Templars. Indeed, the traces of the ark legend can be detected in the names of the characters in the novel, which resonate with the Biblical, historical and literary personae involved in the story of the Ark. Balkis, the priestess of the Abyssinian sect, the mother of Saba and Amida, takes her name from the name given to the Queen of Sheba in Muslim tradition, that is, Bilquis or Bilqis.¹⁰³ Saba, the daughter of Balkis, also possibly takes her name from the Queen herself as the famous queen is also associated with 'the pre-Islamic south Arabian kingdom of Saba'¹⁰⁴, which is now Yemen.¹⁰⁵ The author has most likely chosen different versions of the Queen's name for the mother and the daughter because, in the novel, the title of the Melisite priestesses is hereditary via females. The name of the caretaker of the Kariye Mosque, Malik, also echoes Menelik's name, the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. Amida's name, on the other hand, echoes the Axumite King, Ella Amida, who had freed Syrian Frumentius¹⁰⁶ from slavery.¹⁰⁷ Lastly, the midwife Gudit's name is derived from the supposedly Jewish tribal chieftainess who attacked Axum and took over the ancient city, killing its Solomonic emperor.¹⁰⁸

As told by Ismail Hodja, the relic gets 'stolen' from Jerusalem in the early twelfth century by Christian crusaders, namely the Templars. The armies were looting articles that they thought were 'powerful' the Hodja suggests, and '[w]hatever it was that the

¹⁰³ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ In the Ethiopian tradition, Sheba is located in Ethiopia.

¹⁰⁵ Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Ark of the Covenant: The Remarkable Quest for the Legendary Ark* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), pp. 72, 198; Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ Frumentius later became Ethiopia's first Christian bishop in the fourth century AD (Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 12-3).

¹⁰⁷ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 12-3.

¹⁰⁸ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, p. 103.

Crusaders found allowed them to become wealthy and strong’, and accordingly, the Proof was among these items.¹⁰⁹ Then one step ahead of the Ottoman armies, according to the Sheikh¹¹⁰, the Proof, among other valuables, is taken to Acre and Antioch, and finally in 1291 to Aksum in Abyssinia.¹¹¹ Not long after, when the Abyssinian king gets suspicious that the Templars would steal the Ark, he sends a mission to Pope in 1306 to warn them, who, then, in turn, persuades the king of France and other European leaders to root out the Templars and usurp their riches.¹¹² Here, the Templars’ story is given a twist in *The Abyssinian Proof* with the addition of a certain Philip of Stark, the Templar deputy who brought the treasure containing the Proof to Abyssinia in the first place. He takes the treasure with him to France, but gets executed, and Sophia, his daughter from a local woman, seeks refuge in Constantinople with her treasure as ‘the Byzantine Church wasn’t on friendly terms with the Roman Pope’.¹¹³

In the novel, when Philip of Stark took the treasure to Europe in 1306, Metochites in reality would have been the controller of the general treasury (1305-06).¹¹⁴ It will be remembered that Theodore Metochites was the patron of the Chora monastery in Constantinople.¹¹⁵ He became the prime minister (*Grand Logothete*) under the leadership of the Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, who, just like Theodore Methochites, was an admirer of Greek learning and had embraced the Empire’s ancient Greek legacy¹¹⁶. As a reaction to the Latin rule (1204-61) following the Fourth Crusade

¹⁰⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 231.

¹¹⁰ The Ottomans captured Jerusalem, Acre and Antioch in 1517 during the reign of Selim I. This makes ‘one step’ a phase of three centuries in this account.

¹¹¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 232.

¹¹² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 232.

¹¹³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 233.

¹¹⁴ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 232; Anne Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images*, p. 33.

¹¹⁵ Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images*, p. 31.

¹¹⁶ Anne Karahan reviews the increasing interest of the Byzantine Empire in their Hellenic roots: ‘Intensified interest for the Hellenistic past is characteristic of the Palaiologan era. [...] The devastating fourth crusade, and the Latin Empire (1204-61) with the Roman Catholic Church, raised the ethnical and historical awareness of the Byzantines furthermore. Greek orthodox religion, Greek language and philosophical heritage distinguished Byzantium from the Latin heritage that permeated Christian thinking

(1202-04), the duo denounced the union with the Roman Catholic Church that their respective fathers had supported.¹¹⁷

The Fourth Crusade (1202-04) was an important factor in escalating the divide between the Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church, and by ‘weakening Constantinople over the centuries’, the Latin Crusaders paved the way for the ultimate collapse of the Byzantine Empire.¹¹⁸ Ismail Hodja reprimands the Crusaders saying ‘[t]hese were all supposedly religious men, yet they were scheming against each other. It’s remarkable that the Christians have thrived for so long’.¹¹⁹ He criticises the Crusaders, calling their acts ‘shameful’, and adds that ‘acting in the name of Christianity [they] sacked some of the greatest Christian cities of the time. When they were finished, there was almost nothing left of Byzantium’.¹²⁰ In the novel, this is the reason the valuables belonging to Christianity were entrusted to the Byzantines, and ‘the Byzantine emperor put the Proof of God under the protection of the statesman Theodore Metochites’.¹²¹ The estrangement between Roman and Byzantine churches is criticised by Ismail Hodja, who, as a Muslim cleric, bemoans this division even if he also adds ‘I suppose the Turks can thank the Templars for weakening Constantinople over the centuries’.¹²²

in the West. Constantinople was now regarded as “the second Athens”. By defining themselves as [...] [Ellines], the Byzantines accentuated their affinity to the pagan Hellenic cultural heritage, as well as to the Christian Greek and also their difference from the Roman Catholic Church. The precarious situation of the Empire made them emphasize their Greek legacy. Instead of turning to the West – how could they, after the interim of a Latin Empire that had turned Constantinople to a Latin capital – the Byzantines turned to the East.’ (Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images*, p. 27, fn. 128).

¹¹⁷ After he retrieved Constantinople from the Latin Empire (1204-61), Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, Emperor Andronikos’s father, had reinstated the Byzantine Empire, and just like Theodore’s father archdeacon George Metochites, he had supported the Greek-Latin union.

¹¹⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 232.

¹¹⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 232.

¹²⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 231.

¹²¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 233.

¹²² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 231-2.

Ismail Hodja acts as the *historian* in the novel who speaks about the history of religions at length, and as a scholar of Islam and Abrahamic religions, his testimony gives the Abyssinian hybrid story credence. Furthermore, the way the story of the Ark blends with that of the Chora Monastery is rendered credible through the details about the Proof's journey to Constantinople. When Ismail Hodja tells Kamil Pasha of the existence of '[p]eople who believe the Proof is the Ark of the Covenant or a rich treasure, or any number of ignorant legends', this is very likely a hint at the historical pursuers of the ark, namely the Crusaders, i.e. the Templars, who allegedly tracked the traces of the Ark and many other antique 'sources of wisdom' for centuries, possibly believing in their potency.¹²³ Ismail Hodja tells Kamil Pasha that '[t]he Templars used the object [The Proof] to advertise their own importance', and as explained earlier, this is why Ismail Hodja warns Kamil Pasha that, in a passage quoted earlier:¹²⁴

'It's not the dealers you should worry about. There are groups whose hunger for the Proof of God goes back hundreds of years, just like the Melisites. People who believe the Proof is the Ark of the Covenant or a rich treasure, or any number of ignorant legends. If their members heard it had been found, they'd stop at nothing to get it. They'd never sell it. It would simply disappear'.¹²⁵

The groups Ismail Hodja refers to are groups such as the Freemasons, whose secretiveness, as a group whose members recognise each other through the use of special words and symbols that are based on the fraternity of medieval stonemasons, provokes conspiracy theories about their quest for power. As it has been mentioned above, the Templars' quest for the Ark of the Covenant was later revived by the Freemasons, whose upper ranks paid many visits to lower Nile to investigate the Ancient Egypt, which they saw as 'the source of wisdom'.¹²⁶ Masonic authors generally identify Templars as 'the "missing link" between the masons of antiquity and modern

¹²³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 238.

¹²⁴ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 233.

¹²⁵ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 238.

¹²⁶ Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 166-7, 305.

Freemasonry'.¹²⁷ In his quest for the Ark, Graham Hancock also pursues the elite ranks of Scottish Freemasonry in order to find clues to the history of the lodge's interest in the Ark in Ethiopia and provides some *evidence* regarding the Masonic search for the Ark of the Covenant.

Based on Ismail Hodja's brief, Kamil Pasha starts to associate the reliquary thieves with the resurrection of the Crusaders: 'What did a member of a secret religious society look like? He imagined them to be rough, gullible, and ignorant, but then remembered that the Crusader orders had been made up of knights and educated men'.¹²⁸ Ismail Hodja advises Kamil Pasha to maintain his guard against any kinds of thieves, even against the scholars, despite Kamil Pasha's confidence in them.¹²⁹ Kamil Pasha himself, as a rationalist, recognises the power of religious belief to overcome reason and civil order, especially when sacred objects that promise power are at stake:

Kamil didn't believe the reliquary had any miraculous properties. Reason was more likely to be duped by faith than by logic. The world was peopled with believers whose faith caused them to act against all reason, to steal, to wage war, to kill and maim their neighbours. If they believed the reliquary or its contents was sacred, then they could cause great harm. The icon stolen from the Patriarchate had already demonstrated that.¹³⁰

It is made clear in the novel that the potency of the Proof is secured because of the feelings it may stir in people: being in power and control or having a respectable status are some of the aims pursued by various characters in relation to the Proof. Ismail Hodja, thus, simply cautions Kamil Pasha against the people who can abuse religion to gain power: 'It's a powerful relic, Kamil. Although I know you don't believe in such things, others do'.¹³¹ He adds: 'I'm afraid if one person knows, then others will hear of

¹²⁷ Diaz-Andreu, *Nineteenth-Century Archaeology*, p. 50; Jon E. Lewis, *The Mammoth Book of Cover-Ups: The 100 Most Disturbing Conspiracies of All Time* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2008), p. 122; Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal*, pp. 305-6.

¹²⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 243-4.

¹²⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 237.

¹³⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 192.

¹³¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 189-90.

it and be drawn to Istanbul like scavengers to blood. I'm afraid it'll fall into the hands of men who will either destroy it or use it to incite hatred among the religions'.¹³²

The hodja, while informing the Pasha about the history of the Proof, also discourses on the damage the ambition of men can do to society, very disappointing for the hodja because it means that religion can at times be used as a tool for destruction rather than reconciliation. With the murder of his friend Malik, who was killed trying to protect the Proof, taking down the smuggling ring becomes a personal undertaking for Kamil Pasha. John Scaggs mentions in his *Crime Fiction* how drawing 'parallels between the detective and the historian' is a common practice in the critique of works of crime fiction, whether the crime in question is related to history or not, since, as Worthington explains, historical crime fiction as a genre is indeed 'based on the investigation of past events; the crime in crime fiction necessarily takes place before the investigation'.¹³³ Therefore, as Worthington puts it, 'the detective has often been likened to the historian in their common endeavour to construct a coherent narrative from the relics (evidence) of a previous time'.¹³⁴ However, the fact that the crime itself in *The Abyssinian Proof* is linked to history, finding the relic, the Proof, now also depends on the detective's ability to think like a historian. Kamil Pasha, based on his new knowledge on the history of the relic, discovers the hiding place of the Proof before the thieves can find it, which turns out to be hidden inside the wall in the Kariye Mosque. The hiding place provides a metaphor for religion's power to create both division and union, as examined below.

¹³² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 190.

¹³³ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 122; Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 130.

¹³⁴ Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. 130.

2.1.8. Religion that Divides, Religion that Unites

It is generally maintained that as the Ottomans replaced the civilizations that were in place before them, the Empire emerged as their heirs, and as a result, the Ottomans took up the ‘practices’ of their antecedents and subsumed them.¹³⁵ In *The Abyssinian Proof*, Jenny White features this adjustment through the dual religious practices of the Abyssinian villagers as well as the Kariye Mosque itself. The Proof is initially protected by the Byzantines; however, the reliquary disappears¹³⁶ shortly after the Conquest of Istanbul and it remains so until it is recovered by Malik, the caretaker of the Kariye Mosque, at the end of the nineteenth century. The loss of the Proof, like the ‘lost manuscript’ theme within the crime fiction genre that presents writers a mystery around which to base their stories, is posited as the backstory of *The Abyssinian Proof*, also motivating the murder mystery plot. As to the disappearance of the Proof, Malik explains to Kamil Pasha that as a result of ‘a battle between the caretaker of the reliquary and a false prophet’, the reliquary disappeared as the caretaker at the time was able to hide it before he got killed. Following the disappearance of the relic shortly after it is entrusted to the Abyssinians, the community leaders hide the absence of the relic from their community, believing it was still in the church and would be found one day.¹³⁷ The building, however, gets converted into a mosque after being kept as a church for another hundred years following the Conquest. Its mosaics remain intact as they are kept ‘plastered over’ for hundreds of years, and a recent renovation in the mosque reveals the mosaics ‘again for the first time in three hundred years’, which

¹³⁵ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 15.

¹³⁶ The disappearance of the Proof simulates the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant. The faith of the believers keeps the established traditions of the Ark and the Proof alive despite the lack of proof of their existence as the relics are only allowed to be seen by the caretaker (the ark) and the Priestess (the Proof).

¹³⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 185.

allows Malik finally to be able to locate the Proof towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹³⁸ When the word of the discovery of the Proof gets out to smugglers through the caretaker's money-seeking nephew, Amida, the smugglers murder Malik to learn the location of the Proof. Malik gets killed trying to protect it before he is able to tell anyone its location or is able to make a copy of it.¹³⁹

The time frame between the death of two people trying to protect the Proof and the hidden location of the relic act as a reminder of how powerful and enduring religious symbols can be. Within this framework, the choice of a hidden location for the Proof helps the author to raise the matter of the endurance of religious symbols while pointing to the material transformation of the Chora monastery over the centuries. The transformation of the Byzantine Empire into the Ottoman was realised gradually as the Ottomans 'coopted their enemies; instead of pursuing a policy of de-Byzantification'.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, some social structures as well as edifices were (and are) left in forms that expose their syncretic and symbiotic nature: things remained solid, but were modified. The discovery of the Proof of God by Kamil Pasha, the magistrate, beneath the surface of the ancient walls of the mosque, which have gained a hybrid character over the centuries, is therefore symptomatic of this symbiosis. The transformation of the building throughout history is exemplary of the transformation the Ottomans generated in Istanbul. The narrator of *The Abyssinian Proof* says:

Byzantine walls, arches, cisterns, and artefacts came to light every time someone stuck a spade in the ground. The old city was encrusted with the new, but no matter how many palaces and mosques the sultans and their families built, the Christian city always found a way to remind the newcomers that it had been there first.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 186.

¹³⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 186.

¹⁴⁰ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 65.

¹⁴¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 37.

Talking about the early Ottoman regimen, Karen Barkey mentions how the boundaries between Christians and Muslims eroded because of Islamization that was promoted by ‘dervish-based proselytism’ whose aim was not to divide people but to unify them around common goals. Other contributing factors to gradual Islamisation at this period were the ‘heterodox understanding of Islam’ and ‘the prevalence of Islamo-Christian sanctuaries’ which came about as a result of this unifying attitude towards religion. The use of ‘the same sacred space’ had brought ‘the faithful closer together’; moreover, transformation of monasteries into tekkes, but at the same time preserving their religious symbols, had become a pattern in the early Ottoman Empire.¹⁴²

In this regard, while both the famous Hagia Sophia Mosque and Kariye Mosque had once been churches, their Christian features were kept intact as they were buried under Islamic features. In *The Abyssinian Proof*, this detail is used as a plot twist which allows Malik and Kamil Pasha to discover the location of the hidden relic, and at the same time it gives the reader a glimpse of religious and political history materialised in a single holy premises. This change, the material Islamisation, denotes the fact that ‘religious boundaries’ had appeared following the initial phase of unifying religious practices, and the reason for this was that, by the fifteenth century, the Ottomans had gained confidence in their newly conquered territories and ‘local networks’, and in ‘their ability to dominate’.¹⁴³ As a result, this later period witnesses the transition of the Ottomans from a *heterodox* understanding of Islam to an *orthodox* one. By mid-fifteenth century (by the time of the reign of Murad II (1421-1444)), ‘interfaith constructions’ of Christian buildings were deserted, and after the conquest of Constantinople, ‘the comfortable multi-confessional space’ transformed into a ‘dominant Sunni Islamic

¹⁴² Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 59.

¹⁴³ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 63.

state'. The consequence of this in terms of shared conventions was 'a gradual move away from a comfortable multi-religiosity' and 'the construction of "the other"'.¹⁴⁴

In *The Abyssinian Proof*, the Habesh people of the Sunken Village, by seemingly becoming Muslims, attempt to avoid this space of the 'other'. As a result, they live a double life because this space of multi-religiosity is abandoned. In the later period of the Empire, beginning in the late sixteenth century, interfaith practices increasingly lost popularity. Instead, clearer boundaries were established as conversion to Islam became more important with its evidential advantages for the Muslim populations, such as 'better economic and social status, less taxation, and the privilege of belonging to the victorious class'.¹⁴⁵ Under the Islamic rule, it was allowed to become a Muslim; however, Muslims were rigorously forbidden to convert to Judaism and Christianity. The punishment for the latter kind of apostasy 'was even harsher [including the death penalty at times] when converted Muslims tried to go back to their original faith'.¹⁴⁶ However, the severe repercussions of apostasy based on Sharia law were ameliorated by the early nineteenth century with 'the last case of a formal, official, execution of an apostate in Istanbul' taking place in 1843, and it became a state policy to ignore the crypto-Christians' return to their old faith 'in the years leading up to and immediately after the Reform Edict of 1856'.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, to the contrary, Selim Deringil makes it clear that, different from the *Tanzimat* (Reorganisation), in the *Islahat* (Reform) Edict, there was a clear emphasis on the forbidding of the compulsion to convert to Islam, which can be explained by the somewhat reprehensible pressure on the non-Muslims to convert to Islam.¹⁴⁸ Deringil explains the relative 'freedom of religion' which was

¹⁴⁴ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 63.

¹⁴⁵ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, pp. 123, 127.

¹⁴⁶ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 125.

¹⁴⁷ Deringil, 'There Is No Compulsion in Religion', p. 551.

¹⁴⁸ Deringil, 'There Is No Compulsion in Religion', p. 556.

provided by the reform movement rather as ‘freedom to defend their religion’, which is significant for the discussions on the role of Islam in Ottoman society during the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁹

2.1.9. Philosophical Debates in Religion

Interfaith practices of the Melisites, the combination of their covert Christian rites and overt Muslim rituals, correspond to the transformation of the Kariye Church. Malik explains to Kamil Pasha that ‘[t]he Melisites converted so they could continue to worship at the church after it became a mosque’.¹⁵⁰ As a result, instead of practicing at a mosque near the village, after their ceremony in the village, the Habesh community pray at the old mongrel Kariye Mosque on Fridays. The author’s depiction of the Melisites’ secretly maintaining their double religious identities indicates the fact that the boundaries that had reappeared after the erosion of the ‘heterodox understanding of Islam’ in the fifteenth century had indeed endured even after the *Tanzimat* period.¹⁵¹ *The Abyssinian Proof* is a platform through which the various issues of religious freedom, cohesion and unity can be examined. Ismail Hodja’s comments prove this point:

‘Some believe that the Melisites are really Christians living as Muslims, although who’s to say what that means. But ordinary people aren’t interested in philosophical debates, and they tend to be quite unforgiving about that sort of thing. They say that he who prays at two altars is without religion’.¹⁵²

The ‘philosophical debates’ Ismail Hodja mentions here hint at topics that encompass intermediacy in religions, including syncretism, proselytization, and oneness of religions. Ismail Hodja is a Sufi sheikh who belongs to the Nakshibendi order. Although Sufism represents mystical heterodox Islam, Nakshibendis’ teachings were strictly

¹⁴⁹ Deringil, ‘There Is No Compulsion in Religion’, p. 556.

¹⁵⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 186.

¹⁵¹ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, pp. 59, 63; Destruction of the Janissaries is also associated with the increasingly orthodox Islamic view of the Empire.

¹⁵² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 230.

rooted in orthodox Islam and the exercise of Sharia rules.¹⁵³ After the dispersion of the Janissaries in 1826, the Bektashis were dislodged as they had also been ‘accused of paying no homage to Islamic orthodoxy or to shari'a obligations, and therefore being a source of moral degeneration for good Muslims’.¹⁵⁴ Following this development, many Bektashi shaikhs became affiliated with the Nakshibendis, and resultantly, the foothold of the Bektashis was replaced by the Nakshibendis. Especially after the death of Sultan Mahmud II, the order (tarikats) became more powerful under the rule of Abdülmecid I (1839-1861), who had been educated as a child by Mehmed Emin Şehri Hafiz Efendi, an adherent of the Nakshibendi-Khalili suborder.¹⁵⁵

Itzhak Weismann suggests that the *Tanzimat* period was a continuum of centralisation efforts in the Empire that also ran parallel to the Sharia-based rule of the ulema and the pursuit of modernisation.¹⁵⁶ Abu-Manneh also agrees that Mahmud II’s sole aim was to restore his sultanic power while it was Abdülmecid who put emphasis on eradicating the misconducts of the imperial officials.¹⁵⁷ In an Imperial edict (Hatt-ı Humayun) which he had addressed to the Grand Vizier and in an *irade* where he addressed his ministers, Sultan Abdülmecid was calling for the implementation of the Sharia in all the affairs of the sultanate and urging all authorities under his rule to uphold integrity and fairness, and calling them to maintain *tranquillity* and *repose* among *all the inhabitants* of the Empire.¹⁵⁸ During the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid the main impetus was the precepts of Orthodox Islam; however, there existed a schism between the state-ordained religion and Islam’s philosophical variations that continued to mark the nineteenth century

¹⁵³ Butrus Abu-Manneh, ‘The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century’, *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s., 22 (1982), 1-36 (p. 7).

¹⁵⁴ Abu-Manneh, ‘The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya’, p. 28.

¹⁵⁵ Abu-Manneh, ‘The Islamic Roots’, pp. 182-3.

¹⁵⁶ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Abu-Manneh, ‘The Islamic Roots’, p. 182.

¹⁵⁸ Abu-Manneh, ‘The Islamic Roots’, p. 190.

Ottoman rule.¹⁵⁹ Deringil describes the ‘centralized or centralizing state’ apparatus as represented by ‘the member of the cerebral high *ulema*, who sat in his *medrese* (Muslim seminary) in urban centres’.¹⁶⁰ However, divergently, especially after the Greek uprising of 1821, reactions to this centralist position of the Empire as well as ‘the increasing oppression and violence’ of local rulers loomed throughout the empire, causing a sense of insecurity, transformed some groups into radicalised religious formations, specifically Islamic orthodox factions.¹⁶¹ Having mainly expanded ‘among the upper and the more educated ranks of society’, the Nakshibendis seeped into the administrative ranks of the Ottomans and functioned mainly as ‘an urban order’.¹⁶² Unlike other branches of Sufism, the Nakshibendi teaching was only for the *spiritual elite*, who were drawn to divinity *by nature*, and it was seen as ‘the mother of all mystical paths and the source of all their secrets and truths’.¹⁶³ As ‘the demand to observe the law against the arbitrariness of the governors’ increased, the order gained sympathy in the provinces, which in turn even seeped into the capital.¹⁶⁴

It is within this context, within the context of the interreligious dimension of the empire, that the complex structure of Jenny White’s crime novel makes a clearer argument than might otherwise be visible. Jenny White’s representation of the late nineteenth-century religious fanaticism of the sultan’s subjects, as in the Macedonian case, and their evolving devotional tendencies, as in the Abyssinian case, sets up the quandary of multicultural representation: there is an increasing tension between people with differing religious affiliations. Moreover, the tone of the novel is generally not a hopeful one when the accounts of Macedonian rebel Marko and the inflowing Muslim refugees

¹⁵⁹ Abu-Manneh, ‘The Islamic Roots’, pp. 187-8.

¹⁶⁰ Deringil, ‘There Is No Compulsion in Religion’, p. 554.

¹⁶¹ Abu-Manneh, ‘The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya’, p. 23; Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, p. 26.

¹⁶² Abu-Manneh, ‘The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya’, p. 7.

¹⁶³ Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, pp. 32-3.

¹⁶⁴ Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, pp. 26-7.

from the Balkans are taken into consideration. The tension resulting from the empire's dissolution is communicated throughout and this lack of hope is sustained until the point where the contents of the Proof are revealed.

Ismail Hodja, as a scholar of Islam, shows a particular interest in the discovery and the contents of the Proof. When he reads from the Aramaic text of the manuscript, he discovers it to be the opening verse of the al-Anbiya Sura in the Chapter of the Prophets of the Quran: 'In the name of the merciful and compassionate God, [. . .] their reckoning comes even closer to men, yet they turn aside heedlessly'.¹⁶⁵ If the contents of the Proof are considered genuine, Ismail Hodja acknowledges, the text 'was written six hundred years before the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad'.¹⁶⁶ The text of the Proof continues with the following:

'We have revealed for you a Book in which is a Message for you. [...] He has ordained you the religion that He commanded to Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and revealed also to the servant of God, Jesus of Nazareth, whose testament lies revealed before you.'¹⁶⁷

This would mean that Jesus was the bearer of the words Ismail Hodja was translating from Aramaic, 'a distant ancestor of the Arabic alphabet' and 'spoken in the time of Jesus'.¹⁶⁸ Given the fact that it would have been impossible for the prophet Muhammad to have seen this text when he recited the Quran, it also attests to the fact that Islam and Christianity are indeed one and the same in essence. This, moreover, essentially proves the existence of God. Ismail Hodja explains its reasoning to Kamil Pasha:

'Think about it rationally, Kamil, as you always like to do. How else would Jesus have been able to produce such an exact copy of the text? Allah dictated it to him, but he was killed and unable to deliver the message, so another Messenger had to be found. That was the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Allah revealed the same message to him and he was able to deliver it'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 342.

¹⁶⁶ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 342.

¹⁶⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 342-3.

¹⁶⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 235, 345.

¹⁶⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 347.

Although it acknowledges uniformity among religions, this passage has an underlying implication with regard to the Nakhsibendi leader's position in the face of the Proof. The novel harbours a diversity of characters that represent religious practices to varying degrees. As a figure within the Nakhsibendi order, Ismail Hodja's position is a blurry one in certain ways. He is called a Sufi leader, although, as explained earlier, the Nakhsibendi order grounded its enterprise on the application of Sharia only.¹⁷⁰ Unlike the pantheist Bektashi order, which is credited with bringing about the 'dervish-based proselytism' of the early expansion period of the Ottomans, the Nakhsibendi strictly abided by the Sharia and had the tendency to profess superiority vis-à-vis other religions and heterodox communities.¹⁷¹

Ismail Hodja is given further credence in the novel through his personal contribution to the compilation of the history of the Proof, collected at al-Azhar in Egypt, known as 'Sunni Islam's most prestigious university' in the contemporary world of Islam.¹⁷² This detail aims to demonstrate the sophisticated and advanced status of Islamic scholarship to the Western reader; however, it also shows the Islamic world's possible interest in (and concern with) the Proof's legacy. The power of the Proof is interpreted by Ismail Hodja in an explicitly Islamic light: as a legitimising source of power for the superiority of Islam. Further assurance of this orientation is imparted by the Hodja's following sentence: 'I think either this text [the Proof] disappeared soon after Jesus died or it was hidden by his followers who replaced it with their own gospels'.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, pp. 26-7.

¹⁷¹ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 59; Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, pp. 26-7; Deringil, 'There Is No Compulsion in Religion', p. 556.

¹⁷² Edward Delman, 'An Anti-ISIS Summit in Mecca', in *The Atlantic* <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/ISIS-summit-Islam-Obama/386303> [accessed 3 October 2016]

¹⁷³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 347.

In Islamic belief, when ‘God’s earlier revelations had become distorted at the willful and perverse hands of the Jews and Christians’, God’s words were revealed to Muhammad, ‘no less than to Moses and Jesus’:¹⁷⁴

There is nothing but God’s own Word in the Quran, as Muhammad himself could assure the community of believers. In Jewish and Christian circles, however, there were assuredly circulating other writings that had some claim to being God’s Word but are not found in the Bible or the New Testament. Both these Scriptures represent, then, a deliberate decision by someone to designate certain works as authentic or canonical Scripture and to exclude others from the authoritative list that is called the canon.¹⁷⁵

Ismail Hodja’s comments reinforce his belief that the prophets before Muhammad were not able to accomplish their mission and their followers manipulated God’s words, giving the Prophet Muhammad the upper hand in this. For the Hodja, the Proof of God is indeed proof of Islam, because almost two millennia after the words of God were relayed to Jesus, the text which contains the approximate words of the Quran and which was meant to constitute the Covenant with Jesus, re-emerges in Constantinople, testifying to the truthfulness of Muhammad. This source of power that has the capacity to dictate over religious divisions is sketched against the background of the tension that was caused by the increasing fragmentation of the empire along religious lines. The implication of the Proof in terms of the Ottomanism that was prescribed in the early years of the Young Turk period can be read below.¹⁷⁶

2.1.10. Ecumenical Council, Ottomanism, Yesterday, Today

As mentioned above, when Ismail Hodja reads the Proof, he discovers that it contains a similar text to that of the *al-Anbiya Sura* in the Quran and justifies this concomitance to credit Islam with a higher authority than its precedents: ‘In the *al-Anbiya Sura*, Allah tells us that there were many other prophets before Muhammad, praise be upon him,

¹⁷⁴ Francis E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ Peters, *The Children of Abraham*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁶ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*.

including Jesus, and that they were all given the same message by Allah, but that they were ignored or worse by the unbelievers'.¹⁷⁷ In another discussion, Ismail Hodja also states that '[a]ll of our religions flourish from the same trunk, a single vast tree inhabited by the spirit of Allah. Nevertheless every branch and leaf believes itself distinct'.¹⁷⁸ Despite Islam's recognition of the Judaic and Christian prophets, Islam had not ordinarily been counted as part of the family of monotheist religions in the Judaic and Christian world until recent times, although it had been common to accept the interrelatedness between Jewish and Christian faiths.¹⁷⁹ Today, it is widely accepted that all these three religions have common roots in the Prophet Abraham, whose Covenant with 'the One True God' is considered to symbolise the start of monotheism.¹⁸⁰

Aaron W. Hughes claims that the term 'Abrahamic religions' is 'a theological neologism' and that the recognition of similarities between religions that creates dialogue in the contemporary world does not appear any earlier than the 1990s. In other words, it is only in the modern world that Abraham has been melded into a model as a precedent for the originators of each religion as a result of a willingness to promote 'interreligious reconciliation' between what is perceived as the East and the West.¹⁸¹

Especially, since the 9/11 attacks, Abraham, the common denominator of these monotheist religions, started to be taken as 'the point of departure for interfaith conversation and understanding'.¹⁸² While providing a reference point to all three religions 'to explain the myths, structures, and historical interactions among these three religions', the concept of an Abrahamic root has also been used to denote an interfaith

¹⁷⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 346.

¹⁷⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 236.

¹⁷⁹ John L. Esposito, 'Foreword', in *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* by Francis E. Peters (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. ix-xix (p. xiii).

¹⁸⁰ Peters, *The Children of Abraham*, p. 1; Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 2.

¹⁸¹ Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, p. 19.

¹⁸² Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, pp. 1-2.

ecumenical union in recent years.¹⁸³ John L. Esposito, in his introduction to F. E. Peters's *The Children of Abraham*, maintains that the issue of interreligious dialogue is more than a theological concern now, and that it has also become an issue of international and domestic politics.¹⁸⁴ The promotion of the commonality versus differences of the Abrahamic religions is, therefore, not independent of its political implications, and has set the agenda in the early twenty-first century.

John L. Esposito suggests that both differences and similarities of religions within a 'broader Abrahamic vision' need to be recognised as an 'interreligious and civilizational dialogue'.¹⁸⁵ However, in line with Ismail Hodja's tree metaphor above, Hughes claims that each of these religions has claimed to be 'the true recipient of the Abrahamic covenant', and in the process, each has urged its own perception of Abraham onto the others.¹⁸⁶ Hughes observes that 'what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam do is construct three rival versions of Abraham, claim that their construction is not only the most valid but the only valid one, and, in the process, discredit the constructions of their rivals'.¹⁸⁷ In the meantime, 'an interfaith Abraham' cannot be achieved, because each of these religions originally views Abraham from their own historical viewpoints which results in contrasting historical knowledge and a lack of shared understanding of Abraham.¹⁸⁸ On this point of historical commonality in reference to the contemporary attempts of historical reconciliation, Hughes asserts that

many of the similarities that we perceive in these three religions are the result of real historical interactions. For example, that Paul would emphasize the Abrahamic roots of Jesus's message or that Muhammad would perceive himself as the restorer of the original 'religion of Abraham' (*millat Ibrahim*) is not an essential property that clearly reveals their 'Abrahamic roots,' but an ideological move to legitimate

¹⁸³ Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ Esposito, 'Foreword', p. xii.

¹⁸⁵ Esposito, 'Foreword', pp. xii-xiii.

¹⁸⁶ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 236; Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, p. 9.

¹⁸⁷ Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁸ Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, p. 19.

the new in light of the old. Or, when in the modern world these three religions are invoked in various military conflicts such as the Middle East, it is not helpful to say that this is a ‘family squabble’.¹⁸⁹

In other words, it is justifiable to assert that the imagined shared Abrahamic root is an invention of the contemporary world that is aimed at surpassing centuries’ long disputes based on differences that terrorised the world via individual or collective actions like crusades and jihads. This new perspective of religion is among many previous examples of constant rewriting of history and religion to fit the ideological and political goals of the day.

It should be stressed once more that Hughes is not of the belief that faith in the Abrahamic origin can achieve an historical reconciliation and peace among religions, and neither can the ecumenical calls for union. Hughes criticises the promotion of an ecumenical union because he doesn’t see this possible new direction as the solution to the problems caused by religious strife in the world. According to him, advocating the ownership of ‘a set of “shared beliefs and values”’ would necessarily require the anticipation of a shared historical ancestry for Abraham that can only be used to legitimise each of these individual religions as the ‘true spiritual heir’. According to this reasoning, belief in union only recognises the uniqueness of each of the individual religions concerned, which eventually only contributes to more dissension based on these religious institutions’ perception of their own superiority.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, this imagining not only creates essentialism and antagonism towards each other but also with regard to other so-called non-monotheistic religions. Additionally, the act of challenging secular notions of history by way of placing the events in the history of religions within the scope of such a history generates bias and essentialism by positing a subjective truth, which is indeed itself an ahistorical phenomenon. Therefore, Hughes’s

¹⁸⁹ Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, p. 19.

objection is aimed at the academic and historical analyses that simplify this puzzle and diminish the ‘complexity and the messiness that goes with it’ instead of creating ‘new taxonomic models to classify it adequately’, although he claims not to have any objections to non-academics whose aim *is* to create better communication between religions.¹⁹¹

The implications of these arguments for Jenny White’s creation of a phenomenon represented by the Proof’s place within the scholarship of the history of religions, or within the context of a beleaguered if not declining Ottoman Empire, are manifold. The ultimate goal, however, is to show that the Proof evinces the fact that ecumenical discussion is not without the burden of a power struggle which is represented by various actors in the plot. Firstly, the whole plot is set within a series of antiquity smuggling schemes carried out by a local gang of thieves and ruffians with an English ringleader. The value of the Proof is not only measured by its theological value, but also by how much material value it may bring to its handlers and holders, and how much power it may render for any organisation that may possess it. The Proof is represented to be a mysterious and powerful object as Ismail Hodja makes it clear that ‘[w]hoever possesses the Proof will be immensely powerful. She [Saba] must understand it to wield it properly’.¹⁹² Ismail Hodja is afraid that whoever holds it may become a source of menace, because ‘with the actual Proof in his hands, he [Malik] would be much more of a threat. People might have left their own religions to follow him, like a prophet. It’s happened before. Very dangerous, indeed’.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹² White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 236.

¹⁹³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 236-7.

Secondly, despite his support for an ecumenical council, Ismail Hodja has been primarily represented in the text within the context of Islamic scholarship. His contribution to the history and legacy of the Proof is offered as a means of legitimating the privileges of Islam vis-à-vis Christianity. Also, in the case of non-believers, the Proof is said to prove the existence of God. After all, Ismail Hodja's beliefs and knowledge are derived from the Quran:

‘The important point is that all the prophets were given the same message. In the Consultation Sura, it is written, ‘He has established the same religion for you as that which he enjoined on Noah, on Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Namely, that you should remain steadfast in religion and make no division therein. [...] Of course, it's pointed out that the people did become divided, but the idea is that Allah will bring them together again. The Islamic, Jewish and Christian God is the same God’.¹⁹⁴

Despite his belief in God's intentions to gather the people of the world together, this illumination does not have any impact on his sense of the contingency of the source of his own knowledge. The idea that Muhammad had not seen the Proof before the Quran was scripted turns what is considered by some an ‘ahistorical’ event into a ‘historical’ one, rendering religion indispensable for human history and progression. This whole argument can be seen as a legitimising factor for the rule of Islamic law in the Ottoman Empire. Although one may argue that, by means of the characters of Ismail Hodja and Malik, it is the intention of Jenny White to project, or rather put forward for discussion, the idea that an ecumenical council would eliminate all the struggles for primacy among religions and help bring the *family* together, I would support Hughes's claims in contra-argument to this thesis.

If the thesis of Abrahamic roots, or an equivalent of it, the Proof, is applied to the Ottomans, the most commonly idealised version of the Ottoman Empire, with its Muslim and non-Muslim subjects living in harmony under the roof of the Islamic

¹⁹⁴ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 346.

administration, would receive further support. However, such a model is rendered particularly suspect given the failure of the attempts at Ottomanisation, which came about as a result of the failure of the Porte to shed its Islamic cloak as increasingly exclusivist. The Islamic core of the empire had a unique value in its earlier days of expansion when the Empire ‘tended toward toleration’ when ‘the communities [...] and the leadership were concerned with this issue.’¹⁹⁵ The empire had chosen ‘maintaining diversity and managing the resources of this diversity’ instead of suppressing differences. Indeed, these differences of these ‘Peoples of the Book’ were protected and even encouraged under the banner of Islam ‘provided they recognized the superiority of Islam’. In this regard, Karen Barkey points out that ‘Islam was pervasive and the primary marker of inclusion in the political community. Its impact can be summoned up in three words that described Muslim and non-Muslim communities: *separate, unequal, and protected*’.¹⁹⁶

Jenny White’s Empire is different from Goodwin’s happy-to-have-strict-boundaries image of the Ottomans. In the novels of both authors, the continuity of the Ottomans is predominantly threatened by the forces outside of them, although some of the local characters’ plight or quest for a new social identity, or their fight to keep the existing order, is mostly represented within the main framework of their potential offenses against the law. The empire is observed in its moments of adaptation to upcoming changes. In White’s representation of the Ottoman Empire, the difference from Goodwin’s lies in the empire’s lessened ability to ‘manage’ the differences among its subjects, hence giving way to ethnic and religious clashes to which Goodwin’s novels only tactfully and generically refer. Ottomanism, which came about as a result of efforts

¹⁹⁵ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 119.

¹⁹⁶ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, pp. 119-20.

to have a shared identity, failed to blur or overcome certain strict and detrimental borders among religious, and increasingly ethnic, groups. Even if these boundaries are praised for being a sign of a tolerant society in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, by the nineteenth century they present an obstacle in the way of forming an egalitarian society, and a plural one in the contemporary sense. Promising this ideal, the Young Turk revolution, by consolidating into a Muslim-Turkish identity, eventually failed to achieve Ottomanism, and, therefore, was not able to prevent the full-blown coming into being of ethnic nationalisms in the twentieth century. It is therefore doubtful whether the Proof would provide a solution to the religious strife across the empire, considering the demands by each group for sovereignty or self-rule could not be met, given the position of an increasingly scriptural and exclusivist Islam as the religion of the imperial core. Since the Proof disappears again by the end of the novel, the author leaves the answer to this question open-ended.

The third point that explains the challenges brought to the Proof and the world created around it can be observed in terms of the changing relations of power in the Ottoman society by the end of the nineteenth century. While the Imperial Museum, the new secular courts, the new antiquities law and modern medicine are part of the changing Ottoman identity, many traditions still persist and people usually cling on to their source of power derived from what is accepted as traditional. This contradiction can be observed in the example of the Abyssinians, who form a small community with enduring traditions such as the rite of ceremonial worship on Fridays, the ritual of circumcision of the Priestess, and the employment of a midwife, who performs the circumcision, upholds traditions, and acts as a healer.¹⁹⁷ The story of the protectors of the Proof demonstrates both the flexibility and the durability of these practices. For

¹⁹⁷ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 293.

example, while the resilience of the Melisites is proven by the ability of the community to convert to Islam to be able to retain the Kariye Mosque, Gudut, the midwife, insists on continuing the acts required by archaic traditions, including purification which involves circumcision, and on refusing to make use of modern medicine at the risk of the death of Balkis, the priestess.

Explaining to Kamil Pasha how the Proof got stolen from the museum, Hamdi Bey, the manager of the Imperial Museum, tells him that ‘they [the guards] thought they were guarding a prophecy revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by an angel’ and that ‘they think this is a newly revealed sura’, because ‘in the absence of real information, rumours are passed around’.¹⁹⁸ The reader is led to guess that it was Saba who took the Proof using some of the drugs that belong to the young surgeon Constantine Courtidis, who is in love with Saba, to delude the guards into believing that an angel has visited them to take the Proof from the Imperial Museum; the ritualistic tattoos on her back would prove to the guards that she is an angel. Saba, as the new priestess after her mother Balkis’ death, believes that the Melisites are the rightful owners of the Proof, and as a passionate ruler of her community, Saba’s insistence to inherit the Proof’s legacy marks the durability of traditions.¹⁹⁹ In this sense, the Proof fits in the tradition of magical items ruling over the willpower of humanity in popular fiction, including the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

The Abyssinian Proof is a criticism of abuse of power, which has been explored at length by means of the Proof, a relic containing a manuscript proving the existence of God. In the novel, religion, as a source of power, is used as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can be used to exert dominance by insinuating hatred among people

¹⁹⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 451.

¹⁹⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 71, 449.

(social unrest in Macedonia, Muslim refugees, the thefts are all signs that any former unity among people has been disrupted and the sacred values of people, such as home, religion and family, are now being disregarded). In the novel, the ‘ungodliness’ of people is on display through the mostly godly proof available:

Yet everyone Kamil met seemed obsessed by the battered reliquary they believed contained the Proof of God. Despite Ismail Hodja’s enthusiasm, Kamil thought it unlikely that the Proof of God proved anything at all, but someone had been willing to kill Malik for it. To Kamil, that proved the ungodliness of man, nothing more.²⁰⁰

On the other hand, it also proves that this source of power can unite people (the cleric Ismail Hodja and Osman Hamdi Bey watching an Abyssinian initiation rite at the end of the novel). In the final analysis, with the relic having disappeared from the Imperial Museum, the hopes for an ecumenical council are also abandoned. The lack of trust in humanity is extended even to the ecumenical council since Ismail Hodja keeps the knowledge of the Melisites to himself instead of sharing it with them. He confides this to Kamil Pasha by adding ‘[u]nfortunately, the world isn’t ready to become one nation [...] We need to plough the ground first before we plant the seed’.²⁰¹ The author, through her invention of the Proof, opens a gateway for discussions on the role of religion in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire as well as in the contemporary world.

2.1.11. The Creation of an Evidence-Based World of Crime Fiction

We can see a distinction in *The Abyssinian Proof*, created via crime fiction, of the existence of a world which is ruled by religions, sects, rituals, traditional medicine; and on the other hand, the new modern world which offers evidence-based investigation, transformation of the justice system that involves higher degrees of cooperation with local and international institutions, such as Scotland Yard and the British Embassy. In

²⁰⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 242.

²⁰¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 442.

the Ottoman case, the second part of the nineteenth century marks the years of centralisation and secularisation but also Muslimisation of imperial rule. A series of reformations in this period [the *Tanzimat* and the *Islahat*] ‘transformed the role of the religious communities: the non-Muslim laity gained influence at the expense of the [Muslim] clergy’. Also, ‘[e]thnic and secular affiliations and the use of the vernacular began to subvert the universalist ideas of the church’ as ethnic awareness began to take root.²⁰² Secularisation of the justice system in the Ottoman Empire was a slow process that was introduced and reinforced by structural reforms such as the founding of the Police Force in 1845, a couple of decades after the foundation of Scotland Yard in 1829, and the introduction of the public prosecutors in 1864 and their temporary integration into the constitutional system in 1876. These are the developments that are not traceable in Jason Goodwin’s *Yashim* series. Jenny White’s *Kamil Pasha*, on the other hand, is a magistrate who received law and criminal procedure education in Cambridge and is therefore familiar with legal structures in another part of the world.²⁰³

The world of Abyssinians, which is administered based on its religious and traditional foundations, offers a life of devotion to a spiritual cause which is false and delusory since the keepsake that is the *raison d’etre* of the sect is lost. In the novel, ‘the *mystery*’ presented by the Abyssinian community’s secret is ‘what keeps us reading’ and it is also what ‘opens out to interrogate the nature of society itself’.²⁰⁴ The hypocrisy on which the Abyssinians base their traditional values, the increasing clashes among religious groups across the empire, and the antiquity theft suggest *lack of order*, which is the detective’s mission to unveil even if he is unable to correct it. According to Sue Neale,

²⁰² Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2014), p. 1.

²⁰³ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 15.

²⁰⁴ Andrew Pepper, *Unwilling Executioner: Crime Fiction and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 49.

crime fiction is used ‘as a weapon to criticize social, political, and gender inequalities’, and therefore there is a ‘strong socio-political content’ in this genre.²⁰⁵ In its criticism of society, the detective fiction as a genre, according to Ed Christian, ‘often moves from the interrogation of suspects to the interrogation of society, where crime stems from flaws in the political, social, and industrial [or economic] systems’.²⁰⁶ The contradiction between archaic traditions and modernity presented in the example of Amida supports Jon Thompson’s claim that ‘fictions of crime offer myths of the experience of modernity’. In this sense, they offer the experience of ‘what it is like to live in a world dominated by the contradictory forces of renewal and disintegration, progress and destruction, possibility and impossibility’.²⁰⁷ Placed in a late nineteenth-century setting, both Jason Goodwin’s and Jenny White’s crime fiction provide a vehicle ‘to evaluate different historical moments in the experience of modernity’.²⁰⁸

Through the journey provided by the Proof, *The Abyssinian Proof* draws attention to and mounts a critique of injustices across the Ottoman Empire. Kamil Pasha comes across many instances of abuse of power that surface in a range of cases, such as slavery (the tanner’s attempt to enslave Avi), religion (Muslim refugees in Istanbul), faith (‘blind faith that requires only obedience and discourages thought’), knowledge (Amida’s selling the secret of his sect) and national privileges (the embassy official’s abuse of his position).²⁰⁹ Alongside the many topics just listed, the novel also shows the cunning ways in which the forces of Western imperialism are exerted against the

²⁰⁵ Sue Neale, ‘Crime Writing in Other Languages’ in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 296-307 (p. 300).

²⁰⁶ Ed Christian, ‘Ethnic Postcolonial Crime and Detection (Anglophone) in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 283-295 (p. 284).

²⁰⁷ Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 2

²⁰⁸ Thompson, *Fiction, Crime and Empire*, p. 2.

²⁰⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 59.

Ottomans in the nineteenth century, a topic which is also central to *The Winter Thief*. In *The Winter Thief*, Western imperialism primarily takes the form of Great Game competition between Britain and Russia, and the struggle of emergent ethno-nationalist groups in the wake of that rivalry.

2.2. *The Winter Thief*: Shifting Loyalties and the Plight of Justice in a Multicultural Ottoman Polity

If *The Abyssinian Proof* is the story of the failure of the dream of living in harmony, Jenny White presents *The Winter Thief* as the story of the failure of the ideal of living in equality. *The Winter Thief* is about an attempt to establish an Armenian socialist commune in Erzurum in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century. Throughout the novel, Jenny White explores the waning years of the Ottoman Empire in terms of imperial anxieties in the face of foreign interventions and the rising nationalist formations. The heavy-handed response of the Porte to the plans and actions of Armenians to set up a socialist commune is illustrated as an indication of the sensitivities and misgivings of the government regarding any collective action or formation within its territories. White, through her enactment of the emergence of state violence in *The Winter Thief*, engages with a number of historical incidents of the last few decades of the Empire that tarnished the relations between the Armenians, the Kurds and the Ottoman bureaucracy, which would eventually lead up to the most controversial incidents in both Armenian and Turkish national histories and the representation of those incidents in a contested historiography. In this section, I discuss the formation of nationalism among the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the century, the involvement of the Great Powers in ‘the Armenian Question’ and the dissension within the Armenian communities. The aim in this analysis is to study the contributions made by the alternative historical representation of Jenny White that provides a perspective outside the generic understanding of the binary formulations of victimhood versus perpetration, which becomes the method of representation for many decades after these catastrophic events.

2.2.1. Introduction to *The Winter Thief*

2.2.1.1 Summary

In *The Winter Thief*, a British-owned ship filled with armaments is discovered in the harbour of Istanbul in 1888, and Kamil Pasha, the magistrate of Beyoğlu, is commissioned to discover the agents behind this operation and who the guns were intended for. Despite the fact that New York is registered as the place of dispatch, Kamil Pasha suspects the British of supporting a nationalist group in the Ottoman Empire. A few days after the discovery of the guns, The Ottoman Bank is robbed and bombed, which causes the burning down of a nearby taverna. Unrelated to the events taking place at the Ottoman Bank, Vera Arti, the wife of Gabriel Arti, one of the robbers of the bank, is seized by the imperial intelligence unit Akrep (Scorpion) for her attempt to get *The Communist Manifesto* published in the Armenian language. In order to save his wife, Gabriel asks for the help of Yorg Pasha, a close friend of Kamil Pasha's deceased father, who turns out to have arranged the smuggling of the guns through the customs.

Vera escapes from detention at the base of Akrep, the imperial secret service, which is run by Vahid, its ferocious leader. Gabriel, giving up hope of finding Vera, sets out on a journey towards Erzurum, followed by his wife Vera and Apollo, their friend from Geneva. In the Kachkar Mountains near Erzurum, the plans to set up a socialist communion have begun to be implemented, with people from all around the world with socialist aspirations arrived and settled at an old monastery. At the monastery, the group not only has to fight the cold weather and contagious diseases but also to defend the monastery against the attacks by the Hamidiye troops under Vahid's command, which are comprised of local Kurds. The clashes end with the shooting and wounding of Vahid, and the commune, together with Armenians who backed and fought alongside

the commune during the fight under the leadership of Kamil Pasha, finally leave for Trabzon for safety. Using the stolen money hidden in Trabzon by the now deceased Gabriel, Kamil Pasha pays for the expenses of the Armenian villagers in their final destination. Fearing the consequences of this action, he claims to have met the expenses from his ‘personal fortune’, and as a result, Kamil Pasha is declared a hero by the Western press, *The Times* of London, and the Sultan himself.²¹⁰ Vahid, who survives his wounds, is declared unfit to serve as the head of the intelligence unit of the empire.

2.2.1.2. Main Topics of Concern

The Winter Thief employs as its guiding reference points the social and political incidents that took place at the end of the nineteenth century in relation to the Armenian case, such as the Ottoman Bank occupation and the clashes between the Kurds and the Armenians in the East; however, the author uses a modified and speculative version of these events. For example, the Imperial Ottoman Bank occupation by the Dashnak party in 1896 is utilised in the novel both as a robbery and an attack, which were carried out by a group with seemingly two different ideologies. The clashes in the east of the Empire between the Armenians and the Kurds are also depicted as events that could have been avoided were it not for the ambitious interventions of the likes of Vahid, who herald disaster for the Ottoman Empire. In this section of the chapter, my aim is not only to examine the ways in which the Armenian and Kurdish people are represented, but also to analyse the motivation and rationale behind such representation. The Armenian – Turkish – Kurdish relations have been a focus of dissidence throughout the modern national histories of both Armenia and Turkey. Therefore, representations involving these ethnic groups should be approached with more deliberation as they generally suggest a nationalist agenda that favours one kind of nationalism over another,

²¹⁰ Jenny White, *The Winter Thief* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), p. 364.

and as such, involves propaganda rather than a search for authorship, agency and alternative approaches within their historical complexities. On the other hand, such a sensitive issue is sometimes dealt with in a manner in which the stories or narratives that are locked in from a certain perspective may also leave ample room for speculation around philosophical, cultural and historical issues, opening up reflection and debate rather than closing down into one fixed position. Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*, which surveys contemporary collective consciousness regarding the Armenian massacres, is an example of such an approach.²¹¹

In this section of the second chapter, my analysis will mainly focus on how a work of historical fiction can establish a connection between the knowledge about and the legacy of past atrocities. The fictive versions of historical events, such as the 1863 Armenian rebellion against the Kurds in Erzurum, the Sasun massacres of 1893-94, and 1895-96 massacres in various parts of the empire, and finally the Ottoman Bank occupation (1896), shed light on the much debated questions of Turkish-Armenian-Kurdish relationships by means of an alternative approach that centres discussions not only on the events that took place, but also on the ideological shifts, and economic and social challenges and changes that were dominating the political scene around the world towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Ottoman government too was not unexceptionally unaffected by these dynamics. Therefore, an alternative historical representation is fabricated in *The Winter Thief*, in which the actors and the ideologies of the late nineteenth century in the context of the Armenian question are reworked in order to shed light on the highly sensitive balance of political and economic power at the time.

²¹¹ Elif Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

In *The Winter Thief*, Jenny White stages the political and social complexities of the Armenian nationalist struggle at the turn of the nineteenth century in a Kamil Pasha novel setting, diffusely showing that ‘the Armenian question’ was shaped by no less than the tripartite structure of the limitations of Ottoman power, the widening influence of the European Great Powers on the Ottoman Empire, and the spread of nationalist and socialist thinking within the Armenian community. The plot twists in the novel, such as the Ottoman Bank robbery, the seizure of the armaments in a British-owned ship and the active incitement to take up arms of the Anatolian Armenian townspeople by the Western-educated youth for protection against Kurds, correlate very closely with the actual historical events that led up to the 1915 massacres. A subject that instigates nationalist feelings in both Armenia and Turkey today, the 1915 deportations of the Armenians are not directly examined since there is no mention of the events of this period in the novel. Therefore, the issue of *genocide* will be left out of the scope of the analysis carried out in this chapter, although an attempt will be made to elucidate the extent to which anachronisms and ingenuity in the novel are cultivated in relation to the Armenian massacres during Abdülhamid II’s reign.

2.2.2. Dissension among Armenians

Assigned to the investigation of the arms smuggling, Kamil tries to figure out which group the British are supporting by providing them with guns.²¹² Possible enemies of the Empire include ‘Armenians, Greeks, Russians, the British, the French, Young Turks sitting in the Porte, plotting to reinstate the parliament’, as musingly enumerated by Yorg Pasha in a conversation with Kamil Pasha.²¹³ Enemies of the empire threaten not only its sovereignty (Westerners, Russians), but also its integrity (nationalist

²¹² White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 19-21.

²¹³ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 20-1.

revolutionaries, such as Armenians) and its absolutist monarchical form of government (demands of the Young Turks for reinstatement of the constitution). Kamil Pasha thinks it possible that something big has been planned against the empire, ‘something that could tear at the belly of the empire’. He takes a mental note of the vulnerability of the empire because of the ‘massive debt to European banks and loss of territory in decades of wars and revolts’.²¹⁴ As the Empire’s perception of itself as a betrayed nation and an empire on the verge of collapse, its vulnerability translates into suspicion of each and every group in the Empire, Muslims or non-Muslims. Tensions between the Armenians and the Porte, and the Armenian resistance translated into a socialist movement, emerge at this juncture of weakness of the empire.

The plot of *The Winter Thief* is a composite of various events, ideologies and policies that lingered within the universal political climate during the late nineteenth century. Vaguely based on the distinction between idealism and conformism, the chapters with Vera or Gabriel reveal some of the clashes between different ideologies among the Armenians of the period, including socialism, anarchism, nationalism and Ottomanism. The novel starts with the attempt of an Armenian girl, Vera Arti, to get *The Communist Manifesto* published in the Armenian language in the Istanbul of 1888. Vera has been a student in Geneva, of Armenian origin, and is represented as the daughter of a wealthy family in Moscow. Despite her Russian bourgeois background that enabled her to study in Geneva, Vera’s enthusiasm for socialism together with her affinity for her Armenian roots coalesces into her interest in promoting nationalist socialism. In her conversation with the publisher, Monsieur Agopian, Vera presents her reasons to want to get *the*

²¹⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 41.

Manifesto published by saying, ‘It’s the duty of educated Armenians like us to protect those of our people who are vulnerable, the peasants and the workers’.²¹⁵

As a member of the Henschak, the Armenian socialist organisation, she defends the consolidation of Armenian nationalism with socialism as a method of defiance against the Ottoman autocracy: ‘The Armenian people will find the strength to resist oppression only by joining the International Movement, by standing shoulder to shoulder with other oppressed peoples around the world’.²¹⁶ Despite her adherence to the Armenian cause, socialism is more pivotal for Vera than nationalism, because for her,

‘[a]n Armenian landlord has more in common with a Turkish agha than with the peasants plowing his fields. The fact that landlord and peasant share the same nationality is irrelevant. It doesn’t mean the landlord will treat his workers any better. Peasants have to stand together, no matter if they’re Turk or Armenian. Nationality divides people; socialism unites them’.²¹⁷

Vera’s enthusiasm to get Marx and Engels’ work published is met with an unmitigated rejection by the publisher when he says:

‘Madame Balian, I appreciate your sentiment, but from what I’ve heard, this is the stuff of sheer anarchy. If you remove the state altogether, do you really think men will support one another from the goodness of their hearts? [...] If you remove the state, they’ll rush to tear out each other’s throats’.²¹⁸

The publisher doesn’t seem to sympathise with Vera’s concern about the hardships of the working class while Vera doesn’t discern the publisher’s concern about the complications lack of authority may evoke in such a system. For the publisher, it is important that there remains a state that holds its people together and protects them. Thus, the conversation between the two proves inconclusive; the publisher does not yield to Vera’s utopian ideology while Vera does not conform to the publisher’s deference. Agopian establishes their difference by saying, ‘Maybe in Moscow you have

²¹⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 12-3.

²¹⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 12-3.

²¹⁷ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 13.

²¹⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 13.

the luxury of being Armenian however you choose – by going to church, or speaking the language, or just baking cheureg. But here we Armenians have a common fate, peasant and landlord alike'.²¹⁹ Vera finds this statement fatalist and 'Oriental', which demonstrates lack of knowledge or awareness concerning the internal dynamics in the Empire.²²⁰

The nucleus of Armenians in Russia consisted of the Armenians of Persian Azerbaijan, who had immigrated to the Caucasus as per the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828). Their population was immediately augmented with the addition of the Armenians from the Eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire, who had joined the withdrawing Russian army after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-9.²²¹ Russian Armenians prospered after the 1850s, acquiring influence in the region as merchants and bankers, and although 'the separation of the bourgeoisie from peasantry became more pronounced', they nevertheless maintained their solidarity as the rich made donations for the education of the Armenian community and to the Church.²²² Besides, a new intelligentsia was produced among the educated bourgeoisie; some of them worried about the conditions of the peasantry and set out to fix their problems while others, influenced 'by the waves of revolutionary and populist ideas that swept through Russia from the 1850s', instead of focusing on deposing the tsar, concerned themselves with the problems of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.²²³ Jenny White is particularly interested in this point because of her concern about the damage a lack of understanding of the individual conditions of people, and a lack of recognition of the consequences of external interference, can create for the existent order.

²¹⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 14.

²²⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 14.

²²¹ Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 54-5.

²²² Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 60-1.

²²³ Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 61-2.

The discrepancy between Vera's *heavily accented* Armenian, which she learned from her grandmother because her parents spoke Russian in Moscow, and the publisher's 'cultured and precise' voice, reveals the difference between their Russified and Ottomanized background despite their common ground as members of the middle class.²²⁴ Agopian, the publisher, not being able to celebrate his Armenian culture and traditions, sees himself first and foremost as an Ottoman. Appalled by Vera's disregard for the existing Ottoman state, he calls Marx and Engels's socialism an *anarchy* and sets out to show her that the state is the only essence that keeps people together: 'Something has to hold people together, madame. We're Armenians. That's enough. We don't need someone else's utopia'.²²⁵ His rejection of the socialist ideology may be read as conformism, or even treason, by Vera, because he can seemingly conduct his publishing business unmolested, but it rather means forbearance for Agopian, which, despite the hardships his fellow Armenians face at the time, rests on the Ottoman Armenian's faith in the Ottoman system that it will protect all its subjects as long as they abide by the rules of the system.

Agopian's lack of interest in publishing *The Communist Manifesto* can be viewed as the manifestation of self-censorship that became a habit during the Abdülhamidian era.²²⁶

The press is kept under strict scrutiny in this period since Abdülhamid II's regime 'exploited the power of a modern press to cement loyalty to the state and stifle dissent'.²²⁷ During this time, the press was 'entirely committed to the service of the regime', which left political issues outside the interest of the publishing industry.²²⁸

However, even in the face of such restrictions, Agopian's rejection of Marx can also be

²²⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 12.

²²⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 13.

²²⁶ Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 126.

²²⁷ Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 125.

²²⁸ Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 126.

read as rejection of ideologies or idealism altogether. Agopian complains that ‘Everyone wants to offer us a utopia [...]. No one offers us peace’.²²⁹ Agopian stresses the fact that being acquiescent is the only wise way for the Armenians, because he is aware of the threat Russia is inflicting: ‘Russia is threatening the empire’s eastern provinces [...]. The sultan suspects us Armenians of collaborating with them’, and because of this, he believes that ‘[t]his is not the time to publish Marx’s work here’.²³⁰ After this opening, in the rest of the novel, the author examines the complexity of ‘the Armenian question’ from both the Armenian revolutionary viewpoint and the perspective of the Ottoman body politic through her representation of a turbulent, cold and merciless society. As the dimension of socialism brings more complication to the Armenian resistance, the complex web of relationships among Armenians and Ottoman officials are put to the test.

2.2.3. Armenian National Awakening: Socialism Unfurled

While Vera’s conversation with Agopian, the book publisher, exposes the divisions among Armenians, the conversations Kamil Pasha has, during his investigation, with other characters in the novel, such as the Police chief Omar, or Huseyin Pasha, Kamil Pasha’s sister’s husband, disclose conflicting views among the ranks of people in the service of the empire. The author draws attention in her novel to the differences in opinion not only among the Armenians, but also within the government, with people like the Sultan and Huseyin Pasha suspecting an Armenian plot behind the confiscated

²²⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 14.; All the writers studied in this thesis argue against idealism and revolution. In all the books their characters’ attempts at revolution or struggle fail. While the Russophile commander is unsuccessful in bringing a republic in *The Janissary Tree*, Louis de Bernières shows the unnecessary of idealism, especially as revolutionary ideology, by being against irredentism and warfare. On this point, Louis de Bernières has one of his characters in *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, Dr Iannis, say: ‘We should care for each other more than we care for ideas, or else we will end up killing each other’ (de Bernières, Louis, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* (Great Britain: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1994; repr. Great Britain: Minerva, 1995; repr. 1997), p. 52).

²³⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 15.

arms while Kamil Pasha and his father's friend Yorg Pasha believe that the guns were meant for a socialist commune in Choruh Valley.²³¹ When he first discovers that the shipment is connected to Armenians, the unsuspecting Kamil Pasha does not consider an Armenian revolt a possibility even though the captain of the ship with illegal armaments that were brought from New York claims to have heard Armenian being spoken by the owners of the shipment, which is hidden as a 'load of salted cod' whose barrels are marked with an ax.²³² Not linking socialism with nationalism, Kamil Pasha utters his first impression about the Henschak symbol on the confiscated barrels on the ship: 'I thought socialists didn't go in for nationalism. How can there be Armenian socialists? Isn't their slogan something like "Workers of the world, unite," not "Armenians, unite"?'²³³ Jenny White marks a different intervention in the Armenian historical narratives with the dimension of socialism and foreign intervention receiving the spotlight rather than the more familiar, and ethnically teleological, Armenian national narratives.

Teleological historical narratives of *the Armenian national awakening* paint a picture of a determined fight of the Armenian nationalists that woke up the Armenian people from their slavish slumber. In these narratives, tragic deaths and massacres during the early strife caused by the abuse of power by the state, are retrospectively seen as the examples of *national* struggle, or as steppingstones contributing towards the formation of Armenian national identity. Folk tales of such times, for example, emerge likewise as part of national social consciousness. While some of these historical narratives are harshly deterministic in their manner of blaming the Ottoman state, amounting in their blame-placing to accusing the Ottomans of being slaveholders, some of them also see

²³¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 145.

²³² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 97.

²³³ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 100.

the Ottomans as being victims, as a minor power among the Great Powers of Europe – a sheep among the wolves. These explanations are further complicated by the distinctive role of Russia as an actor separate from its role as one of the Great Powers in that the Russians also had a contested relationship with the Great Powers as well as with their Armenian subjects, especially as the Armenians increasingly gained more power and influence in the Russian Empire.

One thing that is commonly pointed out is that the Armenian demands for independence were presaged by demands for fair treatment. The rural Armenian populations in Anatolia were under heavy tax obligations; not only did the local authorities act arbitrarily when collecting taxes, but also Kurdish and other nomadic tribes demanded ‘protection tax’ which sapped almost all the surplus of the farmers’ harvests and products, and so made life unbearable for the Armenian Christians. As extortions increased, at times conversion seemed to be the only safe avenue for the Anatolian Armenians.²³⁴ The rights of the Armenians as Ottoman subjects had been limited, and not inconsequential in relation to this condition, a certain political and national consciousness was flourishing among the Armenian peasantry. Other Christian ethnic communities gaining sovereignty from the Ottoman Empire had become a touchstone for Armenian national struggle. The complexity of the troubles of Armenians at the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, cannot be separated from the convoluted issues of the financial difficulties of the Ottomans, the involvement of the Great Powers in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the internal political, social and

²³⁴ Selim Deringil, “‘The Armenian Question Is Finally Closed’: Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51.2 (2009), 344–371 (p. 348).

economic dynamics and reactionary international movements that emerged as a result in this period.

Armenian nationalist thinking emerged as a result of a two-step process. First, came the cultural renaissance (preparatory phase), then, supported by the high clergy and the liberal bourgeoisie, patriotic and socialist reform movements followed.²³⁵ The Zeytun Rebellion of 1862 and Erzurum Rebellion of 1863 are the first two of a series of insurrections against the Ottoman Empire and the Kurds in the region in this period. These uprisings are now considered to be the early ‘examples of popular resistance’ as they are also ingrained in the later Armenian identity as part of Armenian folklore.²³⁶ Local Armenians’ hardships were also emphasised in the works of the nationalist writers of this period. The rising of national identity was therefore enmeshed with the sufferings of the Armenians under ‘the Ottoman yoke’.

Armenians’ nationalist feelings were cemented in the imagery of Ottoman oppression. ‘The Ottoman yoke’, as an ideological discourse, had been ever-present since its first use by Ivan Vazov in a play with the same title in 1888 to promote Bulgarian nationalism.²³⁷ In Andrew Petersen’s words,

In order to understand the negative attitude towards the Ottoman past it is worth remembering that Bulgaria’s independence was chiefly championed by Russia from the start of the nineteenth century. The Russo-Turkish wars of the mid-nineteenth century followed by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 led to the creation of an independent Bulgarian state which regarded the Ottoman period as a time of decline and stagnation. As in many former Ottoman provinces the Bulgarian population was ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse. This was true even amongst the Christian population so that the development of a national identity was

²³⁵ Anahide Ter Minassian, ‘The Role of the Armenian Community in the Foundation and Development of the Socialist Movement in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1876-1923’, in *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire: 1876-1923*, ed. by Mete Tunçay and Erik J. Zürcher (London: British Academic Press, 1994), pp. 109-156 (p. 112).

²³⁶ Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), pp. 160-1.

²³⁷ Andrew Petersen, “‘Under the Yoke’: The Archaeology of the Ottoman Period in Bulgaria”, *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*, 4.1 (2017), 23–48 (p. 28).

predicated on an antipathy to the Ottomans in terms of politics, culture and language.²³⁸

The economic stagnation and the Ottoman centre's lack of dedication to responding to the demands of its people during the nineteenth century set the stage for 'a multilocal awakening', which, as time progressed, gave birth to a 'consolidation and radicalisation of collective identity' for Armenians as well as other Christian ethnic groups, and culminated in fiercer local uprisings, localised attacks and even assassination attempts on the person of Abdülhamid II.²³⁹

Armenian American professor of history Richard G. Hovannisian suggests that '[a]s long as these peoples [*minorities*] performed their duties and as long as the central government could wield a system of checks over its provincial officials, there was no reason to upset the existing balance'.²⁴⁰ On account of this, according to Hovannisian, the harmony had actually started to be unsettled in the seventeenth century when the tendency of Muslim leaders to rebel repeatedly, the adverse effect of corrupt bureaucratic elements in administrative matters, and the European menace to the Empire prompted the early development of a climate of intolerance in the Empire. In the subsequent centuries, as the empire continued to lose territories and the uprisings in the Balkans paved the way for the creation of new nations with the help of European support, intolerance in the empire worsened.²⁴¹ Eventually, persecutions started to take place in the Balkans as well as in the Eastern territories in a war-like manner to counterbalance the uprisings, which were habitually considered to be treacherous movements. In the second half of the nineteenth century indifference toward the destitute among the Armenian Christians was being rationalised due to fear of the

²³⁸ Petersen, 'Under the Yoke', p. 28.

²³⁹ Panossian, *The Armenians*, p. 128.

²⁴⁰ Richard G. Hovannisian, 'The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire', *East European Quarterly*, 6.1 (1972), 1-26 (p. 4).

²⁴¹ Hovannisian, 'The Armenian Question', p. 4.

Russian aspiration to annex the Ottoman territories with Armenian populations and the possibility of further insurgencies among Armenians that could lead to a further loss of territory.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, rebellions assumed a more organised character under the guidance of the activists and the encouragements of nationalist intellectual writers. Initially, figures such as Father Khrimian (1820-1907) and Mekertich Portukalian (1848-1921) acted as the indigenous pioneers who encouraged the Armenian people and cultivated their sense of justice, which was later on translated into national sentiments and invested in the intellectual and armed mobilisation based on the possibility of national liberation.²⁴² Father Khrimian was especially instrumental in terms of kindling the national feelings of the Armenians. At the Berlin Congress, through the representation of Father Khrimian, Armenians demanded reforms and civil rights alongside partial autonomy based on the model of the Maronites of Mount Lebanon that was established in 1861.

The Berlin Congress convened after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-8 to discuss the status of the Ottoman territories in the Balkans and in the Eastern provinces, the two fronts the war was fought on. Changing the Treaty of San Stefano signed between the two empires earlier that year, the Berlin Treaty was a limiting force of the Russian control over the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Largely due to British pressure that sought to limit the Russian influence over the Ottomans in order to protect its overland route to India, in the Berlin Treaty, the Russian Empire had to relinquish its claim to be the protector of all Orthodox Christians under Ottoman rule. Moreover, as per the Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty, the Ottoman Empire was compelled to guarantee

²⁴² Panossian, *The Armenians*, pp. 161-6.

the security of Armenians against Kurds and Circassians, make ‘improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians’, and to ‘periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the powers’.²⁴³ In this treaty which replaced the Treaty of San Stefano, no genuine action by the Powers was guaranteed to be undertaken for the Armenians with the Berlin Treaty.

Father Khrimian had come from Berlin empty-handed after the Congress concluded with the Ottoman lands in the Balkans being divided up into new territories creating the new independent states of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro while the Armenians were only promised in the famous Article 61 the chance to oversee promised reforms within the Ottoman Empire.²⁴⁴ Disappointed by the lack of interest of the West in the Armenian question, on his return from Berlin, Father Khrimian ‘gave a series of speeches which secured him a place in the radicalisation of Armenian thinking, and the clear and forceful articulation of demands based on nationalist principles’.²⁴⁵ Razmik Panossian relates the power of the ‘iron ladle’ metaphor Khrimian used in his speeches in Istanbul after the Congress, which was later on instrumental in aligning Armenian nationalism in the direction of revolution:

Khrimian spoke metaphorically of the ‘dish of liberty’ from which Serbs and Bulgarians served themselves using ‘iron ladles’ (weapons and force). Armenians went to get their fill, but they only had ‘paper ladles’ (petitions and promises), which dissolved and were useless to serve liberty. They therefore remained hungry. The moral of the story was clear: in order to obtain freedom, arms had to be used.²⁴⁶

Khrimian’s call to use ‘iron ladles’, which meant arms, was therefore a call to revolt as a result of the disillusionment about the lack of support for the Armenian question at

²⁴³ Quoted from Hovannisian, ‘The Armenian Question’, p. 7.

²⁴⁴ Panossian, *The Armenians*, pp. 170-1.

²⁴⁵ Panossian, *The Armenians*, pp. 168-9.

²⁴⁶ Panossian, *The Armenians*, p. 172.

Berlin in 1878.²⁴⁷ Also, after the internationalisation of the Armenian suffering at the Berlin Congress in 1878, the calls to revolt became more vocal.²⁴⁸

Another development that encouraged Armenians to take up arms was the changing structure of the organisations that were being set up in the last quarter of the nineteenth century by the Armenian nationalists in the Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire (Tiflis) and those living in European cities. An important figure that inspired such organisations was Mekertich Portukalian (1848-1921), who inspired his fellow Armenians to project the future of the Armenians as a nation. Portukalian was a writer and an educator, who wrote for newspapers, and opened two schools in Van, one of which was shut down by Armenians in 1881 because of dissidence among them and the other by the Ottoman authorities in 1885.²⁴⁹ After his expulsion from the Empire in 1885, Portukalian settled in Marseilles and encouraged those Armenians who were abroad to financially help the oppressed Armenians and to spread the word on their status around the world.²⁵⁰

Although he was an intellectual leader who believed in people's right to defend their rights and be recognised through their nations, he didn't become a revolutionary leader, seemingly due to his reservations regarding the need for armed struggle to achieve change; and therefore, not infrequently he favoured reforms rather than revolution.²⁵¹

Portukalian's commitment to the national cause bore fruit when the future of the Armenian people started to be discussed under the guidance of the new political parties. The Armenakan Party was the first political party to be set up by Portukalian's disciples in 1885.²⁵² They wanted self-rule for the Armenians, which could be achieved through revolution. Although they refrained from 'terror, agitation and militant demonstrations',

²⁴⁷ Ter Minassian, 'Armenian Community', p. 112; Panossian, *The Armenians*, p. 172.

²⁴⁸ Ter Minassian, 'Armenian Community', p. 112.

²⁴⁹ Panossian, *The Armenians*, p. 166; Walker, *Armenia*, p. 127.

²⁵⁰ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 127.

²⁵¹ Panossian, *The Armenians*, pp. 166-7.

²⁵² Walker, *Armenia*, p. 126.

they still favoured training people ‘with arms, as guerrilla fighters, but essentially for defensive purposes, against the terrorism of the Ottoman empire’. They hoped the Great Powers would get involved in the Armenian cause to help them achieve their aim.²⁵³

Subsequent organisations were not as abstinent in their chosen methods to defend themselves against the violence executed by the Kurdish irregulars. Both Henschaks and Dashnaks used armed resistance in order to create the resonance that would draw the Powers’ attention to the Armenian suffering. Unlike the Armenakan Party, they did not emerge in the Ottoman Empire, but in Geneva, Switzerland, and Tiflis, in the Russian Empire, respectively. Their architects were heavily influenced by the flourishing ideals of socialism and Russian antimonarchism. Both of these groups’ focus fell on the emancipation of the Ottoman Armenians despite the pressure put on the Armenian Catholics by the Russian Empire after 1880s. An important reason for this was that they believed the Ottoman Armenians to be in imminent danger, while they also did not want to fall out with the Russian Empire. Thus, it can be said that, their campaign was not independent of their Russian background. As Christopher Walker explains, ‘the two main revolutionary organisations were founded by men from Russian Transcaucasia, and the imprint of Russian Populism is strong on them – so strong indeed that it can be argued that they frequently misunderstood political relationships within the Ottoman empire’.²⁵⁴ Such misunderstandings led to further oppression by the authorities after each action they took within the Ottoman Empire. Having glossed over some of the misunderstandings involving these political relationships above, in the sections below, the standpoint of these organisations and factions within the Ottoman Empire will be

²⁵³ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 127.

²⁵⁴ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 68.

investigated as they have been projected and novelised by Jenny White in *The Winter Thief*.

2.2.4. Class System among Ottoman Armenians

The Ottoman Armenians did not have strong ties as a community across the empire before the second half of the nineteenth century, which contributed to a marked urban and rural division among them. According to Christopher Walker, the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were divided into four groups based on their geographical status and their relationship with the Ottoman state. The most affluent group among them were called *amiras*, the wealthy and influential people who had close ties with the Ottomans and were based in Istanbul and Izmir. In the second category were the traders and artisans who lived in towns in the inner parts of the Empire. The third and fourth groups of people were villagers and mountaineers. The most pronounced difference between these latter two was that the mountaineers led a reasonably unaffected life by the social changes around them in the sense that they were largely exempt from tax-payments, and unlike the villagers, they were allowed to carry armaments.

After the Armenian question gained recognition as an international issue with the 1878 Berlin Treaty, political awareness and solidarity spread among Armenians even though the split driven by ideological and economical differences persisted. This divided ideological landscape transformed with Sasun events of 1894 which left approximately 900 to 3000 Armenians dead.²⁵⁵ In his observation of such division, Walker refers to the analysis of the British diplomat Sir Robert Windham Graves (1858-1934) on ‘the nature of the swing of opinion among Ottoman Armenians’.²⁵⁶ Graves initially sets out to

²⁵⁵ Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 95, 142; Robert Windham Graves, ‘British Consul R.W. Graves to Sir P. Currie’, in *Assembly of Turkish American Associations* <<http://www.ataa.org/resource-center/armenian-issue-revisited/british-consul-r-w-graves-to-sir-p-currie>> ‘[accessed 13 June 2018]’.

²⁵⁶ Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 150-1.

clarify that the ‘agricultural population’ is largely uneducated and that their political awareness goes as far as their understanding of their lack of security. Therefore, they welcome any means to be rid of the oppression they are subjected to, which among other reactionary tactics also includes conversion into Islam. Graves also notes that due to the lack of ‘freedom of discussion’ and of ‘local press’, the townspeople are incapable of forming unity among them, therefore, difference of opinion among them emerge in the form of political dissent, which, according to him, is an obstacle in the way of Armenian self-governance.²⁵⁷

Graves mentions three categories of Armenians who were politically conscious. The first category involves the conservatives or Turcophiles, who enjoyed protection and wealth due to their relations with Muslims; and the Catholic Armenians, who ‘had little to suffer from Kurdish exactions’ and whose ‘current religious immunities’ would be imperilled in the case of ‘a Russian annexation’ as they would be a minority group among the Gregorian Christians. The second group included moderate liberals, who took part in businesses, educational and other professional activities. Graves suggests that despite this group’s alertness to the precariousness of the position of the Armenians in the Empire, they were also receptive of the futility of the attempts to gain independence as a nation, or of the threat a Russian rule would pose to their Armenian identity. This group:

whose views although too liberal to allow them to be really contented with the present position of Christians under Turkish rule, could not be called actively disloyal. They were generally quite alive to the material impossibility of constituting an independent Armenia, as well as to the danger of ultimate denationalization that perhaps awaited them in case of annexation by Russia; it was therefore their aim to avoid precipitating any violent solution of the Armenian question, and to maintain the Armenian element as such, by strengthening and developing the national Church and schools, which enjoyed greater freedom under Ottoman than under Russian dominion; at the same time, they placed their hopes

²⁵⁷ Graves, ‘British Consul R.W. Graves to Sir P. Currie’.

for the future in the ultimate introduction of those administrative reforms which have been so often promised by the Porte.

Finally, the third group consisted of the revolutionaries, ‘young Armenians who have studied abroad, and have fallen under the influence of Socialist or Nihilist propaganda’.

Graves mentions the journal *Hunchak* as ‘the most prominent organ of this party’ and sees their resistance to the Ottoman maladministration as their sole design and ultimate goal:

Their object has plainly been, by creating an appearance of widespread disaffection, quite out of proportion to their numbers and influence to provoke reprisals on the part of the Turkish Government and people, of a nature to draw the attention of the Powers to the manifest grievances of the Armenian nation, and the necessity for their redressal. In this, it must be admitted that they have been ably seconded by the action of the Turkish authorities themselves in the provinces chiefly concerned. Their policy appears to be merely destructive, and so long as they can upset the present regime, they seem indifferent as to what shall replace it; at least I am not aware of their having formulated any alternative scheme of government.²⁵⁸

This classification of Armenians based on their political awareness prior to the Sasun crisis is explanatory for the variety of characters with conflicting types of Armenian self-identification in *The Winter Thief*. Accordingly, the Armenian publisher in the novel represents the second party, the liberals, evidently due to his choice of inaction because of the increasing tension between the authorities and the Armenians, especially in the face of threats coming from Russia, which means that he is willing to protect the sense of unity among Armenians as Ottoman subjects.

Vera, on the other hand, is representative of the revolutionaries, the Henschaks, who, as Graves claims, aimed to stir political unrest in order to attract the attention of the Powers, with the expectation of invoking the Berlin Treaty. Unlike the liberals, the Henschaks desired ‘immediate radical change’ and they were explicit regarding their organisation’s socialist agenda. They stood firm in their belief that they needed to attract the Powers’ attention to end the Ottoman rule, and to that end, they used revolutionary

²⁵⁸ Graves, ‘British Consul R.W. Graves to Sir P. Currie’.

techniques, which included propaganda, education, agitation, mass protests as well as assassinations, terror and other extreme measures. The eventual aim was to institute socialism. They were especially active between 1890-6, during which time they organised rebellions in Sasun, Zeytun and Van, and took part in other oppositional activities.²⁵⁹ In the novel, Vera is introduced as a moderate Henchak member, who believes in an Armenian nationalism forged by the socialist cause, although the more avid revolutionary stereotype described by Graves is also represented in the subsequent chapters. The narrator gives the reason for Vera's joining the Henchaks as 'out of misplaced loyalty' to her friend Apollo, who is introduced as a founding member of the Henchak.²⁶⁰

The Armenian Hunchak Party was the first socialist party of the Ottoman Empire. According to *International Communist Current*, a still active group founded in 1975, the Hunchak party was established 'under the influence of Russian Marxism', and in their design of public actions they were aligned with Russian populism. *International Communist Current* in *International Review* explains the Hunchaks' national basis with the 'stage-ist understanding of the Second International'.²⁶¹ Vera first becomes aware of the discrepancy between the socialist and nationalist leanings of the Hunchaks when she takes refuge at the Armenian Church in Kurtulush.²⁶² She comes to the realisation of and gets disappointed by the fact that Gabriel, her husband, is a member of Father Zadian's league.²⁶³ Their friend Apollo's involvement with Father Zadian turns out to be controversial as well, as they are heard by Vera to be arguing. Finally, Apollo takes

²⁵⁹ Panossian, *The Armenians*, pp. 203-4.

²⁶⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 82.

²⁶¹ 'The birth of socialism in the Ottoman Empire', *The Left Wing of the Turkish Communist Party, Part 1: The Socialist Movement in the Ottoman Empire*, *International Review* 13-16 (p. 13) <http://en.internationalism.org/files/en/socialist_movement_in_the_ottoman_empire.pdf> [accessed: 14/06/2018].

²⁶² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 200.

²⁶³ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 202, 252.

the confiscated arms out of Yorg Pasha's storage, and Apollo, his men and Vera set out for Erzurum. Socialism, however, as Vera understands it, does not seem to be a purpose of this Armenian insurgent group:

The men [the comrades that came to Trabzon with Vera and Apollo on a ship] claimed to be socialists, but Vera by now understood that they did not understand socialism as she did, as a universal ideal of justice. This, she had come to realize, was an Armenian movement, and it was her Armenian heritage, not her ideas, that caused them to accept her. The men had obsessively planned to trek into the mountains, going over every possible scenario and danger. They had quarrelled over each kurush of expenditure, since their means were limited by the money Father Zadian had collected.²⁶⁴

The question of whether the Choruh Valley is a socialist commune, as Kamil Pasha and Yorg Pasha maintain, or an Armenian rebellious group, as the Sultan insists, remains vague until the nature of the population of the valley is made clear to the reader. The fifty pioneers to settle in the Concord Commune are part of 'the socialist International' from all over the world, including one girl, Alicia, from Ireland, and others from Europe, Russia, and the United States who made their way to the commune to try a new communist or maybe communal anarchist settlement.²⁶⁵ When starvation and cold take their toll and the population of not only the commune but also the Armenian local resistance is largely eliminated in great numbers as a result of the armed conflict between the Hamidiye troops and Kamil Pasha's special investigation unit, the dreams for a socialist commune die.

2.2.5. The Representation of Wrongdoings

To be able to probe Jenny White's chosen method of representation, that is, her use of fictional devices to stage intellectual positions and dialogue, I will first review Tessa Morris-Suzuki's synoptic illustration of the ways politically sensitive historical issues are dealt with in their contemporary representations. According to Morris-Suzuki,

²⁶⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 276.

²⁶⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 37-8, 248.

different narratives can be used to suggest different ways of confrontation with the past, which can appear as taking or denouncing responsibility for past wrongdoings. In her *The Past within Us* she mentions several ways of dealing with past atrocities, and especially in terms of dealing with their legacies.²⁶⁶ For example, while the *liberal* interpretation may acknowledge the responsibility of certain parties of a historical event or incident, the *structuralist* narrative explores the conditions that give rise to these incidents. So, while *liberal* focuses on the political and ideological aspects, *structuralist* focuses on the continuity of social structures that offer necessary conditions that prevail at the time of the increased tension.²⁶⁷ A third type of narrative draws *parallels* between the wrongdoers and the countries they are in contention with, putting symmetrical blame on each party. This kind of parallelism may, however, justify a differentiation in people as *evildoers* and *victims* depending on the harm done in any given society. This simplified classification acquits civilians and soldiers in any given country of any support they may have shown or any crimes they may have committed during the times of disturbance. Parallelism therefore makes it more difficult to use the term *aggressor* instead of *victim* when it is weighed on a comparative scale. The final component in Morris-Suzuki's compilation of narrative models is the display of previous wrongdoings of some other faction or country as *pre-dating* which sets an example for the atrocities to follow, 'shift[ing] the focus of responsibility away' from generally accepted wrongdoers.²⁶⁸

This analytical distinction serves both to broaden and narrow down the domain of influence and responsibility for any particular historical incident, which Morris-Suzuki

²⁶⁶ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 13; In her *The Past within Us*, Morris-Suzuki summarises the analyses of a number of works of historiography on Nazis in an attempt to analyse the literature on the history of Japan.

²⁶⁷ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us*, p. 13.

²⁶⁸ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us*, pp. 13-14.

makes use of in her examination of Japanese historiography. In her corresponding analysis, the historical accounts by the Society for History Textbook Reform are not viewed as progressive outputs as they are claimed to be, but are indeed seen as intending ‘to relieve a contemporary generation of Japanese from any sense of responsibility for pre-1945 colonialism and military expansion in Asia’. In a similar way, but this time from an opposing position to the Textbook Reform, performing detailed archival research in order to ‘document Japanese military and state involvement in crimes such as institutionalized rape’ functions to place ‘greater emphasis on the specific guilt of particular individuals and institutions’. On the other hand, unlike these blame placing-blame acquittal exercises, in the Japanese example, the postcolonial narratives ‘explore both the complexities of Japanese colonialism and the structural and intellectual continuities linking prewar empire to the postwar Japanese state’ which, like the *structuralist* approach, recognises the entrenchment of historical responsibility in the ‘enduring social structures’.²⁶⁹

The two resulting conclusions from these examples are that, although they each have ‘slightly different implications for our understanding of historical responsibility’, the first casts the spotlight chiefly in the direction of ‘the need for the punishment of wrongdoers and the payment of compensation’ while the second concentrates on ‘the need to think how we might undo the legacies of past violence and discrimination which survive in contemporary political and social institutions and modes of thought’.²⁷⁰

Considering the sensitivity of the issue of representing Armenians of the late Ottoman Empire, Morris-Suzuki’s classification may shed helpful light on the representation of Ottoman society in Jenny White’s work. The representations that deny the Armenian

²⁶⁹ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us*, p. 14.

²⁷⁰ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us*, p. 14.

suffering as well as those that single-handedly vilify the Ottoman Empire can be considered within the liberal school. An aspect of Morris-Suzuki's analysis, the fourth approach, sheds light on the emergence of the intertwining of Armenian and Kurdish stories that makes use of the stories of repression over the years. The violence Kurds in the southeast of Turkey have undergone in the past few decades, if not longer, has now begun to be viewed as something of the same violence perpetuated against the Armenians by the Ottomans in the nineteenth century, often using Kurdish forces. Today, this complex history is often used against the modern Turkish government to create a narrative that supports modern forms of ethno-nationalism and ignores aspects of the Ottoman model that had made for coexistence for some centuries. On the other hand, the fact that these communities had co-existed for centuries before the late nineteenth century and continued to do so in some areas after these outbreaks of inter-ethnic violence, suggests the need for a structural investigation into how increased hostility among the *peoples* of the Ottoman Empire emerged along religious, and ethnic, lines in the late nineteenth century. This is what Jenny White's fiction attempts to do.

What is important for the purposes of this thesis, therefore, is to reach a conclusion as to whether, or how, historical fiction can help intervene in dominant historical narratives to overturn the stigmatising legacies of the past by reconnecting the present to the past in more nuanced ways.²⁷¹ The multicultural model that was in place in the Ottoman empire before its last decades accommodated both Kurds as a relatively autonomous, largely Muslim people governing large swathes of territory within the Ottoman domains, and Armenians as one group amongst many non-Muslim subjects. Jenny White's novel gives us glimpses of the 'divide-and-rule' violence that replaced earlier more peaceful formations as the Ottoman state struggled to maintain its territorial

²⁷¹ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us*, p. 15.

integrity. We are not made privy to the Kurdish irregulars' own view point in the text; they figure as 'exorbitant', in Jacques Derrida's phrase, to the narrative substance of the novel.²⁷² That is to say, the Kurds' story would require a different narrative, perhaps even a different narrative form, from the Armenian community's story, which is at the centre of this novel. The novel as it stands performs the important revisionist work of re-centring Armenians as Ottoman subjects during an important moment of the empire's destabilisation, and indeed the beginning of its self-destruction through the perpetuation of ethnic violence. However, both this work and other historical works that do not incorporate all parties involved in the escalation of the events to wide-scale massacres, fall short of being comprehensive, and unless more effort is spent on the construction of alternative narratives, blame-placing and blame-acquittal polemic will continue to be exercised in history and identity construction. Jenny White's novel, by placing the Hamidian regime and bureaucracy at the centre of her investigation into the violence against Armenians, also usefully explores the difficulties the Ottoman Empire was having in keeping the Ottoman body politic intact. Below, the representation of the Ottoman Bank robbery will be discussed as one of many expressions of such difficulties, in which previous Ottoman models are shown to fail under new strains.

2.2.6 The Ottoman Bank in view of Political and Financial Difficulties

The Hamidian period represents the Ottoman Empire's final attempts to protect its territorial integrity and sovereignty, which were being challenged due to the financial difficulties the empire had been undergoing and the aspirations for national liberation of ethnic groups of the late nineteenth century Empire.²⁷³ Despite the changing character

²⁷² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 157-164.

²⁷³ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 3.

of the relations of the Ottomans with the Powers after the joining of the Ottomans in the Concert of Europe with the Treaty of Paris in 1856, the challenges the Empire was facing were rendered more precarious due to its worsening economic conditions. To start with, the system of capitulations, which had been granted to the foreigners in the Ottoman Empire since Süleyman I granted them for the first time to the French in 1535, had already been exploited both by the Europeans and the Ottoman non-Muslim subjects, who made unjust gains by naturalising into a foreign citizenship during the nineteenth century. This has been alluded to in the first chapter as constituting informal imperialism, a much softer form of formal imperialism. Apart from the economic strain the capitulations generated on the Empire's economy, capitulations also influenced the psyche of the Ottoman subjects. Those non-Muslims and foreigners who obtained a more privileged status were increasingly received by the others with resentment causing the rise of xenophobia among Muslims. Those Ottomans who sought protection using the system of capitulations, including the Armenians, were also received with mistrust by the Ottoman government and public.²⁷⁴

The second reason for the immense economic pressure the Ottoman Empire was under was related to the Powers' economic interests in the Empire.²⁷⁵ The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of imperialist competition in Europe, particularly between the French, the British, the Germans and the Italians who were interested in new potential colonies, especially in Africa. Europe was, therefore, in a secure position for economic expansion and investment of its surplus capital abroad. As the British historian Christopher J. Walker suggests, it is possible that the European investment in the Ottoman Empire was part of a longer term plan 'to keep the Muslim empire

²⁷⁴ Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 89, 91.

²⁷⁵ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 3.

backward and at the economic mercy of Europe'.²⁷⁶ Coincidentally, there was also economic hardship in the Ottoman Empire; when the sources of local bankers, *sarrafs*, were not sufficient anymore, especially in the face of the Crimean War ahead, the Ottoman government had to start borrowing large amounts of money from the Powers in the 1850s. Financed with Western capital, the Imperial Ottoman Bank opened in Istanbul in 1863.²⁷⁷ The loans coming from the British and the French continued to stream into the Empire for another twenty years after the Crimean War, which at that point amounted to a total of £191 million, most of which had been spent rather lavishly. A bankrupt empire was welcomed by the Powers because both the collapse of the Ottomans and the strengthening of it would pose a danger due to the competing interests among the Powers.²⁷⁸

The narrator describes the makeup of the Bank in terms of its foreign capital and administration based on what Kamil Pasha remembers from social events: the bank was controlled by a French central cashier, a British comptroller and a third German official.²⁷⁹ Notably, Walker points out that '[t]he bank was about as Ottoman as a foreign embassy'.²⁸⁰ It is one of the sad occasions of the Ottoman history that the lack of autonomy of the Ottoman Bank was endorsed when the Porte was unable to pay the interest on the loans. With the declaration of bankruptcy, the empire was forced to 'accept a British and French-run Public Debt Administration [*Düyun-u Umumiye*] in 1881'.²⁸¹ Monopolies on tobacco and salt were established, revenues of which would be directly streamed into the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, 'ensur[ing] that

²⁷⁶ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 92.

²⁷⁷ Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 92-3; Christopher Clay, 'The Origins of Modern Banking in the Levant: the Branch Network of the Imperial Ottoman Bank, 1890-1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26 (1994), 589-614 (p. 589).

²⁷⁸ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 90.

²⁷⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 58.

²⁸⁰ Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 92-3.

²⁸¹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 25.

Ottoman revenues went first and foremost to servicing its foreign creditors and only later (if at all) to paying for the military, government bureaucracy, public works, and education systems.²⁸² Walker suggests that ‘Turkey was thereafter reduced to a state of economic vassalage’.²⁸³ At that point in history, the Powers had already ‘extended their own privileges within Ottoman Turkey’ when the Porte realised it was ‘too weak to oppose the powers’.²⁸⁴ The police chief Omar uses humour to point at the fact that the Europeans held the keys to the finances of the Empire when he sees the plain wooden door to the bank’s vault, whose actual keys are held by the three European officials: ‘This explains why the empire is bankrupt [...] We don’t need a treaty to hand our wealth over to our European friends. They can just come here, jiggle the lock, and take what they want’.²⁸⁵

The imperialist attitude of the British is conveyed by the narrator of *The Winter Thief* on a number of occasions. Swyndon, the British comptroller, is described as talking about ‘the best way to hunt tigers’, possibly bragging about his previous colonial experiences in Europe’s now infamous venture, the *scramble for Africa*.²⁸⁶ On another occasion, the British ambassador’s denial of responsibility for the weaponry discovered in a British owned ship is perceived with scepticism by Kamil Pasha, as noted by the narrator:

it was typical of the British to vow support for the Ottoman Empire while undermining it. British ships had delivered Martini rifles to the Iraqi Bedouin by way of Kuwait, ostensibly to protect them against tribal disputes. They had given gifts of guns to tribal sheikhs and the heads of dervish convents around the Arabian Gulf. Now those rifles were trained against the Ottoman Sixth Army.²⁸⁷

In terms of their involvement in the banking system of the Ottomans, Omar does not find the European bank representatives’ attitude trustworthy either. Upon discovering

²⁸² Walker, *Armenia*, p. 94; Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 25.

²⁸³ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 94.

²⁸⁴ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 90.

²⁸⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 51.

²⁸⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 58.

²⁸⁷ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 20.

that Swyndon might have been a collaborator on the theft at the bank, he reflects that '[w]e give the Franks salaries the size of Mount Ararat and still they rob us blind. Europeans are about as trustworthy as weasels in a larder'.²⁸⁸ With the representation of the increasing involvement of foreigners in the financial affairs of the Ottomans, the novel demonstrates that distrust towards ethnic groups also grows for fear of foreign backed ethnic rebellions.

2.2.7. Forging Loyalties: Sharp Knife

Michelle Campos suggests that as a result of the adverse financial developments, 'Ottomans of the late nineteenth century had every reason to literally fear for the continued existence and well-being of their empire.'²⁸⁹ This is because previous experience had demonstrated to the Ottomans how territorial integrity could be fractured by the Powers either 'through direct military operation' or due to unfair treaties imposed upon the empire by the Great Powers.²⁹⁰ Despite having him correctly surmise the British involvement in arms smuggling, Jenny White portrays Kamil Pasha as having reservations as to the likelihood of the involvement of the British in the trafficking of illegal weapons and in plotting against the empire by supporting an ethnic group, providing them with weaponry.²⁹¹ The pasha doubts that the British would be involved in the arming of the insurgent group, because '[i]f the British wanted to arm the Armenians on the Russian border, it would be much easier to send the weapons through Syria'. He reasons that arming Armenians would mean helping the Russians,

²⁸⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 64.

²⁸⁹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 25.

²⁹⁰ The Ottoman territories in North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt) had been lost 'through direct military operation', those in the Balkans (Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Cyprus) were lost 'due to unfair treaties imposed upon the empire by the Great Powers' (Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 25).

²⁹¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 21.

which is what the British are trying to prevent, the Berlin Treaty being an example of this.²⁹²

Kamil Pasha's reservation concerning the possibility of English support for an Armenian insurrection grows as he finds the Henschak symbol on the confiscated crates. The possibility of foreign involvement in the arms smuggling, on the other hand, is firmly verified in the novel by a trusted source, Huseyin Pasha, the sultan's minister for the east, who shares his knowledge with Kamil Pasha, remarking that the Palace is indeed aware of the fact that 'the British are arming terrorists in the provinces'.²⁹³ But even so, believing that the British have a role in the arms smuggling, Huseyin Pasha expresses his surprise at the audacity of the act of sending the shipment to Istanbul, which can be considered a downright act of contravention of the sovereignty of the Empire. His fears are primarily concerning the possibility of an insurgency in the capital: 'This is a city, not a desert sheikhdom. If you start shooting here, before you know it, you'll have a pile of bodies so big it would fill the harbour'.²⁹⁴ He sees the arms smuggling as one of 'British games', as an intervention in internal affairs of the Ottomans. He adds, 'They distribute fuel drop by drop, year after year, thinking no one notices, and then they hand out matches'.²⁹⁵ In view of the hidden political strategies of the British, Huseyin Pasha remarks that 'the British lie in wait under the table for the scraps' alluding to the Russians as one of the drops of fuel the British 'distribute'.²⁹⁶

According to Huseyin Pasha, the minister for the east, however, an immediate threat to the Empire comes from the Russians, because they 'have been trying for centuries to grab a piece of the empire'. The minister says that '[t]hey took Artvin ten years ago, and

²⁹² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 27.

²⁹³ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 25, 330.

²⁹⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 25-6.

²⁹⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 26.

²⁹⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 27.

now we have the border right up to our ass’, referring to the war of 1877-78.²⁹⁷ Huseyin Pasha, who is painted as a vulgar character in that he swears and aspires to acquire European art-works participating in European-style ‘modernity’ (‘Kamil thought the ropes of gilded plaster and oil paintings of fruit and dead pheasants an abomination of taste’), believes that ‘the Russians are trying to extend their reach [...]. They think they can get another arm of the empire, and the Armenians will get a finger in return’.²⁹⁸ Huseyin Pasha speaks for the Palace, disclosing its policies in reaction to the troubled situation in the east, and it is evident from the pasha’s contention that, alarmed by the immediate threat from Russians, the palace plans a reprisal. One of the measures taken by the Porte against the Russian threat is the employment of the Kurds to counteract the Armenian plot. In Huseyin’s words,

‘Sultan Abdulhamid suspects the Armenians of colluding with Russia. There are rumors of something going on in the Kachkar Mountains. Foreigners have been seen there, agitating the locals. They’ll be arming the villagers next. The Kurdish irregulars will put an end to it, one way or another’.²⁹⁹

Irregular corps, or the Hamidiye, as they were named after the Sultan himself when the corps was established in 1891, were recruits of Sunni Kurdish and Turkmen cavalries who have been armed and placed in the service of the Empire under the protective shield of pan-Islamic policies. Hamidiye troops served the purpose of supporting Pan-Islamic policies under the leadership of the Sultan as Caliphate and promoted loyalty to the Ottoman sultan, acting in a combined effort to resist European influence, especially on non-Muslims who sought autonomy.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 27.

²⁹⁸ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 84; White, *Winter Thief*, p. 27.

²⁹⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 26.

³⁰⁰ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 134.

Pan-Islamic policies of Abdülhamid II not only aimed at suppressing Armenian revolts, but also preventing the recurrence of Kurdish revolts.³⁰¹ In his book *A Modern History of the Kurds*, David McDowall explains that the origins of the Kurds have been obscured and mythologised for political reasons by Kurdish nation builders in order to profess an ancient nature and background to their community. Nation-building ethos includes 'the mountain' as a geographical denominator which, according to the legend, protected the Kurdish tribes from 'Zahhak, a child-eating giant', and the kinship of Kurds to the Prophets Solomon or Muhammad, placing the Kurdish people's kinship within a religious foundation.³⁰² In terms of population, McDowall also surmises that the Kurds were mostly Indo-European tribes who first arrived in the modern day Iran in the middle of the second millennium BCE and from there they were slowly scattered in the region, including in Mesopotamia and southeastern Anatolia.³⁰³ During the reign of Yavuz Sultan Selim (Selim the Grim as he is generally known in Western literature), Kurdish people in the Ottoman Empire were resettled alongside the frontiers with Persia in order to be employed as militia to defend the Ottoman Empire in return for an exemption from taxation.³⁰⁴ In the nineteenth century, Kurds began periodically to revolt against the Porte.³⁰⁵

While by the nineteenth century, the Kurds and Armenians had completely mixed in Eastern Anatolia, by the end of the nineteenth century the Kurdish tribes had become a threat to both Armenians and non-tribal Kurds in the region.³⁰⁶ In line with the Pan-

³⁰¹ Christopher Walker informs that 'the Kurds had been in revolt against the Porte in 1830, in the early 1840s, during the Crimean war, in the late 1870s and in 1880s under Sheikh Ubaydullah'. In view of these developments and in order not to allow another Kurdish rebellion, Walker suggests that, 'the sultan armed the Kurds, and enrolled them into cavalry regiments, which he named Hamidiye, after himself' (Walker, *Armenia*, p. 134).

³⁰² David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), p. 4.

³⁰³ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 8.

³⁰⁴ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 86.

³⁰⁵ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 134.

³⁰⁶ Walker, *Armenia*, pp. 95, 123.

Islamist policies of the Sultan, the use of Kurds against Armenians also comes as a result of the desire of the Sultan to prevent the Kurds from revolting.³⁰⁷ The armed ‘irregular Kurdish regiments’ are described by the narrator from Kamil Pasha’s viewpoint as ‘tribal militias given the distinction of official rank by the state in order to keep them from rebelling against it. But they were paid little and lived off plunder’.³⁰⁸ Huseyin Pasha acknowledges the Porte’s plans to use the Kurdish tribes against Armenians with the metaphor of the knife, which can be understood as part of an overall pan-Islamist strategy: ‘We don’t want the Kurdish tribes civilized [...] [a]t least one of our knives has to remain sharp’.³⁰⁹ Kamil Pasha questions the sustainability of the policy of violence and ethnic favouritism. Huseyin Pasha’s comment, ‘[t]he Kurdish irregulars will put an end to it, one way or another’, receives reaction from both Kamil Pasha and his sister Feride.³¹⁰

Inferring from Huseyin Pasha’s reference that the Porte was indeed planning to deploy the Kurdish irregulars who were ‘known for their brutality’ to solve the problem of Armenian disloyalty, both Feride and Kamil explicitly argue that killing Armenians won’t make them ‘loyal’.³¹¹ They claim that the real reason for their revolt could indeed be because of ‘the sultan’s heavy-handedness’.³¹² While Huseyin Pasha thinks that only money can make them loyal, by way of referring to the bankruptcy of the empire, he says this is not an option, so the only alternative left to make them loyal is to use force.³¹³ Kamil Pasha, on the other hand, believes that Armenians are loyal anyway, while Feride suggests that the only way to make them loyal is to show them that they

³⁰⁷ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 134.

³⁰⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 311.

³⁰⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 27.

³¹⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 26.

³¹¹ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 26-7.

³¹² White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 26-7.

³¹³ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 27.

are ‘respected and safe and that their children have a future’.³¹⁴ Through the dialogues in which Huseyin Pasha and Kamil Pasha contradict each other as to the Porte’s treatment of the ethnically diverse populations, Jenny White suggests a differentiation and division within the ranks of the Ottoman core – similar to the way differences in opinion and philosophy within the Armenian community as has been discussed earlier in this section.

In addition to the use of Kurds against Armenian insurrection, the second measure taken by the palace against the Russian threat, according to Huseyin Pasha, is the extensive employment of the secret police for domestic matters. The mistrust of the Sultan for his subjects can be traced to the dissolution of the parliament in 1878. The war with Russia had been viewed as an excuse by Sultan Abdülhamid II to annul the 1876 Constitution two years after its promulgation, although it was more likely a measure he took in order to protect his sovereign status as the head of the state.³¹⁵ The dissolution of the parliament, however, is likely to have caused mistrust among the supporters of the parliamentary monarchy. Feroz Ahmad points out that the parliament had already raised the issues of ‘identity and loyalty’ of the Ottoman subjects to the Empire even when the first constitution was in force. The Tabiiyet Kanunu (nationality or citizenship law) of 1869 had failed to create a new Ottoman identity through the notions of citizenship by promoting a new culture of Ottomanism.³¹⁶ According to Ahmad, ‘[m]ost non-Muslims continued to identify with their millets rather than with the dynasty’.³¹⁷

After the abolition of the constitution and as a result of further degeneration of infrastructure and failure to keep promises of progressive reform in the empire,

³¹⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 27.

³¹⁵ Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2014), p. 5.

³¹⁶ Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, pp. 3-5.

³¹⁷ Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, p. 5.

dissatisfaction with the absolutism of the sultan widened. As a result, an opposition was formed, which ‘argued that only by restoring the constitution, ending corruption, and introducing reform could the empire be saved’.³¹⁸ A dissident group with the name of CUP, the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Fırkası in Turkish), also known as the Young Turks, was created in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Parliament in 1889, with the aim of implementing reforms and of saving the empire from further collapse. The political dissidence and discontent widened at the beginning of the twentieth century, and a consensus was achieved between CUP and the other nationally disposed organisations such as the Hunchaks (est. 1887) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) (est. 1890), which had also been formed as part of a reactionary wave of anti-absolutism. They all aimed at curbing the powers of the sultan (in the case of Armenians also partially of the Czar in Russia).³¹⁹ In his book in which he views the Russian Empire from a comparative perspective, Dominic Lieven argues that

[o]nly in Abdulhamid's realm [...] did senior officials in other realms conspire with émigré revolutionaries to depose their own sovereign. Every empire feared decline, the loss of territory, the inability to compete with foreign powers, and consequent loss of control over ethnic minorities within the empire. Nowhere had this process gone so far among European empires as in the Ottoman case.³²⁰

Alongside the opposition from its own institutions to the autocratic rule of the Sultan, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Sultan also feared ‘continued European meddling in Ottoman affairs’ and subversive movements within his realm, both of which had become chronic.³²¹ As a result, any suspicion of separatist action paved the way for reactionist practices and extreme force and action by the Sultan.³²² The Sultan’s

³¹⁸ Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, p. 6.

³¹⁹ Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, p. 6.

³²⁰ Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (2000; New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002), p. 155.

³²¹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 25.

³²² Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 25.

tight grip on his domains and his efforts to forge loyalty came along in ways other than military intervention. In *The Winter Thief*, the seemingly unlimited resources of the secret police chief, the Akrep commander, Vahid, represents such an investment - in violent revenge upon people who are not loyal - that indeed holds the Porte hostage. Before moving onto the Sultan's secret police, first, the image of the Sultan in *The Winter Thief* will be examined.

2.2.8. The Sultan's Gambit?

The Sultan Abdülhamid's employment of secret police as a result of his growing paranoia is a repeated theme in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction. Barry Unsworth's *Pascali's Island* is an important example in this genre, presenting the extent of the web of spies by means of the main character seeking Sultan Abdülhamid's attention through his use of an intimate tone in his letters -- because of the high number of spies just like him!³²³ Information gathering had been an Ottoman state apparatus for centuries, at the least as a practice which endured from the Seljuks. In the Ottoman Empire, Janissaries, whose 'agents were sent out in plain clothes to patrol the markets, bazaars, coffeehouses, and taverns of Istanbul and other major cities', were an important source of domestic intelligence alongside the informers employed by local Ottoman authorities.³²⁴ Even though secret police service was founded during Sultan Abdülmecid reign (r. 1839–61) based on the advice of the English ambassador Stratford Canning, it was in 1913 that the first professional Ottoman intelligence service, the Teşkilat-i Mahsusa (Special Organisation), was established by the members of the Committee of the Union and Progress.³²⁵

³²³ Barry Unsworth, *Pascali's Island* (London: Penguin, 1988). The novel's first 1980 publication was titled *The Idol Hunter*.

³²⁴ Gábor Ágoston, 'Intelligence', in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. by Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters (New York: Facts on File, Infobase Publishing, 2009), pp. 276-278 (p. 276).

³²⁵ Ágoston, 'Intelligence', p. 278.

More than any other sultan, Sultan Abdülhamid II, in Gábor Ágoston's words, 'placed great emphasis on information and intelligence'.³²⁶ Huseyin Pasha in *The Winter Thief*, explaining 'the reaction in the palace to the weapons' and the Sultan's infatuation with the secret service, tells Kamil Pasha:

'Our great padishah has been convinced by his advisers that other nations have riddled us with spies like mold in a loaf of bread and that he needs a secret service to counter their influence. For now, the sultan has set up a new security force called Akrep as a branch of the secret police, but mark my words, Akrep is the first step in establishing a Teshkilati Mahsusa, a vast secret service like the one the British have. [...] Akrep is going to ferret out these revolutionary cells, unlike the secret police who just spy on everybody and write reports. Akrep is going to go after these people, the Armenians, the Greeks, the socialists, and all their foreign collaborators.'³²⁷

The Sultan Abdülhamid's lack of trust of both foreigners and his own subjects appears as a typical theme authors of fiction engage with. In *The Winter Thief*, the author conceives Akrep as a precedent to the notorious organisation Teshkilati Mahsusa, which has been accused, particularly by Armenians and Greeks, of 'committing atrocities and mass killings'.³²⁸ The sultan is described in the novel as being 'distrustful of his own countrymen' as well as being afraid that the British and Russians would 'send troops into the heart of the empire on the pretext of protecting the minorities'.³²⁹ Daniel Allen Butler explains how financial problems had been a particular problem throughout the Sultan's reign, cascading into security concerns:

Foreigners had become a particular problem, for they were in many ways unravelling the fabric of the empire. By the time Abdul-Hamid assumed the throne, the 'concessions' being made to the European powers were literally that: the Turks were conceding their rights and sovereignty to the Westerners.³³⁰

In *The Winter Thief*, an attack at the Ottoman Bank shortly after the confiscation of weaponry at the port is regarded as substantially unsettling for the Sultan, enough to

³²⁶ Ágoston, 'Intelligence', p.278.

³²⁷ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 28.

³²⁸ Ágoston, 'Intelligence', p. 278.

³²⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 168, 336.

³³⁰ Daniel Allen Butler, *Shadow of the Sultan's Realm: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011), p. 23.

have him take harsh measures.³³¹ The narrator of *The Winter Thief* describes the sultan as ‘[a]n enlightened monarch’, who ‘nevertheless jealously guarded his fears and delusions and would visit them whenever the mood took him. This, all his subjects knew, made him unpredictable and even dangerous’.³³²

Late nineteenth century anxieties across the empire, which were projected because of the financial and political stalemate, lead to the creation of the Sultan Abdülhamid’s image as waging a silent warfare among citizens and foreigners in popular fiction. Such an amalgam of political conflict and personal crisis finds voice in Barry Unsworth’s *The Rage of the Vulture* (1982), in which the protagonist Robert Markham confronts Miss Munro, an English visitor in Istanbul, who wants to form her own opinion about Ottomans rather than relying on other people’s observations, by saying that she won’t be able to find any Turks who would be willing to talk to a foreigner because of the widespread system of espionage and incrimination:

‘None of them [Turks] would dare to come to the house of a foreigner. Once on the Sultan’s list you never get off it. Men disappear without trace in this city, this *romantic* city. Sometimes hours after being reported, sometimes years. This is a police state, Miss Munro, run by a man who has been insane for a long time’.³³³

In Jenny White’s novels, the sultan has a rather different image from those in earlier novels of this genre, such as *The Rage of the Vulture*, which describe the sultan as ‘insane’. In White’s work, the sultan is portrayed as yearning to make sensible decisions regarding his realm and his subjects – albeit he is also illustrated as sincerely concerned with forging loyalties of his subjects and maintaining a good image in the European press. The Sultan is, most importantly, represented as the protector of the empire and its citizens despite those who have their own separate agendas.

³³¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 32.

³³² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 176.

³³³ Barry Unsworth, *The Rage of the Vulture* (1982; London: Penguin, 1991), p. 18.

An instance in the novel specifically elucidates the Sultan's well-disposed demeanour when Kamil Pasha appears in the presence of the sultan, which the pasha later on recounts to Yorg Pasha: 'Through Vizier Köraslan, Vahid has convinced the sultan that the commune is a threat to the empire and that the Armenians are scheming with the Russians to take the Choruh Valley'.³³⁴ In this exchange Kamil Pasha refers to, the Sultan is portrayed by the narrator as relatively moderate and well-meaning regarding the Armenian settlement in Erzurum, which might even be called sympathetic, but for the manipulation of the head of the Sultan's secret intelligence service, Akrep. Upon Kamil Pasha's claim that the commune in Choruh Valley is not a revolutionarist group, but 'a social experiment, a community where the members share the labor and profit equally', the sultan assigns Kamil Pasha to investigate the situation before deciding whether to send his irregular troops to surpress a possible Armenian insurgency³³⁵:

'I had been under the impression that this was a revolutionary movement that required a military response, but if indeed this is a peaceful valley and the socialists are not pawns of the Russians, as my advisers have told me, then I would be committing an unforgivable crime. [...] It is haram to spill innocent blood, and may Allah preserve me from it.'³³⁶

Despite the unfavourableness of Sultan Abdülhamid II's image in numerous accounts, which consider him 'insane' or 'paranoid', White's approach is in favour of portraying the Sultan as reasonably moderate, in that, the Sultan as a patriarch is represented as able, by degrees, to 'control' the fate of the Empire.³³⁷

In his observation of the methods of legitimation of Sultan Abdülhamid II's rule in the absence of a parliament, Selim Deringil notes in his *The Well-Protected Domains* that

A ruler like Abdülhamid II, who laboured under the stigma of the 'Terrible Turk' or the 'Red Sultan', while trying to pose as a modern monarch, suffered the self-

³³⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 229.

³³⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 177-8.

³³⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 178.

³³⁷ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, pp. 3-4.

imposed handicap of his virtually complete isolation from his own people and the outside world.³³⁸

In the absence of a democratising and balancing element such as Parliament, Deringil observes the narrowness of the circle of people who fed into the Sultan's perception of the world around him:

Even as autocratic a sultan as Abdülhamid II, who was in effect the last real sultan of the empire, had to rely on a staff who fed him information, advised him, indeed influenced him. So the so-called 'Red Sultan' or 'Oriental Despot' of legend, who rarely left his palace, and never left his capital, depended on these men [...].³³⁹

An example that shows that the sultan is surrounded by manipulative staff members is observed through the Vizier Köraslan's selectiveness of the foreign press he chooses to show to the Sultan. While *The Times* of London is said to have had a headline as 'Ottomans Slaughter Armenians in East', Vizier Köraslan hides this news from the sultan by calling them 'lies [...] fabricated by foreigners'.³⁴⁰ However, Huseyin Pasha and Yorg Pasha, who know about the sensitivity of the Sultan regarding his image in foreign press, use this headline to plead for not dispatching the Sultan's soldiers to the Choruh Valley. The pair's presentation of the headlines to the Sultan exposes the fact that Vizier Köraslan withholds valuable and course-changing information from the Sultan. Another example of clear manipulation of the Sultan by his advisers is the moment Vizier Köraslan tells the Sultan about the connection of the Sultan's failed assassin with the socialist Henschak organisation. The untrusting sultan, who questions the scanty evidence concerning the identity of the assassin and the unlikely alliance between imperial Russia and the Henschaks, since 'the socialists are trying to undermine the czar', is easily convinced by Vizier Köraslan despite the vizier's weak conviction

³³⁸ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, pp. 17-8.

³³⁹ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 10.

³⁴⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 335.

about the reliability of Akrep and decides to send his soldiers to the Choruh Valley because of the so-called assault on his life.³⁴¹

The vizier is not entirely trustful of the intelligence gathered and provided by Vahid, yet he remains firm in his defence of Akrep's operations because of his fear that Vahid 'could destroy his family' with the evidence he has on the vizier's son's murder of his friend.³⁴² Vahid as an antagonist, and nemesis of Kamil Pasha, is represented as a blackmailer, abuser of women, and general villain who achieves his privileged position by covering a murder committed by Vizier Kōraslan's son.³⁴³ In order to marry the girl he likes, Rhea, whom Vahid discovers to be at the tavern next to the Ottoman Bank when the explosion takes place, he uses methods of intimidation to feed into her father's fear by burning down '[o]ne of the father's warehouses' and 'ruining a season's production'.³⁴⁴ At the basement of the Akrep headquarters, during his first encounter with Vera, he hits Vera in the face, and later on Vahid's two men make Vera take her clothes off and touch her.³⁴⁵ In his comparative study of the Russian Empire, Dominic Lieven claims that '[o]nly in Abdulhamid's realm [...] did the monarch set up a large semi-private secret police whose boss was a psychopath who used his home for purposes of torture and rape'.³⁴⁶ The Akrep commander Vahid is undoubtedly modelled on this and similar antagonistic descriptions of the secret service agents.

2.2.9. Carte Blanche to the Sultan's Agents

In his article published in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, David Seed remarks on the 'proximity of the spy and detective genres' in the sense that both prioritize detection

³⁴¹ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 290-1.

³⁴² White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 67-8.

³⁴³ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 67-8.

³⁴⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 68-9.

³⁴⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 49, 88.

³⁴⁶ Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*, p. 155.

and investigation, although detectives are hardly ever identified as spies.³⁴⁷ Even though spy novels were initially set to defend ‘the rightness of the agent’s cause and the security of the nation’, such blend of patriotism soon developed into anti-hero narratives that came as an alternative to the spies taking the centre stage. According to Seed, Somerset Maugham’s own professional experiences had an important role to play in creating a move away from the description of spies with enviable tenacity and appealing careers. As Seed remarks, the publication of Maugham’s *Ashenden or, The British Agent* (1928), with the first anti-hero character, Ashenden, came as a result of the author’s concern for the verisimilitude in the representation of ‘the nature of the agent’s daily experience’. With the secret service having emerged as an ‘institution’, the minimal access to information, or the lack of it, allowed more realist, or perhaps cynical, descriptions of spies as anti-heroes in the British scene of crime fiction.³⁴⁸ David Seed agrees that spy stories, like detective fiction, involve ‘detection’, with the additional characteristic of ‘disguise’.³⁴⁹ Like detective fiction, Seed argues, the spy narrative customarily ‘progresses from apparently disparate fragments of information towards a more complete account of action’, allowing the reader to construct a narrative based on their acts of investigation.³⁵⁰

In *The Winter Thief*, the detective work is carried out primarily by Kamil Pasha, the protagonist, and also by Vahid, the antagonist, and his organisation, although not very successfully. Through Vahid’s interrogation of Vera and the narrative of Vera’s stream of consciousness during and following these encounters, the reader gets an insight into the world of Vera – motivations, dreams, fears, doubts and disappointments of a

³⁴⁷ Seed, ‘Crime and the Spy Genre’, p. 233.

³⁴⁸ Seed, ‘Crime and the Spy Genre’, p. 238.

³⁴⁹ David Seed, ‘Crime and the Spy Genre’, in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 233-244 (p. 235).

³⁵⁰ Seed, ‘Crime and the Spy Genre’, p. 233, 235.

revolutionist. Vahid's team also trace Huseyin Pasha because of his relationship with Rhea, the girl Vahid wanted to marry; however, unlike what Vahid *assumes*, Huseyin Pasha doesn't turn out to have a romantic relationship with Rhea, the daughter of a wine-seller. The narrator remarks on Vahid's concern regarding 'what might happen if Vizier Köraslan or Sultan Abdülhamid discovered that he had been using Akrep resources in a personal vendetta against one of the empire's most highly placed and respected citizens', that is, his adversaries Huseyin and Kamil Pashas.³⁵¹ Vahid also traces the commune to the Choruh Valley to prove to the Sultan the threat they pose for the Empire. Vahid represents what Campos describes as 'the sultan's spies, avaricious men seeking their own promotion rather than the national good'.³⁵² As a public servant who appropriates public resources for personal use and punishes people for crimes they didn't commit, Vahid clearly enacts the role of a villain in the novel. Yet as an antagonist for Kamil Pasha, he also symbolises the dark side of detection and detective work, and he does that in a more anti-patriotic manner than as an anti-hero type. Vera's abduction by the secret police, the death of Gabriel's driver Abel by torture, and the covering up of the murder of Gabriel's sister Sosi are examples of the ambitious and dedicated, but also scrupulous detective at work. Additionally, these acts of detection are perverted for personal ends rather than social good.³⁵³

Vahid appears as the adversary of Kamil Pasha, who is distrustful of the chief of secret police and is aware of his capacity for misconduct and torture.³⁵⁴ At every step in his investigation of the weaponry smuggling and the Ottoman Bank explosion, Kamil Pasha aims to prevent more wrongful accusations and bloodshed from taking place even at

³⁵¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 206.

³⁵² Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 40.

³⁵³ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 117.

³⁵⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 154-5.

risk to his own career and safety. When he appears in the presence of the Sultan, Vizier Kōraslan nominates Kamil Pasha, who claims the formation in the Choruh Valley to be ‘[a] group of young people [who] has begun an experimental farm’, to go to Choruh Valley and investigate the purpose of the people gathering near Ispir.³⁵⁵ After leaving the Palace, Kamil Pasha ‘wonder[s] at his own logic’ for undertaking the responsibility ‘to produce proof of the commune’s innocence and preserve the valley from harm’.³⁵⁶ Despite that, Kamil Pasha feels ‘satisfied that he had at least postponed an attack on the valley and the commune, even at the price of his having to make the journey east himself’.³⁵⁷ By the same token, Kamil Pasha finds himself ‘horrified and amazed at Vahid’s ambition and insensitivity to human life and honor’, as the narrator puts it.³⁵⁸ The Pasha even considers killing Vahid at one of his encounters with him believing that ‘by using the knife in his boot now, he would save countless lives’ because he would prevent him taking the Sultan’s irregular troops to Erzurum.³⁵⁹ Such details function to establish the moral superiority of Kamil Pasha to Vahid since in the end ‘[i]t took all his moral strength not to do it. No man’s death is unaccountable, he told himself firmly’.³⁶⁰ This distinction between Kamil Pasha and Vahid is allegorised by Yorg Pasha through spiders and scorpions, that is *akreps*. Yorg Pasha first talks about spiders: ‘The male of a certain species of spider allows himself to be devoured by the female after they’ve mated [...] It’s his final, magisterial investment in the success of his offspring’.³⁶¹ The pasha finds this act ‘heroic’, since it demonstrates that ‘[t]he Cause is always greater than individual lives’.³⁶² As opposed to the spider, *akrep* is represented as anti-heroic:

³⁵⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 177.

³⁵⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 180.

³⁵⁷ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 180.

³⁵⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 167.

³⁵⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 166.

³⁶⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 166.

³⁶¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 148.

³⁶² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 148.

‘Unlike our selfless spider, the scorpion paralyzes its prey with venom’.³⁶³ Yorg Pasha describes Vahid, the commander of Akrep as ‘the sultan’s very own poisonous creature’, who ‘wants people to be in his power’.³⁶⁴ While Kamil Pasha fears that the Sultan may be giving Akrep carte blanche, Huseyin Pasha concurs in Kamil Pasha’s concerns involving the claim that Vahid ‘wants people to be in his power. His is the voice whispering in the sultan’s ear’.³⁶⁵ Unsatisfied by the unfettered powers of Akrep, Kamil Pasha is ‘alarmed’ by the possibility of ‘the formation of a new security network [Teshkilati Mahsusa] reporting directly to the sultan’.³⁶⁶

Kamil Pasha’s reaction to the extensive powers of Akrep can be seen as a display of the author’s disapproval of Sultan Abdülhamid’s absolutism and can give a hint about the abuses created within a system based on consolidated power and unilateral decision-making. Within this context, while in Jason Goodwin’s novels criticism falls upon Sultan Mahmud’s reliance on the sweeping mandatory modernisation project which aims to ward off the Empire’s vulnerabilities, Jenny White’s novel sheds light on Sultan Abdülhamid’s unilateral management of domestic and external threats and the violent containment of these threats. While in the former, the Sultan, Mahmud II, is observed to be actively involved in his efforts to reverse the disintegration of the Empire, the latter Sultan, Abdülhamid II, is observed as merely ‘managing’ situations that might be subversive. While Mahmud II attempts to make changes to avoid an international encroachment, Abdülhamid’s perspective is only related to continuing to maintain the status quo for the same end.

³⁶³ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 148.

³⁶⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 148.

³⁶⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 148.

³⁶⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 28.

Within this context, the modernisation of the army during Mahmud's time can be contrasted to Abdülhamid's creation of the Hamidiye, illustrating the differences between the diverging perspectives of Goodwin and White on the dissolution of the empire. While Goodwin contests the pace and the suitability of Western modernisation through a story of premature advent of reforms, White similarly criticises the Sultan's reign, but in her case, she suggests that, despite the adequacy of technical skills and the magnitude of the state's resources, although not necessarily their sufficiency, these skills and resources are not mobilised in the most productive way. In other words, in White's vision of the empire, the Sultan is criticised for being content with the reproduction and the redistribution of his empire's resources at high costs rather than employing new and effective methods of negotiation in order to maximise their benefit. Essentially, in *The Winter Thief*, Sultan Abdülhamid is envisaged as merely managing adverse situations.

Selim Deringil, by pinpointing the 'management' aspect in Sultan Abdülhamid's reign, places stress on the Porte's endeavour to survive the crises of the period:

[J]ust as the state was permeating levels of society it had never reached before, making unprecedented demands on its people, it created new strains on society, leading to what Jürgen Habermas has called a 'legitimacy crisis' or 'legitimation deficit'. Nor was this legitimacy crisis confined to the relationship of the Ottoman centre with its own society. In the international arena also, the Ottomans found themselves increasingly obliged to assert and reassert their legitimate right to existence as a recognized member of the Concert of Europe, as recognized after the Treaty of Paris which ended the Crimean War in 1856. In a context of military weakness, diplomacy acquired vital importance, as did the process I shall call 'fine tuning' as regards to the population of the empire. Fine tuning involved the meticulous inculcation, indoctrination, enticing, frightening, flattering, forbidding, permitting, punishing or rewarding [...]. I would even venture to say that fine tuning is more the characteristic of a state which is constantly on the defensive. Not necessarily humane and anodine, it can involve brute force and bloodshed, but only as a last resort.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, pp. 9-10.

Jenny White's *The Winter Thief* is an exquisite illustration of Selim Deringil's thesis in *The Well-Protected Domains* as it pertains to the Sultan. Especially in terms of the Sultan's use of 'brute force', White is particularly careful to portray Sultan Abdülhamid, in the beginning, as withholding his troops from intervening in the commune in the Kachkar Mountains and being reasonable about his judgement regarding the intentions of the commune until an attempt is made on his life, supposedly by a member of the Henchak organisation.³⁶⁸ Even if he questions the reliability of the information his vizier gives to him, the Sultan orders the Hamidiye corps to take control of the area. The administration does not deal with the problems themselves, but attempts to contain the consequences of them through image management. Kamil Pasha, on the other hand, gives an effectively different portrait of the Ottoman 'management' of crises, a topic discussed below. A majority of state officials, unlike Kamil Pasha, are viewed as taking shortcuts rather than dealing with the root causes of the problems. In demonstrating the troubles generated by such civil servants, Carter Vaughn Findley complains that

[t]he interference of the palace secretaries and spies, coupled with the way the sultan sought to dominate and use new organizational and procedural systems, did a lot to project the traditional repression of bureaucratic initiative into a new era and, in general, to hamper efforts at more effective administration.³⁶⁹

This list includes the Vizier, the head of secret police and even Huseyin Pasha in *The Winter Thief*.

Any voice of objection to a government on the defensive and any such movement may be viewed as a personal attack on the ruler, particularly if an existential crisis might be in question for the state or the office. Spy narratives of this period are especially popular

³⁶⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 290-1.

³⁶⁹ Carter Vaughn Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 271.

because they are seen as symptomatic of a whole system of rule living out its last days. Spies frequently figure in fictional narratives set during Sultan Abdülhamid's reign because they signify such fear -- of imperilled systems, of dissolving monarchical power -- and in turn, they evoke the fear the Sultan's agents inculcate in the Sultan's subjects. In Ágoston's formulation, this situation is particularly 'legendary' considering the rumours claiming that the Sultan Abdülhamid 'paid one half of his people to spy on the other half', which discloses a dark aspect of Sultan Abdülhamid's network of spies.³⁷⁰ In view of this, early representations of spies also revealed the malicious side of the spy system, which is directly associated with the palace policy and protocols. For example, Robert Markham in *The Rage of the Vulture* tells his wife that '[a]n accredited agent of the Palace will always be believed, if it is his word against those he accuses. People will pay to avoid being accused. That's why the spy system is so vicious'.³⁷¹

White employs the spy narrative in a more nuanced way than these other writers of Ottoman detective fiction who, in their stories, engage in a trenchant vilification of the sultan's spies. Like most of these writers, in an effort to represent the systemic defects and weaknesses of the Ottoman administration, White offers an investigation into the fears of individuals from the secret police, such as the Armenian publisher's rejection of publishing *The Communist Manifesto*. In addition to reinforcing the narrative of the climate of fear, White also ascribes very human emotions to her ill-disposed spy character. The head of Akrep feels contempt for the wealth of Yorg Pasha, for his having the privilege of having the drive to his house 'somehow clean of snow when the city was suffocating in it'.³⁷² Vahid also feels betrayed when he finds Rhea among the

³⁷⁰ Ágoston, 'Intelligence', p.278.

³⁷¹ Unsworth, *Rage of the Vulture*, p. 38.

³⁷² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 127.

victims after the fire at the taverna.³⁷³ The author offers a justification for these extreme emotions in Yorg Pasha's voice, unveiling Vahid's past to the reader. The pasha, in his confrontation with Vahid, tells him a story involving a child whose father loved his first son, born of his Greek mistress, and 'cared nothing for' his second son and his mother. The Pasha finishes his story by asking Vahid, 'When he [the father] died he left no inheritance but bitterness and loss. What do you think happened to that boy, the second son? What could ever make him whole?'³⁷⁴ Not knowing how Yorg Pasha knows his story, Vahid gets angry.

Antipathetic depictions of spies, such as that of Dennis Wheatley's early Republican insubordinate spy, the *Eunuch of Stamboul*, generally don't provide personalised accounts of the conditions that turn the chief of secret police into who he has become – apart from the political cause to restore the empire.³⁷⁵ In *The Winter Thief*, White sets out to account for the hatred Vahid feels towards the privileged, and the reader witnesses Vahid's quest for vengeance turning into an over-extension of his duties. Through Vahid, White explores the correlation between the power given to a secret service under hostile conditions and its abuse. In the meantime, the supporters of this system, people like Huseyin Pasha and the Vizier Köraslan, who trust the unchecked powers of Akrep, i.e. scorpion, become prey to it. At the end of the novel, Vizier Köraslan confesses to Vahid his regret for ever trusting him:

'I should never have gone along with your stupid scheme. You told me the troops would wipe out a small group of socialists that no one cared about. Instead they ran loose and massacred entire villages that had nothing to do with the Henchak revolt you sold me. Now I know why you disappeared. You went to lead them yourself, and undoubtedly engage in more of your unpleasant digressions'.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 33.

³⁷⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 130-1.

³⁷⁵ Dennis Wheatley, *The Eunuch of Stamboul* (London: Arrow Books, 1935; repr. 1975).

³⁷⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 382.

By pinpointing the internal politics and the systemic faults and by giving a personalised account of the vicious head of the secret police, the author essentially demystifies the Sultan's web of spies and demonstrates the little ways the Sultan's system of loyalty creates its own rifts.

2.2.10. The Conscience of the Empire: Kamil Pasha's Plight of Justice

With the abolition of the first Ottoman parliament, Meclis-i Mebusan, in 1878, more than a little over a year after it had been inaugurated, the end of the nineteenth century witnesses Sultan Abdülhamid's promotion of a culture of loyalty to his person.

Hanioğlu explains that this spirit of absolute loyalty to the Sultan was irreconcilable with the spirit of the *Tanzimat* era (1839-1876):

The Hamidian regime reinstated an old Ottoman emphasis on personal loyalty. Whereas officialdom in the Tanzimat era had been bound by loyalty to the state, the bureaucrats of the Hamidian epoch owed their allegiance to their sovereign. The sultan viewed loyalty as an indispensable qualification for employment in the civil service.³⁷⁷

A system of personal loyalty can promote a practice of competition among bureaucrats to take their place among the sultan's favoured officials. Such a practice would be unavoidably detrimental to the unity of the state because it undermines the chances of establishing equal and fair opportunities for its people. In view of this, White offers a reassuring ending in her novel, with Vahid punished for his schemes, intimidation and making secret deals in order to be promoted as the head of the secret police. At the end, the resentful Vahid accuses the Vizier of failing to help him get the promotion he expected: 'You said you'd increase my influence with the sultan, and instead now he suspects me. You were going to sideline Kamil Pasha, and now he's a hero'.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Hanioğlu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 125.

³⁷⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 383.

In turn, Kamil Pasha wins the commendation of the Sultan, feeling ‘only a slight twinge of guilt at lying to the sultan’ about not being able to recover the stolen gold from the bank.³⁷⁹ When Kamil Pasha and a couple hundred refugees from the Kachkar Mountains arrive in Trabzon, the governor doesn’t want to use the resources of the city administration because the government won’t authorise him ‘to pay a kurush’ for ‘rebels’.³⁸⁰ In order to recruit the governor’s help, Kamil has to use the stolen gold from the bank, and ‘[w]ith some shame, but seeing no other solution, he let[s] the town think it was his personal fortune’.³⁸¹ Vizier Köraslan, being aware of the importance of the image of the Ottomans abroad, and despite his personal hostility towards Kamil Pasha, sends a photographer to Trabzon in order to administer the failure of Vahid’s operation in the Choruh Valley. The vizier tells Vahid that:

‘The Franks are looking for any excuse to invade. By allowing such madness, you gave them the pretext to come in and help the embattled Armenians. If Kamil Pasha hadn’t stepped in to save the refugees and if I hadn’t sent reporters and photographers east to make sure the world knew about it, it could have been a disaster. I was a fool to trust you.’³⁸²

The photos of the refugee relief unintentionally allow Kamil Pasha to gain fame after the news of his generosity makes the headlines of foreign newspapers with the titles of ‘Pasha Pays for Armenian Relief’ and ‘Ottoman Lord Rescues Armenians’.³⁸³

White delivers this detail in her novel, because in Ágoston’s words, ‘Abdülhamid was known for his keen interest in news regarding world affairs.’³⁸⁴ The fact that the photographer was sent to Trabzon by Vizier Köraslan and that the photos were used in headlines for stories of Kamil Pasha’s bravery in *The Times of London* and *New York Tribune*, points to the fact that it was through the Vizier’s efforts that the news of the

³⁷⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 374.

³⁸⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 362.

³⁸¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 364.

³⁸² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 382.

³⁸³ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 374.

³⁸⁴ Ágoston, ‘Intelligence’, p. 278.

Pasha's heroism was published in foreign newspapers. An important argument in Deringil's *The Well-Protected Domains* is that in order to achieve a balance of power in their foreign affairs, the Ottomans had continuously to reassert their self-image:

As their world shrank around them, the Ottomans realized that a vital aspect of survival was the projection of a positive image abroad. In a world where there was increasingly less space for the 'unspeakable Turk', in Gladstonian parlance, this was more often than not a question of damage control as Ottoman statesmen tried desperately to make the case that they were a Great Power recognized by the Treaty of Paris of 1856, with a legitimate right to exist. Their effort centred around two major areas. First was the attempt to contain the damage done by incessant pejorative publications in the international media, and in other forums such as the theatre, which sought to project the Ottoman state as a degenerate nest of blood-thirsty tyrants at worst, or a decaying fleshpot of 'Oriental' vice at best. Second came the presentation of a positive image, in the course of which any opportunity to appear in the mainstream of world events was seized upon.³⁸⁵

In Kamil Pasha's case, the Sultan is extremely satisfied, because the publication of Kamil's act of generosity allows him to hold onto his denial of the massacres in the Choruh Valley. The Sultan is convinced that the Armenian villagers were armed rebels while in Kamil Pasha's defense, they were armed 'only after the word spread of an impending attack on the villages'.³⁸⁶ As reward, Kamil Pasha receives both 'the High Order of Honor' and 'a yali mansion in Sariyer'.³⁸⁷ Since Vahid's reputation is now sullied, Kamil Pasha is now considered to become the chief of the new secret service, *Teshkilati Mahsusa*.³⁸⁸ The imperial order, promotion and the gift Kamil Pasha receives at the end of the novel, for having been declared a hero in the foreign press, is an expression and reassurance of the Sultan's belief in his award system. In order to establish loyalty, Hanioglu claims that Sultan Abdülhamid 'granted extra ranks, decorations, and sometimes extravagant personal gifts, such as mansions, to high-ranking bureaucrats who proved exceptionally faithful – often provoking storms of

³⁸⁵ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 135.

³⁸⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 372.

³⁸⁷ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 374.

³⁸⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 400.

protest within officialdom and the military'.³⁸⁹ These can be seen as attempts by the Sultan and his 'service elite' at 'fine tuning' in order to overcome a 'legitimacy crisis', or 'legitimation deficit'.³⁹⁰

Despite his contentment about the consequences of the military mission to the Choruh Valley, the Sultan is dismissive about the factors that have paved the way for the news of Kamil Pasha's heroism: 'The empire has already come under attack by foreign journalists for supposedly attacking defenceless villagers. Whether or not they were defenceless is a question it seems we must disagree on'.³⁹¹ The sultan is aware of the potential for an even bigger death toll than the one which has already occurred, had it not been for Kamil Pasha. In such a circumstance, according to the Sultan, 'the consequences for the empire would undoubtedly have been severe. Britain and Russia might have felt called upon to intervene'.³⁹² Despite the initial imprint of concern by the Sultan regarding unjust treatment of Armenians, at the end of the novel, the author ascribes a sense of denial and indifference to him, for when the Sultan first asks about the revolt, Kamil Pasha can 'read nothing' in 'the black eyes of the sultan', 'neither concern nor interest'.³⁹³ The sense of denial can also be discerned from the word 'engagement' the Sultan chooses to use to refer to the armed clash in the Choruh Valley.³⁹⁴ The publication of the story of heroism in an international newspaper, therefore, comes to the rescue of the Empire, saving it from the bad reputation that may have been produced by reports of massacres. Through his enigmatic demeanour, the Sultan denies having inflicted any intentional harm on Armenians; moreover, he admits to having greater concerns about the image of the empire in the international press than

³⁸⁹ Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 125.

³⁹⁰ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, pp. 9, 10.

³⁹¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 373.

³⁹² White, *Winter Thief*, p. 373.

³⁹³ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 371.

³⁹⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 373.

about the news of the massacre itself by saying that ‘the newspapers took note of your [Kamil Pasha’s] admirable efforts and the world has already forgotten the Choruh Valley’.³⁹⁵

After the publication of the news of Kamil Pasha’s heroism in the foreign press, the Sultan commends Kamil Pasha for his ‘humanity’ and for his ‘generosity’, and he says that he sees Kamil Pasha as ‘a true Ottoman’.³⁹⁶ Kamil Pasha’s loyalty as ‘a true Ottoman’, however, is not directed to the Sultan as he expects, but to the people of the Empire and their rightful causes. He doesn’t fear the Sultan, so when the governor refuses to help the refugees for fear of the Sultan’s retribution, the Pasha asks him to help the refugees ‘for humanity’s sake’,³⁹⁷ rather than fear, including fear of Russian or English invasion. Kamil Pasha defends the people of the empire against the vulnerabilities created by both the legitimate Ottoman systems of power and illegitimate formations, even though in such an unstable environment, Kamil Pasha’s plight – trying to serve the cause of justice -- at times presents a conundrum. He can become conflicted between what is right and what is legal. For example, Kamil Pasha comes to the realisation that, in order to get new information from the captain, who smuggled arms to Istanbul, he has to negotiate and come to agreeable terms with him, ‘letting a small fish off the hook in exchange for information leading to a bigger catch’. The narrator comments that ‘Kamil hadn’t reconciled himself to the slippery nature of the law when it was applied in the streets’, for according to him, ‘justice shouldn’t be bought and sold like grain at auction’.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 373.

³⁹⁶ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 373.

³⁹⁷ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 362.

³⁹⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, 98.

Another example of Kamil Pasha's confrontation with the slipperiness of law is the moment when, having witnessed the poor treatment of Armenian villagers by irregulars enlisted in the service of the state, he learns from Omar that 'a group of refugees and the surviving members of Gabriel's commune' were intending 'to organize an armed resistance against the Ottomans, coordinating and arming all the small village-based groups like Levon's'. The narrator explains that '[a]s an Ottoman official, Kamil knew he had a duty to stop them. As a representative of justice, he had no idea what the right thing to do was'.³⁹⁹ White establishes a 'relativist' understanding of justice in the novel with Kamil Pasha rationalising the fact that 'what was right today might not be right tomorrow depending on the circumstances'.⁴⁰⁰ Kamil Pasha is not at ease with his relativist attitude, and sees it as contradictory to being a representative of the law, so constantly questions his principles and whether laws could be applied fairly with his having such a relativist attitude.⁴⁰¹

This is an important concern in the novel in terms of crime fiction's ability to reveal the injustices within a government through the gaps in the legal system. As Worthington establishes:

[...] it is the law that constructs, or at least classifies, what is criminal. A crime is, literally, an action carried out in defiance of the law which codifies the practices and deeds that society and culture deem to be deviant from or injurious to the norm. As such, the law is ideologically inflected and culturally and nationally specific, which might be seen potentially to raise complications when discussing the role of the law in crime fiction in the event, the law, or its letter, is curiously absent from much criminology.⁴⁰²

In the case of Kamil Pasha White is able to stage exactly some of the tensions brought about by the complexities of Ottoman law, including the very 'letter' of the law.

³⁹⁹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 368.

⁴⁰⁰ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 368-9.

⁴⁰¹ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 369.

⁴⁰² Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. 53.

Ed Christian, in an article in which he discusses postcolonial detective fiction, argues that ‘postcolonial detectives are not entirely free agents, they do have a degree of power denied most of their compatriots’. Considering this point, he suggests that, in fiction, the indigenous detective must ‘decide whether to act within the law [...] or to circumvent it’, and make a choice between justice and mercy.⁴⁰³ While the surveillance carried out by the detective in this genre requires ‘observing the disparities, ironies, hybridities, and contradictions of both the empire and the indigenous culture’, the same claim could also be said to be true for Kamil Pasha’s investigation on the street as well as his pursuit of justice within ethnically or religiously diverse and conflicted communities, in which daily clashes and struggles may result from a mutual lack of awareness or misunderstanding, or even uneven power structures. Kamil Pasha, by siding with the Armenians and using the imperial army against the Sultan’s Kurdish irregular troops, makes such a conscious decision of conscience, as it were, to defend the Armenian villagers, who are at the mercy of the Sultan’s irregular armies. Kamil Pasha pleads to the Ottoman soldiers to make their own conscious and conscientious decision on this:

‘You are Ottoman soldiers, [...] You are representatives of the most civilized empire in the world, serving a sultan who cares for every peasant in his land as much as for every pasha. It is your duty to obey the orders given by your superiors, but it is also your duty to fight for civilization. The refugees that have arrived appear to have been driven here by the sultan’s irregular troops. These troops were given orders to keep the peace, and some have exceeded those orders by terrorizing the population. But I don’t want to hide from you that these troops were sent by our great padishah, just as you were. I see our mission as protecting the people in this compound. If these troops attack us, then our mission will conflict, and you must decide for yourself whether you are willing to remain here under my command. If we end up fighting them, that might be considered treason. As your commanding officer, I assure you that you are free to leave my command, and I will note it down as a transfer, not a desertion. You are free to go’.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Ed Christian, ‘Ethnic Postcolonial Crime and Detection (Anglophone)’, in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell 2010), pp. 283-295 (p. 285).

⁴⁰⁴ White, *Winter Thief*, pp. 326-7.

According to Kamil Pasha, ‘a good Ottoman officer’ should be ‘strong, educated, obedient, humane and civilized’.⁴⁰⁵ Based on his faith in their capacity to do the right thing, instead of asking them to carry out his orders to fight or accept the situation as an obligation or fate, he urges his soldiers to use reason and exercise free will even at the cost of circumventing laws.

Kamil Pasha’s conflict with the agents sent by the same entity that sends him is a demonstration of ‘that the state [and a reliable one at that] is necessary for the creation and maintenance of public life and central to the reproduction of the socio-economic inequalities that lead to crime in the first place’.⁴⁰⁶ In the pursuit of stopping outlaws from offending against the Ottoman legal mandate, Kamil Pasha by ‘(unwillingly) reiterating the authority of the state’ is in a position to ‘rais[e] troubling questions about the adequacy and fairness of the justice system as a whole’.⁴⁰⁷ On the other hand, Kamil Pasha’s plight, in trying to serve justice, is essentially driven by his trust in the Ottoman justice system. When Kamil Pasha is wrongfully put in the prison by Vahid for allegedly murdering a young girl, Kamil Pasha reminisces about the day when he witnessed injustice unfold while he was in England to study law. He thinks of how the son of a lord ‘had destroyed the taproom of a pub on a drunken rampage with his friends’, and that ‘the rape of the pub owner’s daughter and her subsequent death were never investigated despite a roomful of witnesses to both events’. Remembering this experience, the narrator points out that, ‘Kamil had to believe that the Ottoman system was more just than that, that the murder of an ordinary girl would not go unpunished because she was poor’. Facing a conviction of a murder he didn’t commit, the narrator notes that Kamil Pasha ‘tried to believe that right would prevail, not because he too had

⁴⁰⁵ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 241.

⁴⁰⁶ Pepper, *Unwilling Executioner*, p. 49.

⁴⁰⁷ Pepper, *Unwilling Executioner*, p. 49.

powerful friends but because the system itself was just. He would be released because the evidence would show that he was not guilty'.⁴⁰⁸ Likewise, at the beginning of the chapter, I argued that Kamil Pasha is presented in *The Abyssinian Proof* as a loyal Ottoman prosecutor who believes in the Ottoman legal system and tries to negotiate with Marko, an assassin, but upon hearing Marko's reasons to assassinate the state official, he admits that the state fails to protect its subjects across all its domains as it is meant to do, because of the cracks in its justice system.⁴⁰⁹ Marko had said 'We will win because each man's ambition is the same. You will lose, pasha, because your empire is driven by the greed of a few men'.⁴¹⁰

In *The Abyssinian Proof*, the narrator stresses Kamil Pasha's own scepticism regarding the state officials:

Although he was a civil servant himself, he [Kamil Pasha] had an instinctive distrust of bureaucrats and what they might do with information about something as potentially inflammatory as the Melisites or the Proof of God. Be loyal to the state, he thought, but trust who you know.⁴¹¹

Of all the Ottoman bureaucrats and elites Jenny White introduces in *The Winter Thief*, Kamil Pasha stands out as the most idealized and morally superior of the state officials. He is different from Huseyin Pasha, who relies on violence and money to make citizens loyal, Yorg Pasha, who is less patriotic than greedy, Vahid, who bristles with vengeance and doesn't hesitate to kill innocent people, and the Vizier Kōraslan, whose ethical calibration is impaired because of the favours he owes. Deringil establishes that '[s]ome [the Ottoman service elite] were more conservative, others more progressive, although hard and fast categories and facile labelling have led to much historically inaccurate

⁴⁰⁸ White, *Winter Thief*, p. 244.

⁴⁰⁹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, pp. 21-2.

⁴¹⁰ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 22.

⁴¹¹ White, *Abyssinian Proof*, p. 434.

stereotyping'.⁴¹² Within Sultan Abdülhamid's bureaucracy, the character of Kamil Pasha offers a refreshing addition to the hostility-loaded world of Anglophone fiction about this period. Through Kamil Pasha, as the protagonist, as well as through other generous characters such as the police chief Omer and Osman Hamdi Bey, White reinforces the idea that the empire was not merely staffed by corrupt or violence-prone elites and leaders, but that the domains of the empire were also protected by leaders and public representatives who sought to defend the life and wellbeing of every subject of the sultan, which is a theme revisited in *Birds without Wings*, as we will see in the next chapter.

⁴¹² Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 3.

Chapter Three:
History in the Making of History:
Louis de Bernières and National Imagination

The setting of *Birds without Wings* (2004) by Louis de Bernières is inspired by the ghost-town of Kayaköy, ‘Village of Rock’ in Turkish, which is located near contemporary Fethiye in Turkey. Throughout its history, this region has come under Lycian, Greek, Byzantine, Ottoman and finally republican Turkish rule before it was eventually destroyed by an earthquake in 1957. This historical novel is set in the early twentieth century in a bustling town composed of people from Greek, Turkish and Armenian communities, and recounts a story of the dying days of the Ottoman Empire, followed by the years of war and early years of the Republic of Turkey. In the book, the town is called Eskibahçe, Old Garden, which is described as being located close to ‘the vivid waters where the Aegean merges into the Mediterranean Sea’.¹ When Leyla Hanım, the mistress of the town’s aga, enters the town after her journey from Constantinople, she thinks that ‘[s]he is back where she belongs, amid the softness of civilisation’.² In the vicinity of Eskibahce, there is a leech gatherer catching leeches amidst ‘the ruins of a temple that once was sacred to Leto, Artemis and Apollo’³; a vagabond, whose half-dead look calls for a nickname ‘the Dog’, ‘tak[ing] up residence in the Lycian tombs’⁴; ‘townspeople still us[ing]’ ‘the almost intact ruins of a Roman theatre’ ‘for big meetings and celebrations’⁵; ‘the cries of the vendors and artisans’ at the forefront of ‘the white minarets of the mosque and the golden dome of the Church

¹ Louis de Bernières, *Birds Without Wings* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2004), p. 31.

² de Bernières, *Birds Without Wings*, p. 199.

³ de Bernières, *Birds Without Wings*, p. 221.

⁴ de Bernières, *Birds Without Wings*, p. 44.

⁵ de Bernières, *Birds Without Wings*, p. 32.

of St Nicholas'.⁶ Expanding from this concurrence of history, this chapter looks at the ways Louis de Bernières represents coming-togetherness of various civilisations in an Aegean town, and happy moments as well as the struggles of the townspeople to continue to coexist despite and because of their differences – if any, especially during the increasingly hostile conditions of war. As the slippery nature of history turns the characters of the novel into agents of living history, their sense of belonging crumbles under the weight of the antagonistic forces that challenge and run counter to their ideals of Ottomanism.

3.1. Civilisation

Louis de Bernières, by setting his novel amidst the remains of great civilisations, invites the reader to visualise the townspeople both as outlanders, as if fitted with no concern about the archaeological artefacts around them, and also as part of the town's history, as having an intimate dialogue with their predecessors. These two ways of interpretation are rooted in the way *civilisation* came to be thought of. Before the word's evolution into denoting 'being civilized' or 'not being barbarian' with the onset of the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas, *civilisation* had been mentioned in Western literature⁷ as a 'term of jurisprudence, where civil law, instead of military law, was seen as the marker of the society.'⁸ According to Bruce Mazlish, the earliest change in the meaning of the word is detected in Victor Riqueti's *L'Ami des Hommes* which was published in 1756.⁹ The neologism of the word in Riqueti's work harks back to the origins of civilisation in agriculture as opposed to its 'roots in the city and its future in

⁶ de Bernières, *Birds Without Wings*, p. 199.

⁷ As Bruce Mazlish puts it, its example is found in the Universal French-Latin Dictionary (my translation) ("the *Dictionnaire universel françois et latin* (or *Dictionnaire de Trevoux*") published in 1743 (Bruce Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 7).

⁸ Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 7.

⁹ Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 5.

increased industrialization’: In Ancient Greece, the polis, the city-state, was ‘based on an agricultural hinterland’ but ‘[i]t was only in the city that one spoke “in public,” in a civilized manner, rather than babbling in an uncouth and impolitic tongue’¹⁰ which is the language of the outsider.¹¹ For Riqueti, Marquis de Mirabeau, then, the word came to refer to ‘a group of people who were polished, refined, and mannered, as well as virtuous in their social existence’.¹² Following the publication of Riqueti’s book, the word regained popularity and, stripped of its original religious standards, it was embedded by European thinkers into their emerging Enlightenment thought. The concept, since then, has come to carry with it the notions of ‘increased population, liberty, and justice’ that are lodged in ‘a particular form of sociability’; and by way of its reification, *civilisation* has started to serve as an important component of the idea of *progress* that would become, in Mazlish’s words, ‘the third phase in conjectural history, signalling the last stage in the movement of humanity from savagery to barbarism and then to civilization’.¹³ The representation and characterisation of the Ottomans in *Birds Without Wings* extensively harbour undertones of the criticism of the concept *civilisation* and its development as a notion that denotes linear evolutionary stages, which is then, just like the Western use of the concept of progress, used as an excuse to act against less *civilised* peoples and their lands and possessions.

In *Birds without Wings*, civilisation is not projected as commensurate with linear historical development, but envisaged by Leyla Hanım in a way seemingly analogous to

¹⁰ According to Mazlish, it was Homer who first spoke of the word *bar-bar* to describe the way ancient Carians sounded to him, although he didn’t use the term barbarian. On that account, the Greeks were influential in the generation of a distinction thereafter of *barbarian* and *civilized* (*Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 2).

¹¹ Claiming themselves superior to others, societies have always distinguished themselves from the *outsider*, or *barbarians* (Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 1); Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 2.

¹² Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 7.

¹³ Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, pp. 7-8.

that of Victor Riqueti in its emphasis on community life in the rural; while, on the other hand, for Daskalos Leonidas, this is not a town inhabited by, in Mazlish's words, 'a group of people who [are] polished, refined, and mannered, as well as virtuous', hence, not civilised.¹⁴ Leonidas is a Greek nationalist who comes to Eskibahçe from Smyrna (İzmir) as a teacher for the Rum school children of the town. He views the Muslim inhabitants as his nemesis while he himself is seen as a figure of discontentment and a source of mockery by the inhabitants of Eskibahçe. He is resentful of the rule of the Ottomans and disdains the Turkish language because he sees Greek as the ultimate language of humanity – by misguided righteousness he claims that 'even the Romans spoke Greek'.¹⁵ He also complains about the Christian people's inability to speak Greek at all since Turkish is spoken as the main language in the town. Leonidas is evidently a propagandist of the *Megali Idea* – the ideal of Greek irredentism. He is a member of Philiki Etaireia – a 'secret societ[y] formed to bring about the reunification of [historical] Greece'.¹⁶ Explaining Leonidas's irredentist dreams, the narrator of the novel shows that the teacher's big dreams for the Greek nation go hand in hand with his feelings of Greek superiority, particularly defined as opposed to Turks. The narrator offers this stance as a specific kind of human weakness:

He [Leonidas] was possessed by beautiful visions of Constantinople restored to its place as capital of the Greek world, and, like all who have such beautiful visions, his were predicated on the absolute belief that his own people and his own religion and his own way of life were superior to others, and should therefore have their own way. Such people, even those as insignificant as Leonidas, are the motor of history, which is finally nothing but a sorry edifice constructed from hacked flesh in the name of great ideas.¹⁷

In this dramatic passage, the narrator reflects on three key components; feelings of national and racial superiority, the contorted and invalid source of this tendency (*hacked*

¹⁴ Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Birds Without Wings*, p. 260.

¹⁶ *Birds Without Wings*, p. 258.

¹⁷ *Birds Without Wings*, p. 131.

flesh) and the peculiarly feeble causes of revolutionary changes in history.¹⁸ Leonidas's dream about a far-reaching Greek rule and his perception of Greek superiority signal and foreshadow the coming of a tragedy of one's own making.

Leonidas's feeling of superiority to Ottoman Turks actually runs parallel to the European concept of civilisation, and it is used as a marker of identity that is defined and driven from an angle of exclusionism. Poignantly, Greece's gaining a place and prominence in the ranks of Western civilisations was the result of European nations competing amongst themselves to be world actors if not powers. Especially following an upsurge of interest in antiquity owing to the accounts of French and British travellers who visited ancient sites during the eighteenth century, the image of 'classical antiquity' was increasingly embedded into the discourse of Western Enlightenment. In the eighteenth century, in pursuit of their newly found source of inspiration, French and British travellers toured the ruins of the ancient Greece while the Society of Dilettanti (founded in 1733–36 in London) financed such expeditions and works related to the antiquities of Rome and Greece. The publication of books such as *Antiquities of Athens* (1762-1816) by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett was the outcome of such enthusiasm. Such publications served the function to instil an inquisitive passion for the ancient Greece, and became the precursors of the Neoclassicist and Greek revival movements. Readings of history from this renewed light also helped Western thinkers to interpret history as the 'unraveling of human progress'.¹⁹ As a result, the (discourse of) Western Enlightenment was construed alongside the image of 'classical antiquity', and it is

¹⁸ The latter two ideas will be investigated within the purview of nationalism and historiography in later sections of this chapter.

¹⁹ Victor Roudometof, 'From *Rum Millet* to Greek Nation: Enlightenment, Secularization, and National Identity in Ottoman Balkan Society, 1453–1821', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 16 (1998), 11-48 (pp. 23-4).

within this context that Europe saw the Hellenic²⁰ as the source of its ‘originary *topoi*’ for the purposes of self-definition.²¹

It is accepted by scholars in general that the power European states gained by looking at their own past through the achievements of ancient Greece gave the continent of Europe the tools for its own legitimisation as the universal authority:

The concept of civilization, developed at the time of Enlightenment as part of the European imaginary, claimed to offer a universal measuring rod: a civilization had certain material characteristics and it behaved and thought in a certain spiritual manner. (Needless to say, one man’s civilization could be another’s barbarism.) Certainly this was the case in the past. Was there anything more substantial, however, to the European version of civilization, carrying with it a claim to universality? Or was it a simple expression of domination, to be overthrown in the name of relativism or multiculturalism?²²

Such limited universality, however, would espouse certain attributes which are assigned to Ancient Greek civilisations that allowed humans to consider them as ‘civilised’.

These attributes the Greeks allocated to themselves as ‘civilized’ beings are explained in general to be widely ranging from ‘[r]eason, philosophy, and freedom to shape one’s personal destiny’ to ‘historical awareness, agriculture, the polis, a more refined treatment of women’.²³ These qualities were meant to echo Europe’s vision of itself,

²⁰ The choice of word *Hellenic* is important in the sense that during the revival years of Greece, the word ‘Hellen’ was preferred instead of ‘Greece’ as it referred to the era before the annexation of Greek states by the Roman Empire and had irredentist connotations as after the end of the rule of Alexander the Great, the Hellenistic Greece spanned to a large geographical scope. It is in a way situated in the genesis of ‘the concept of civilization’ as opposed to the more generic term *Greek*. As a result, the provisional Greek state that was established during the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire had first been called the First Hellenic Republic, only to be named the Kingdom of Greece after the independence.

²¹ Roudometof, ‘From *Rum Millet* to Greek Nation’, pp. 23-4; Umut Özkırmılı and Spyros A. Sofos, *Tormented by History: Nationalism in Greece and Turkey* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2008), p. 22; This statement is true for Orientalist studies in general. Travellers tended to take up ideas from where they had been left off by earlier writers in what Said calls a system of citationality. As Said observes, even ‘[w]hen a learned Orientalist traveled in the country of his specialization, it was always with unshakable abstract maxims about the “civilization” he had studied; rarely were Orientalists interested in anything except proving the validity of these musty “truths” by applying them, without great success, to uncomprehending, hence degenerate, natives’ (Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; London: Penguin, 2003), p. 52).

²² Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, pp. xiii-xiv; This dichotomy between the West and the East and the creation of nation-states as well as the Ottoman multiculturalism have been at the core of this work. More discussion of the role of multiculturalism as a source of definition for civilisation will ensue in the following pages.

²³ Roudometof, ‘From *Rum Millet* to Greek Nation’, p.23; Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents*, p. 3.

and also to pronounce a sense of superiority deriving from historical progress attributed to the West. Edward Said cites Paul Valéry's work in his *Orientalism* to show how the East is seen by Europe in antagonistic terms with an intention to prove the superiority of *European* civilisation.²⁴ In Valéry's work, the 'role' of the West is seen as appropriating the sources it chooses to use in order to postulate its own standards, the result of which is the empowerment of the West, which is, needless to say, learnt from the Greeks and Romans. Further, the Mediterranean is perceived by some early scholars as the bottleneck that prevents threats from the East. As Paul Valéry suggests in his article *Puissance de choix de l'Europe*:

From the cultural point of view, I do not think that we have much to fear *now* from the Oriental influence. It is not unknown to us. We owe to the Orient all the beginnings of our arts and of a great deal of our knowledge. We can very well welcome what now comes out of the Orient, if something new is coming out of there—which I very much doubt. This doubt is precisely our guarantee and our European weapon.

Besides, the real question in such matters is to *digest*. But that has always been, just as precisely, the great specialty of the European mind through the ages. Our role is therefore to maintain this power of choice, of universal comprehension, of the transformation of everything into our own substance, powers which have made us what we are. The Greeks and Romans showed us how to deal with the monsters of Asia, how to treat them by analysis, how to extract from their quintessence [...]. The Mediterranean basin seems to me to be like a closed vessel where the essences of the vast Orient have always come in order to be condensed.²⁵

Early twentieth-century essayist Paul Valéry was a believer in the power of the intellect, a sceptic of civilisations but a determinist of European history. He was aware of the transient nature of civilisations, yet this did not cause him to forsake his belief in the future of Europe. Although he recognised the greatness of every civilisation in history and acknowledged their contributions in the *progress* of humankind, in the above passage from 'Puissance de choix de l'Europe' (Europe's Power of Choice), he was

²⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 250-1.

²⁵ Paul Valéry, 'Puissance de choix de l'Europe', *Cahiers du mois*, 9-10 (February-March 1925), pp. 16-17.

using a Eurocentric terminology when he described a dichotomy between ‘the monsters of Asia’ and ‘powers’ of ‘the Greeks and Romans’.²⁶

Through commensurate modes of literary works, the Ottoman Empire has been envisaged and represented as part of Europe’s Orientalist and Eurocentric imagination. As a reaction to such discourses, in later works, including that of Louis de Bernières, a counter-argument and demand has been made to acknowledge such essentialist and ahistorical arguments. Edward Said, for example, demanded, as Fatih Çalışır puts it, that historians ‘abandon the Eurocentric views that contributed essentially to the self-identification of the West, and [...] make an effort to establish new paradigms to understand the historical developments regarding the Middle East’.²⁷ In Jason Goodwin’s *The Snake Stone*, European admiration for Greek greatness is sketched through the character George Compston from the British Embassy in Istanbul, whose admiration for Lord Byron is so unlimited as to be arrogantly overbearing. Through this character, a stereotype has been established of a person who has the strong feelings Britain, France, and Russia had for the independence of Greece (1829), and who sees Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire as a triumph for [the] European civilisation.²⁸ Such stereotypically Hellenophile characters as Compston prevail in contemporary fiction to remind readers of the need to question the bias of the founders of Greece as opposed to their comparative indifference to other new states. Arnold Toynbee admonishes, in his 1922 book *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, the tendency of Westerners to be drawn into the domestic politics of countries like Turkey or Greece: ‘The fact that I am neither a Greek nor a Turk perhaps creates little

²⁶ Jan Ifversen, ‘The Crisis of European Civilization: an Inter-War Diagnosis’, *Globalization and Civilizations*, ed. by Mehdi Mozaffari (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 157.

²⁷ Fatih Çalışır, ‘Decline of a “Myth”’: Perspectives on the Ottoman “Decline”’, *The History School*, 9 (January-April 2011), 37-60 (p.42).

²⁸ Jason Goodwin, *The Snake Stone* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 219.

presumption of my being fair-minded, for Western partisans of non-Western peoples are often more fanatical than their favourites'.²⁹ As Toynbee suggests, Westerners, in his own term, can be more fervent and determined about the destiny of non-Western civilisations than the non-Westerners themselves. The recognition of Greeks by Europeans as 'an oppressed people' that need to be saved from their oppressors came about only as a result of the interest developed by the European travellers in the region inspired by Renaissance humanism, and inspired the forerunners of the Greek independence movement such as Adamantios Korais, who were educated abroad, and in whose nationalist thinking, the Greek people had been enslaved by the Ottomans for the better part of their existence.³⁰ It shouldn't be forgotten that no other millet that lived under the protection of the Ottoman Empire received such substantial support from the Western Powers as the Greeks did.

3.2. Oppression

The Greek national identity, just like the Bulgarian and Romanian national identities, as has been mentioned in the second chapter, is founded on the notion that the Greeks were oppressed under the 'the Ottoman yoke'. The novel *The Beggar* (1982) by Andreas Karkavitsas propagates the idea of 'oppression', which is widely explored as a common theme by the Greek independence movement supporters.³¹ The novel takes place in Thessaly in the years following the annexation of the region by the Kingdom of Greece in 1881, and features the Nykteremi villagers, who are yearning to achieve a democratic rule in their village under the new Kingdom of Greece, and repeatedly failing to do so. The Greeks' state of enslavement is represented in the villagers' bestial character, which

²⁹ Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilisations* (London: Constable and Company, 1922), p. xxxi.

³⁰ Roudometof, 'From *Rum Millet* to Greek Nation', pp. 11-48 (p.24).

³¹ Andreas Karkavitsas, *The Beggar*, trans. by William F. Wyatt, Jr. (New Rochelle, New York: Caratzas Brothers, Publishers, 1982).

is expressed through these following techniques: directly and openly ('The bestial condition of the Karagounedes'³²); by means of comparison ('One opened and closed his eyes, another chewed constantly though he had nothing in his mouth, from habit merely, as the grazing animals do'³³); and through the descriptions of the animals of the village living side by side with the villagers. The villagers' bestial character is attributed to their slavish attitude, which is, according to Karkavitsas, the result of centuries' long rule of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the fact that the Turks are not the rulers, and therefore the Turkish aga of the village is not the official administrator anymore, the villagers still demonstrate a spirit of servitude for the aga. Karkavitsas pointedly uses words related to servility such as 'master', 'slavish attitude', 'obeisance'³⁴ and 'serfs'³⁵ to stress the villagers' habitual disposition. When the aga comes to visit the village, the villagers cannot stop themselves from showing their homage even if they don't want to and they know the aga is not their master anymore:

the peasants involuntarily began to feel that uncontrollable ancestral dread rise within them. In their eyes that tiny company seemed like the procession of some great and feared pasha of olden days, one of those who terrified their grandfathers and great-grandfathers and left a legacy of horror to their descendants. The effect of that legacy and the terrified seeds of their ancestors which they carried unchanged in their blood caused the Karagounedes to feel the air about them grow oppressive with horror and menace. Killings, beatings, tortures, burnings – all those evils which their ancestors had suffered at the hands of their Turkish masters appeared clearly before them; plaints and wailings roared in their ears and drove them, dead from fear, to that slavish and indispensable obeisance.³⁶

This grotesquely polarized depiction shows the villagers as having internalised centuries of brutal treatment by foreign masters. There is no hint that Ottoman rule might ever have been just or fair, or brought prosperity. The prejudice against being governed by non-Greeks appears self-evidently justifiable. The slavishness of the peasants continues

³² Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 13.

³³ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 2.

³⁴ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 8.

³⁵ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, pp. 110, 116.

³⁶ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 8.

even after the aga's rule has ended – and the question of whether the aga had ever been a cruel, or perhaps a reasonable, governor is not entertained.

As opposed to Karkavistas's rather pessimistic and hostile image of Demis Aga of Nykteremi, de Bernières draws a fatherly and protective image of Rustem Aga of Eskibahce. When a hermit nicknamed *the Dog* comes to live amongst the ancient tombs near Eskibahce, Rustem Bey sends a sabre and a loaded pistol for him, so that, whether he is a new resident or a visitor, the man is ready to defend himself if he needs to.³⁷

Another incident that proves the good character of Rustem Bey takes place at the Christian cemetery. Word of mouth conveys that Polyxeni's mother poisoned Muslim families in Eskibahce.³⁸ In order to see whether Polyxeni's mother is guilty or not, the townspeople gather at the cemetery and unearth the mother's bones to see if the flesh dissolved in soil. Rustem Bey believes in the innocence of Polyxeni's mother, and upon seeing her mother's clean skull at the cemetery, he extends a purse of money to Polyxeni and her siblings and he asserts that he always knew that her mother was innocent and had brought money with him to give to Polyxeni and her siblings.³⁹ He continues by saying:

‘Wasn't it enough that I should lose all my family in the plague? Wasn't it enough that Polyxeni Hanım and her brothers and sisters should lose their mother? It's a mean-spirited and ignorant people that rubs salt and sand in other people's wounds with all these stories of poison and conspiracy! No more stories! No more bad blood!’⁴⁰

Although contented, Polyxeni and her siblings wonder ‘why it was that an infidel pasha as important as Rustem Bey should have come to make a speech in their defence, and give them a purse of money’.⁴¹

³⁷ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 45.

³⁸ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 66.

³⁹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 77.

⁴⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 77.

⁴¹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 77.

The representation of an Ottoman Aga is a symptomatic indicator of how the writers view the society itself. Both novels take ‘the dead’ as their topic, exhibiting the involvement of the villagers and townspeople with similar superstitious issues, and disclosing, in turn, each of the agas’ reactions to the actions of the villagers. In *The Beggar*, believing that the vrykolakas, the undead, the vampires, in Greek folklore⁴², had taken possession of the house that stands right next to the Aga’s house, the villagers set it on fire, which results in the burning down of the Aga’s property as well. Upon the first confrontation with the perpetrators, Karkativsas writes, the aga ‘glowered fiercely at the peasants as if wanting to annihilate them with looks alone. The tyrant’s blood boiled within him at the sight of those humble slaves [...]. The conquering wild beast untamed and pitiless within him snorted and roared with blood-dripping rage’.⁴³ Since the punitive rights of the aga have been taken from him after the independence of Greece, he is rendered powerless in theory. However, the aga uses his power to punish the villagers, while the beggar gets away even if it is him who convinces the villagers that the house contains a vrykolakas, and woos them to burn down the house. All the juridical bodies, including the attorney from the city, the commander, the governor and the captain, side with the aga in this matter to show that the Ottoman rule is not over for the villagers and that justice is not in view yet.

Apart from the common theme of belief in superstitions in both novels, the characters’ search for justice, or their epiphany that there was none, serves as the main axis for the plot and provides a platform for instancing the historical backgrounds of the novels.

Superstitious beliefs and traditions are typical traits of both the townspeople in

⁴² This superstitious folkloric monster in Melenik is called both Vrykolakas and Vampyras, whereas the latter usage denotes to the use of the term as a word of “abuse” (G. F. [George Frederick] Abbott, *Macedonian Folklore* (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), p. 217.)

⁴³ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 116.

Eskibahce and in Nykteremi, but while the ‘mean-spirited and ignorant’⁴⁴ townspeople of Eskibahce are disgraced by the act of goodness of the aga in *Birds without Wings*, the consequences of the villagers’ actions based on their superstitious beliefs become a reason for a harsh punishment for the tyrannical aga in Nykteremi:

The Sultan, unloving father, has generously handed the land over to the infidels, and together with them has also handed over the beys and the agas to the discretion and the ridicule of hated slaves. And the infidels have no right to do anything with them! Take them to court! Seek satisfaction! What did Demis Aga want with satisfaction and law-courts since he couldn’t punish his slaves with his own hands?⁴⁵

From the perspective of justice, Kostavistas and de Bernières show potentially different qualities of an infidel ruler, and Kostavistas’s Demis Aga, even without any official authority in the village, is not portrayed as compassionate as Rustem Bey. That is to say, while Rustem Aga is depicted as a just and compassionate leader who treats the townspeople in a dignified and equal manner, and with respect and trust, Demis Aga is viewed as a narcissistic and despotic ruler who enjoys disempowering and petrifying the villagers. Through the portraiture of the hopes and confusions of the townspeople of Nykteremi, Karkavitsas demonstrates that establishing the rule of law is a tricky process. The villagers choose to side with those who can favour them, and since the elected usually end up being those who are close to the Turks, according to the narrator, they elect ‘foreigners’ in a dysfunctional democratic system. Having a master is almost seen like a feature of the Greek character⁴⁶: ‘We go get rid of one master and up pops another’ says Paparrizos, the village priest.⁴⁷ The villagers seem not be able to govern themselves, and the reason for this is seen as the Ottoman rule that lasted for centuries: ‘They were no longer his slaves, and he was no longer master! But as soon as Demis

⁴⁴ Rustem Bey’s words in de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 77.

⁴⁵ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 117.

⁴⁶ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁷ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 5.

Aga appeared at the outskirts of the village, that slavish attitude buried within them through the centuries once again made them forget their oaths and their independence'.⁴⁸

3.3. Originary *Topoi*

Andreas Karkavitsas's novel is about the inability of Greek people to build a *national character* following the gaining of their sovereignty from the Ottoman Empire. Bearing no significant trace of their idealised Greek antecedents, the Greek inhabitants of Nykteremi struggle to define their Greekness. On the other hand, the investment of de Bernières's novel in national ideology is more complex and multi-layered than that of *The Beggar* as it informs the reader of different forms of justice, historical consciousness and formulation of sense of belonging. In *Birds without Wings*, separatist nationalist people like Leonidas exemplify de Bernières's idea of mental alienation experienced from historical authenticity during national insurgencies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

According to Georg Lukacs, '[t]he appeal to national independence and national character is connected with a re-awakening of national history, with memories of the past, of past greatness, of moments of national dishonour, whether this results in a progressive or reactionary ideology'.⁴⁹ In view of ideologies of nationalism, Louis De Bernières illustrates alternative attitudes to such a loaded idea of re-awakening, instancing various ways of reading history. For example, in a scene in which Leonidas's attitude is juxtaposed with that of his father, unlike Leonidas's rigid understanding, it is discovered that the idea of national identity can be rather fluid. Leonidas's father cannot

⁴⁸ Karkavitsas, *Beggar*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: The Merlin Press, 1989), p. 25.

relate to his obsession with the idea of *originary topoi*, his feelings of hostility, and his wish for vengeance of the Ottomans. Despite Leonidas's dire opposition to the Ottoman rule, his father is a content Ottoman gentleman, who enjoys his privileges as a merchant in Smyrna under the Ottoman rule.

One day at dinner in Smyrna, Leonidas tells his father that he's become a member of Philiki Etairia, causing him to become enraged. According to the account of events told by Leonidas's father's friend Georgio Theodoru, the father exclaims in anger:

'You're crazy! You want to be ruled from Athens? Have you ever been to Athens? It's a shitty little village, that's what! A shitty little provincial village with some ruins and no theatre worth going to, and the people with no education and no culture, and the houses with all the paint peeled off, and they can't even speak Greek properly! Is that what you want? You're a fool.'

Leonidas tried to defend himself: 'The new Greece would be ruled from Constantinople, Father, just as the old Greece was.'

'We are already ruled from Constantinople,' replied his father.

'By Turks'.⁵⁰

Just as the idea of being ruled by Turks is repeatedly revisited in *The Beggar*, Leonidas is also often observed as opposing to Turkish rule at every turn. More importantly, Leonidas's character gives an example of the nationalist and irredentist mind-set⁵¹ that, following the Great War, led Greece to wage war between 1919 and 1922 against the Ottoman Empire, in which they had coexisted for almost half a millennium. In his words, as a member of 'the greatest race in the world', Leonidas believes in the restoration of the Byzantium.⁵² The following lines from the novel demonstrate the narrator's scepticism about the virtue of Leonidas's undertaking:

Britain no longer mourns the throne of France, Spain has no project to reclaim the Netherlands, and Portugal has no ambitions on Brazil, but there are those who are incapable of letting the past pass on, among them the Serbs who will always be

⁵⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 259.

⁵¹ Contemporary nationalist thought is discussed further later in this chapter.

⁵² de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 260.

obsessed by the loss of Kosovo, and the Greeks who will always be obsessed by the fall of Byzantium.⁵³

The irony in the process of Greek nation-building is that before the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans, the pagan Hellenic was not directly followed by the Orthodox Greek establishment. Therefore, although the image of the Hellenic is always at the core of Greek nationalist thinking, during the Greek independence movements, under the intellectual leadership of the likes of Adamantios Korais, there came a point of realisation that ‘the linear past of the nation was invariably disrupted’ by the Christian Roman establishment in the city.⁵⁴ As a result, ‘Korais and his disciples could not account for the severing of modern Greece’s link to classical antiquity’.⁵⁵ Since the Ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople being not only spiritual, but also the administrative and legal leader of Christians of Eastern Europe, including Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, and Greek communities, the *Rum millet*,⁵⁶ of the Ottoman Empire had often claimed to be ‘unnational’ in terms of the ‘conduct of the Church, the clergy and other elites that dominated’.⁵⁷ In other words, the narrative that leads to ‘the classicist hegemony over the Greek past’ had brought many inconsistencies with it.⁵⁸

In his 1964 inaugural lecture as the Korais Professor at King’s College London, Cyril Mango mentions how the fluidity between the definitions of Hellenism and Greek identity resulted in the preclusion of an alternative understanding of Greek identity:

Much of the claim of modern Greece upon the sympathy of western Europe has been based on the assumption of a direct historical continuity reaching back three thousand years: from modern Greece to Byzantium, from Byzantium to the Hellenistic world and thence to ancient Greece. Whoever asserts this continuity is

⁵³ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 131.

⁵⁴ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 82.

⁵⁵ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 82.

⁵⁶ *Rum* is the word used for the Greeks of the Ottoman Empire. The word originates from the designation for the territories of the former Roman Empire.

⁵⁷ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 82.

⁵⁸ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 82.

classed as a philhellene; whoever denies it runs the risk of being labelled a mishellene or hater of the Greeks.⁵⁹

This statement by Mango epitomises the unwillingness of historians and critics to admit the Ottoman heritage of Greeks. However, in contradictory evidence and to the dismay of the western world, as Özkırmılı and Sofos point out, Ancient Greece's 'most tangible and material remnants were the ruins scattered throughout the Ottoman territories'.⁶⁰ In *Birds*, Louis de Bernières portrays Eskibahce as a location containing such ancient ruins, which are mentioned solely for the purpose of having the residents of the town neglect them. In Eskibahce, Leonidas's philhellenism is received with cynicism and counterchallenged. What is seen as the disruption of linearity imposed by the Ottomans from the point of view of Leonidas is seen by Iskandar the potter, a sympathetic character in the novel, as the continuation of civilisation. According to Iskander:

[Leonidas] stirred up resentment in them [the townsmen] with stories about how we Osmanlis had taken the land from the Greeks, and that the land was rightly theirs. I have heard it said that this place belonged once to a people called Lycians, and that the Greeks took it from them, so why did this teacher not tell the children that all land is originally stolen? Why did he not say 'Let us find the Lycians, and give it back'?'⁶¹

Lycian tombs are one of the recurrent images in the novel used primarily to juxtapose and challenge the discourse of linear Greek civilisation. Leonidas Daskalos's belief that the Greeks were the true owners of Anatolia and the feeling of superiority this notion gives to him make him oblivious to the contemporary reality of the life and diversity in the Ottoman town that came about as a result of centuries-long historical progression.

The narrator remarks, 'if one traced it back far enough, there was no one in that town who was not in some way a relation of everybody else'.⁶² What connects local people of

⁵⁹ Cyril Mango, "Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 28 (1965), 29-43 (p. 29).

⁶⁰ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, pp. 82-3.

⁶¹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 8.

⁶² de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 33.

Eskibahce to one another is not their ancestral definition of who they are, but their shared experiences and customs. In this town, as in many other towns of the Empire, Muslims ask their Christian friends to burn candles for them in the church and to ask their Mary Mother of Jesus to do them favours. The Christians, on the other hand, ask their Muslim friends to tie rags to the tekke of their saint, or give them verses of the Qur'an to be written on slips of paper by the Imam of the town's mosque.⁶³ To the mind of an orthodox Muslim, not asking what the white meat is when sharing a meal with Christian neighbours and drinking wine with them either overtly or in secret, getting converted when married, and being buried with a silver cross wrapped in a scrap of the Qur'an enfolded in the hands of the deceased might be all outrageous acts, but these are the common modes of behaviour in Eskibahce.⁶⁴ Sharing, and in Karen Barkey's terms, mixing of the cross and the crescent, becomes a practice that's produced over time.⁶⁵ The mongrel town, thereby, poses the unique character of the transcultural customs and practices that make up the Ottoman identity.

3.4. *Vatan*: From Community to Nation

As believers of the book, Ottoman subjects were all recognized as members of the empire, and regardless of their religious affiliations, they could see themselves as Ottomans even before the diffusion of Ottomanism as a state ideology starting from the early nineteenth century. However, after the declaration of independence of Greece, nationalism began to pose a new threat to the integrity of the Empire, and '[a]s a result of this staggering development' suggests Michelle Campos,

⁶³ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 65.

⁶⁴ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 151.

⁶⁵ Karen Barkey, 'Sharing Sacred Sites: The Ottoman Past and Transcultural Memories' paper presented to *Ottoman Pasts, Present Cities: Cosmopolitanism and Transcultural Memories AHRC Research Network; International Two-Day Conference* (26-27 June 2014) <<https://ottomancosmopolitanism.wordpress.com/conference-podcasts>> [accessed 23 February 2018]

the Ottoman government turned to create a state ideology known as Ottomanism (*Osmanlıcilik*) which aimed at promoting universal loyalty to the dynasty and equality under the law for both non-Muslims and Muslims. The architects of state Ottomanism hoped to prevent the spread of new nationalist ideologies among non-Muslim subject populations as well as to neutralize European interventions on their behalf.⁶⁶

Officially-led reformation movements of the nineteenth century to a great extent aimed at preventing further losses of territory in the empire by forestalling national movements and the possibility of a European intervention. Such countermeasures included the re-adjustment of the rules of citizenship so as to provide all citizens of the Empire with equal rights and obligations. This period was what Campos defines as a process of transition ‘from community to nation’.⁶⁷ Theories on modern nationalism emphasise the importance and primacy of collective popular elements such as language, race, shared customs, etc. in nation-building and its preservation. In a vast empire with subjects from multiple religious affiliations and complex administrative divisions, such methods would have to be appraised carefully to ensure the continuity of the empire. Therefore, a similar nationalism project had to be introduced in the empire. In Benedict Anderson’s words, in the Ottoman Empire, an ‘official nationalism’ would need to be implemented for ‘combining naturalization with retention of dynastic power’ as it did happen ‘in particular over the huge polyglot domains accumulated since the Middle Ages’ (‘willed merger of nation and dynastic power’) or in other words, ‘for stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire’.⁶⁸ That proved to be a difficult task.

Like the late nineteenth century Russification, Ottomanisation was also a product of ‘official nationalisms’ which ‘developed *after*, and *in reaction to*, the popular national

⁶⁶ Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 61.

⁶⁷ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 60.

⁶⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983; repr. 1991), p. 86.

movements proliferating in Europe since the 1820s'.⁶⁹ Russification of the tsarist regime initially sought to assimilate minority ethnic and religious groups into the Russian imperial body by means of either imperial strategies which underscored 'political integration based on loyalty to the Empire' and which would pave the way for evolutionary assimilation; or by means of bureaucratic nationalism which 'defined being Russian on ethnic and religious bases and sought to assimilate members of other ethnic groups linguistically and culturally'.⁷⁰ Unlike the Russian case which mostly favoured the latter model, forced homogenisation, between 1863 and 1904, in the Ottoman Empire, the former method, assimilation respecting the pre-existing diversity, was administered up till and during the process of the 1908 Revolution.⁷¹ This marked a differentiation in attitude which inclined towards a unity in variety; altering the identity of the Empire towards a common ground for developing an understanding about shared accountability based on equal parliamentary representation; and undertaking equal civic responsibilities, instead of embracing rights and privileges that arise from the rule of absolute monarchy.⁷²

In order to foster a common identity in an empire with large-scale multitude and variety, where the risk is that the lowest common denominator of that variety was just not substantial enough to create an identity sufficiently compelling to drive people away from the promises of homogenous nationalism, the territoriality of a bordered land therefore had to come to the fore as the one common ground to connect these various groups. As a result, territoriality emerged as a strong element of nation-states in the

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 86.

⁷⁰ Darius Staliūnas, "Between Russification and Divide and Rule: Russian Nationality Policy in the Western Borderlands in mid-19th Century", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 3 (2007), 357-373, (p. 357).

⁷¹ Staliūnas, "Between Russification and Divide and Rule", 357-373 (p. 357).

⁷² Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2001), p. 20.

imperial context. According to Bernard Lewis, territory-based nationalism was tailored from European models in order to meet the needs of the Ottoman Empire. The word patriotism, which meant ‘the sentiments and beliefs of the patriot’ in the later period in Europe, is actually derived and evolved from its Greek and Latin origins, *patriotes* and *patriota* respectively, which meant ‘fellow countryman’.⁷³ The corresponding word in Turkish, *vatan*, was borrowed from Arabic (‘watan’ in Arabic transliteration), and it basically meant *place of residence*. Lewis explains that the word had ‘none of the paternal or ancestral connotations of *patris* or *patria*’, and in its simplest form it meant ‘the love and devotion which people felt for their birthplace or homeland’ or even family in classical Arabic and Islamic texts.⁷⁴ It was, accordingly, used as ‘a focus of sentiment, of affection, of nostalgia, but not of loyalty, and only to a limited extent of identity’.⁷⁵

In the Ottoman case, according to Bernard Lewis, the first instance of the official use of the word *vatan* is observed in a report prepared by the Board of Public Works⁷⁶ in 1838.⁷⁷ This report, after giving various examples of how military and commerce are expected to develop thanks to scientific knowledge, views the need of the Empire to improve in science by means of restructuring education and primary school system, showing it as a necessity for being able to communicate ‘the meaning of love for the state and fatherland (*vatan*)’.⁷⁸ Despite the failure of the report in achieving the desired

⁷³ Bernard Lewis, ‘Watan’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26 (Sep. 1991), 523-533 (p. 524); Lewis explains that the city was ‘the unit of identity’ for the ancient Greek or Roman citizens, who were city-dwelling people ‘with the right to share in the formation and conduct of the government of his city, and a corresponding duty to fight and if necessary to die in its cause’ (Lewis, ‘Watan’, p. 523).

⁷⁴ Lewis, ‘Watan’, p. 524.

⁷⁵ Lewis, ‘Watan’, p. 525.

⁷⁶ Medjlis-i Umur-i Nafi’a (Meclis-i Umur-u Nafia). Berkes translates it as Board of Useful Affairs (Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (McGill University Press, 1964; repr. London: Hurst and Company, 1998), p. 98).

⁷⁷ Lewis, ‘Watan’, pp. 523-533 (p. 526).

⁷⁸ Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, p. 105.

change in the schooling system, this example shows that love of homeland had already entered into the vocabulary of a state organisation. In addition to this report, the word also receives a similar substance in the 1839 Edict of Gülhane, in which it was noted that 'it is the inescapable duty of all the people to provide soldiers for the defence of the fatherland [vatan]⁷⁹. According to Campos, this proclamation, 'injected the language of loyalty' and devotion to state and homeland.⁸⁰ Bernard Lewis shows that, by the mid-century, *devlet* (state) and *millet* (nation) had already been identified with *vatan* (country), and *vatan* had become 'something not only to be loved but also to be served and if necessary fought for' in public consciousness.⁸¹

In order to demonstrate the increase in the level of penetration of nationalist feelings among the Ottomans through the notions of love of land, Lewis further gives as an example a letter Şinasi, poet and journalist, wrote in 1851: 'I want to devote (or sacrifice) myself to the cause of my religion, state, country (*vatan*) and nation (*millet*)'.⁸² In Şinasi's letter, *vatan* and *religion* seem to be inseparable, and despite the increasing association of *vatan* with the 'land', nationalist feelings would remain strongly associated with religion up until the First World War and unavoidably beyond into the period of the Republic of Turkey. On the other hand, even after the notions of land became the official discourse, collective sense of belonging continued to be explained in relation to jihad. The Ottoman Empire's expansionist wars since the beginning of the sixteenth century, apart from a number of sporadic exceptions, are seen by Lewis as part of the Empire's warfare in the name of Islam, and as a result, 'the Ottomans had become

⁷⁹ Quoted in Lewis, 'Watan', pp. 523-533 (p. 526) from *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, ed. by Jacob Coleman Hurewitz; trans. by Halil Inalcik, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956; repr.1979), *Volume 2 British-French Supremacy, 1914-1945*, p. 270.

⁸⁰ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers* p. 61; also see Abu-Manneh 'The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript'.

⁸¹ Lewis, "Watan", p. 527.

⁸² Lewis, "Watan", p. 527.

accustomed to seeing each of these wars as a jihad' throughout the years of fighting against Christian states.⁸³

The Crimean War (1853-56) became the turning point in international relations of the Ottoman Empire as in their fight against Russia, the British and French became Ottoman allies. According to Lewis, the emergence of *vatan* as a source of aspiration alongside religion in the military enterprise of the Ottomans was partially the result of the fact that they had observed 'the lack of concern' of the British and the French 'at fighting with Muslim allies against a Christian enemy' during the Crimean War.⁸⁴ This model, however, wasn't seen as suited by some Ottoman officials to the Ottoman case for the unique problems recruiting non-Muslims in the trenches would create. As described by Lewis, among the opposition to this idea was Cevdet Paşa who claimed that people from various non-Muslim faiths of the Empire would require among other necessary arrangements, their own religious leaders, so that these soldiers could practice their religions; but such adjustment would not be easy to administer. Cevdet Pasa was also suggesting that

For Muslims, the most effective call [for 'greater endurance and sacrifice' in war] is to holy war or martyrdom in the cause of the true faith. These are words familiar to them from childhood, inculcated in them at school. The vigour and endurance of Muslim soldiers in battle, greater than that of other religions, are due to such religious sentiments.⁸⁵

According to Cevdet Paşa, soldiers' *endurance*, which is pivotal to military achievement, seems to be sustained with less effort if religion is placed at the centre of such sacrifice since children grew up with religious sentiments. So, on the battlefield, one had to provide soldiers with support that could keep their faith in martyrdom and justice upon death. Practice of religion therefore was crucial, but also very challenging

⁸³ Lewis, "Watan", p. 527.

⁸⁴ Lewis, "Watan", p. 527.

⁸⁵ Lewis, "Watan", p. 528.

in such a mixed faith system. If one, however, replaced religion with *vatan*, as was done in Europe after ‘the decline of their feudal age’, and taught children the term *vatan* instead, ‘even then it would not be as potent as religious zeal, nor could it take its place. But even that would take a long time, and until that time our armies would be left without spirit’.⁸⁶ Another important aspect in Cevdet Paşa’s report was the difference of the Ottoman army to multi-ethnic armies in other countries:

In India the English may promote non-Christian soldiers to the level of sergeant but no higher, and no one interferes or objects. But among us, if we accept Christians as soldiers, it will be necessary to give them the ranks to which they are legally entitled in the same way as Muslims. If they are not given these ranks, the so-called friendly states will offer friendly advice by way of protecting them, and our military organization, hitherto exempt from interference by foreigners, will be exposed to foreign interventions.⁸⁷

In short, the multi-religious structure of the Ottomans had become a problem in military practice, and the introduction of the word *vatan*, it was feared, was not going to be a sufficient answer to likely clashes as a result of its introduction. The fear of foreign intervention as discussed in previous chapters also offers an explanation regarding paradoxes of national Ottomanism and different forms of imperialisms around the world.

3.5. ‘There is a Jihad Preparing’

As a result of an evolving sense of belonging and national identity, at the turn of the twentieth century, a common imperial identity and love of homeland were ultimately being promoted in the press not only in Ottoman Turkish, but also in Greek, Armenian, Arabic, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), and other various imperial languages.⁸⁸ In Michelle Campos’ introduction to *Ottoman Brothers*, a Jewish lawyer Shlomo Yellin’s address in one of the CUP meetings in Beirut after the Ottoman revolution in 1909, encouraged the

⁸⁶ Lewis, “Watan”, p. 528.

⁸⁷ Lewis, “Watan”, p. 528.

⁸⁸ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 67.

unity of the Ottoman nation as he frequently spoke of the ‘sacred homeland’. According to Campos, at this stage, martyrdom, the need to sacrifice oneself for the sake of his *Vatan*, was ‘stripped of [its] traditional Islamic context and reinvested within an Ottoman national framework’.⁸⁹ However, in de Bernières’s novel it can be observed that such a popular common nationalist sentiment was not felt on the same wavelength across the empire. Ottomanism was not flourishing in the new parliament of 1908 because, as, he notes, the deputies ‘prove[d] themselves incapable of any ideal higher than ethnic self-interest’.⁹⁰ An important reason for that was the fact that the Ottomanist project had been shaped too slowly and too late.

The process of centralizing and nationalising the empire required equal rights for non-Muslims, but it also entailed some obligations on them that only the Muslims were subject to before. For the non-Muslims of the Empire, having the same political rights as their Muslim brothers required accepting the end of exemption from military service. Actually, ‘universal military service was seen as the means of bringing all the communities under the umbrella of Ottomanism’.⁹¹ On the other hand, conscription was something non-Muslims were not accustomed to and it became even more challenging as the Empire went into war after war despite the best efforts of the Unionists.⁹² At any rate, nationalism’s unstoppable rise had become undeniable during the Balkan Wars. Both during the Balkan Wars, and at the Eastern front during the onset of the First World War, Christians were started to be seen as a fifth column enabling the defeat of the empire to Greece and Russia. In Michelle Campos’s words, ‘Ottomanism as a union of Muslims and Christians was proven to be a delusion’ now.⁹³ Therefore, although

⁸⁹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 2.

⁹⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 165.

⁹¹ Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2014), p. 13.

⁹² Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, p. 13.

⁹³ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 243.

non-Muslims were not exempt from military service anymore, in order not to risk losses caused by possible betrayal by its Christian population, the Ottoman government left them out in labour battalions, outside of the immediate influence of other forces during the war.

In Eskibahce, the impact of such empire-wide developments regarding a rising sense of nationalism and the continuing changes in the practices of conscription can be monitored through the daily lives of the inhabitants. The population of the town gets tested by the impending wars, especially as the First World War breaks out and the able men of the town are conscripted. Karatavuk and Mehmetçik, two of the main characters in the novel, are among those who are trying to sign up for the Great War despite being underage. Karatavuk tries to serve in place of his father Iskander the potter, for without the father the family would starve during the war. The story of the friendship of Mehmetçik and Karatavuk is one of the important axes of the plot. When these two characters are still boys of young age, Iskander, the potter, makes bird whistles from clay for his son Abdul and his friend Nico. They blow the whistles so much and for so long that the two children are named after the sound of the birds that these whistles make. Abdul becomes Karatavuk (blackbird); Nico becomes Mehmetçik (red robin). When the conscription sergeant accepts Karatavuk's demand to conscript in place of his father, Mehmetçik, the son of Charitos wants to go and fight for the empire and the sultan padishah as well, as long as he can stay with Karatavuk, but since he is the son of a Christian father, the sergeant doesn't accept him. He says that the war is against Franks, and Franks are Christians. But Mehmetçik, Nico, insists that he is an Ottoman and that the Germans, also a Frank nation, are allies. The sergeant says 'Yes, the Germans are with us, but still it's a holy war, and you can't expect us to trust Christians

in the army in case they turn against us. It's only natural common sense'.⁹⁴ In the end, Mehmetçik is not able to fight for his own country as an Ottoman, and the labour battalion remains the only option for him.⁹⁵

In the narrator's words, the war minister Enver Pasha of the Young Turk government 'is convinced that he can get the entire Muslim world behind him by playing the Islamic card, thus disabling much of the Russian, British and French empires'.⁹⁶ Martyrdom is a powerful topic in nationalist and war narratives, and is also deployed as the central theme within the context of the First World War in *Greenmantle* (1916) by John Buchan. In the novel, Richard Hannay, a secret agent for the British government, is commissioned to find out what Greenmantle is and what makes it so vital for the Germans to retain it as the tension of the Great War escalates. The Eastern Front is of crucial importance for the British to win the war, and Germany is trying to achieve it by using the element of religion, Islam, to control the masses in the Ottoman Empire. When Greenmantle, a prominent Muslim figure, a prophet, who can 'madden the remotest Moslem peasant with dreams of Paradise' is found out to be dying, the Germans attempt to replace him with someone else, and a German intelligence officer, Hilda von Einem, is sent to ensure that the mission is completed.⁹⁷ The underlying idea of this German mission is to convince the Turkish people to declare Jihad against the British, because in Hannay's words, 'religion is the only thing to knit up such a scattered empire'⁹⁸, and for that reason, Sir Walter, Hannay's handler, believes that '[t]here is a Jihad preparing'.⁹⁹ By making a religious analogy with the Ark of the Covenant, Sir Walter suggests that Greenmantle is expected to create a miracle,

⁹⁴ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 293.

⁹⁵ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 293.

⁹⁶ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 283.

⁹⁷ John Buchan, *Greenmantle*, (London: Penguin Books, 1916; repr. 2008), pp. 7, 205.

⁹⁸ Buchan, *Greenmantle*, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Buchan, *Greenmantle*, p. 7.

although he doesn't know how yet – which is left to Hannay to find out. Hannay's mission is to find out what the awaited *revelation* is in order to be able to plot against it so as to weaken the Central Powers and keep the Indian Muslims loyal to the British, which is crucial to the integrity of the British Empire.¹⁰⁰

A similar notion of the role of jihad and martyrdom during the war is employed by Louis de Bernières in his *Birds*. Karatavuk at the beginning seems to be enthusiastic about jihad, and like other Muslim believers, is looking forward to 'meeting the Prophet in his own garden in paradise' and 'spend[ing] eternity in the arms of a vast number of houris'.¹⁰¹ He believes that the martyrs 'would be carried there by the green birds of paradise that come only for martyrs', and that they 'were being given a chance to go straight to Heaven with no questions asked'.¹⁰² The confusion starts to dawn on him after he has 'seen too many evil things' and has 'done too many evil things even when [he] believed in Him'.¹⁰³ After the war, nearer the end of the novel, Karatavuk reflects on the pointlessness of jihad in a war with so many actors to take part in too many possible scenarios:

Here are the things that I would like to tell Mehmetçik if I knew where he was. I am sorry that you were not allowed to fight for the empire like an honourable soldier, and although it was a jihad I think that those who wanted to fight for the Sultan should have been trusted. There were Arabs at Çanakkale who were Muslims but did not fight, and were traitors to the empire, and ran away. Also the Franks had Muslim soldiers from India who fought very fiercely for them, and did not believe it was a jihad. Therefore this proves that to exclude Christians from the army was beside the point.¹⁰⁴

Ironically, Nico's nickname, Mehmetçik, in contemporary Turkey, refers to the bravery of Turkish privates. In a painful contrast to Karatavuk's despondency, earlier in the

¹⁰⁰ Buchan, *Greenmantle*, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 316, 375.

¹⁰² de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 331.

¹⁰³ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 331.

¹⁰⁴ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 617-8.

novel, Mehmetçik doesn't complain about the labour camp as long as he can serve the Sultan. Karatavuk, during his years in the military, 'come[s] to understand why they would not let Christians come and fight, because the Christians would have doubted that it was a holy war and they might have dampened our enthusiasm, because doubt, when it is split, spreads like water'.¹⁰⁵ After all, political jihadism not only resulted in the exclusion of non-Muslims from fighting alongside their Muslim countrymen, but it also aimed at demoralising the Arabs who fought against the Ottomans. However, de Bernières has his character, Iskander, Karatavuk's father, criticise this rationale, for Iskandar finds it conniving that 'the Arabs had sided with the British, as had the Muslims from other side of Persia'. He says: 'It seemed that only Turks took the Jihad seriously'.¹⁰⁶

In his *The Politics of Nation-Building*, Harris Mylonas attempts to explain the formation of primacy in decision making regarding nation-building, including the selection processes of one type of nationalism over another.¹⁰⁷ In his analysis, Mylonas outlines the types of strategy the state employs to deal with non-core groups under its administration. Mylonas, in his argument regarding the shifts and variations in state policies towards non-core groups and nation-building processes, concludes that 'international and geostrategic concerns' justify the importance of 'the interaction between host states and external powers rather than non-core groups and host states'.¹⁰⁸ According to this logic, it can be said that it was partially the loss of 'Christian-populated territories' in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 that warranted 'the return of Islam' in the following political decisions of the state, but not the Muslims'

¹⁰⁵ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 332.

¹⁰⁶ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 318.

¹⁰⁷ Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁸ Mylonas, *Politics of Nation-Building*, p. 5.

relationship with the non-core groups.¹⁰⁹ This trend, although intermittent as stability in the country could be secured considerably, continued throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The increase in Islam's role in defining the Ottoman identity in its final years, as Hanioglu explains, came in relation to the fear that 'strengthening of the common denominator of citizenship would lead to dangerous demands for representation and would ultimately accelerate separatist processes'. As a result, as Hanioglu puts it, Sultan Abdülhamid II's regime unmistakably 'reintroduced a determining role for Islam in imperial identity'.¹¹⁰ To make things worse, Islam-oriented policies thrived alongside other 'various forms of Turkism' by Ottoman Muslims, which is not inconsistent with the articulation of other nationalist formations in this highly divided society.¹¹¹ As a result, as suggested in the novel, the Arabs' resistance to fighting on the same side as the Turks points to the failure of Abdülhamid's policies of Islamization. Below, the Muslim and non-Muslim divide, the inter-ethnic animosity and the failure of the Islamisation of citizenship will be explored further.

3.6. Treason

As the Muslims experienced a change in their status as opposed to their non-Muslim co-citizens, and as this helped the recognition of their Turkish identities, the non-core groups, to use Mylonas's terminology, were experiencing a different level of confusion of identity. Harris Mylonas in his *The Politics of Nation-Building* asks why Armenians, the most loyal millet in the Ottoman Empire, which did not rebel until the last decade of the nineteenth century, while many other millets had already rebelled, were subject to

¹⁰⁹ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, 'Turkism and the Young Turks, 1889-1908', *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, ed. by Hans-Lukas Kieser (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 3-19 (p. 7).

¹¹⁰ Hanioglu, 'Turkism and the Young Turks', p. 7.

¹¹¹ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 2.

the cruellest treatment.¹¹² In *Birds without Wings*, this assertion has a rather contrasting quality with no notable victimisation of any group and self-explanatory in terms of the confusions of identity of the non-core groups. Instead, the increasing tension and hostility in the Empire among ethnic and religious groups are mentioned indiscriminately:

For many decades there had been troubles in the east of Anatolia. Living separate lives in separate villages, Armenians and other tribesmen had been assiduously at each other's throats, committing against each other the banal but vile atrocities so frequently rehearsed by those who are deeply addicted to the orgasmic pleasures of extreme hatred. Relations were particularly bad between Kurds and Armenians, both convinced of the superiority of their own race and religion [...]. Many Armenians desired an autonomous land for themselves, aspiring to situate it even in places where they were not in the majority. The Kurds were at that time still more or less loyal to the state, and the state itself was too chaotic to impose tolerance or order on these far-flung and undeveloped places, where life had become equally perilous and abject for all races. To this day the Kurds of that region and the descendants of the Armenians will tell identical stories against each other, perhaps the most common being that one had to disguise one's little girls as boys, and women as men. Armenian guerrillas were armed through the charitable efforts of Russian Armenians, and encouraged by Great Britain, whose politicians calculated that an independent Armenian state would constitute an excellent buffer to keep out the Russians.¹¹³

Shortly after this paragraph, de Bernières also brings up the fact that, when the subjects of the empire were declared equal under the new laws of 1908, the conscription of non-Muslims resulted in the Ottoman army being 'filled with reluctant [Armenian] conscripts [...] whose natural aspiration was towards an independent Armenian state'.¹¹⁴ As a result, the precautions taken by the government consisted of the removal of 'all remaining Armenian officers and men from the 3rd Army, and put them to work in labour battalions', which was later followed by Enver Pasa's proposal 'to remove all Armenians from behind Ottoman lines, and replace them with Muslim refugees from

¹¹² Mylonas, *Politics of Nation-Building*, p. 1.

¹¹³ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 303.

¹¹⁴ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 304.

elsewhere’, ending catastrophically with the death of many of those who were removed from their homes.¹¹⁵

The narrator in *Birds without Wings* argues that ‘the first step that led the Armenian people into their great tragedy’ had been the treason of Garo Pastermadjian (aka Karakin Pastirmaciyan, or Armen Garo), a former member of the Ottoman Parliament from Erzurum and also one of the attackers of the Ottoman Bank in 1896.¹¹⁶ According to the narrator, ‘Garo Pastermadjian led most of the Armenian officers and men of the 3rd Army over to the Russian side, returning with them in their campaign of pillage and rapine through the Muslim villages in their path’, which unavoidably shattered the trust of the Ottomans.¹¹⁷ Such instances are placed under the spotlight as examples of destabilising relationships between the central government and the non-core groups, although a rather more nuanced appraisal offered in the novel than this more usual binary approach. In the novel, the increase in the suspicion and reactions towards Armenians across the country following the Russian-Armenian rapprochement is represented through the example of the Armenian apothecary, Levon Krikorian, in Eskibahçe:

Ever since it had become known that bands of Armenians had effectively started a civil war behind the lines on the Russian front, Levon Krikorian and his family had had to put up with small insults. He sometimes heard the words ‘vatan haini’ [‘traitor’] muttered as he passed by, and once there had been stones thrown against his shutters at night.¹¹⁸

When the Hamidiye¹¹⁹ arrives in the town to take the Armenians away, the narrator tells that the Hamidiye were essentially looking for ‘the traitors’, which baffles the

¹¹⁵ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 304.

¹¹⁶ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 304; Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 304.

¹¹⁸ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 305-6.

¹¹⁹ Irregular Cavalry that served Sultan Abdulhamid II.

gendarmes of the town, who later on understand that what the Hamidiye sergeant means by ‘the traitors’ is the Armenians.¹²⁰

The choice of word ‘the traitor’ to describe what is considered as a group tied to the society in an organic way, the lack of any common notion of who the traitors could be, as well as the villainous description of the Hamidiye members, is made by the narrator both to criticise the governmental practices of removing Armenians and to challenge the narratives which level the responsibility of the mistreatment of the Armenians on the Ottoman Turks in equal measures. In the same vein, the blaming and beating of Levon by Greek Constantinos while no one else tries to stop the beating, for the mere fact that Levon is an Armenian, shows that de Bernières’s narrative hinges on the idea that the townspeople, in other words the Ottomans, did not act based on hatred of Turks for Armenians for racial or religious reasons, but because of the inculcation of the idea that the Armenians have now come to be seen as a threat to the community.¹²¹ Levon avoids being beaten to death when he pledges loyalty to the Sultan Padishah and the Empire and announces that he is ‘a loyal Ottoman’.¹²²

Siniša Malešević in his *Identity as Ideology* (2006) examines the popular concept ‘identity’ from the lens of ‘ideology’, another popular concept which, according to the author, has lost its appeal among scholars in recent decades. In his book, Malešević explores the principles of Anthony Smith’s *nationalism*, which will be discussed further below, based on Durkheim’s theories on society in an attempt to discover the scope and the potential of the conjectural understandings of any given social order that are shaped by the ideologies that lay claim to wield the authority of ‘moral norms or superior

¹²⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 306.

¹²¹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 157-162

¹²² de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 161.

knowledge'.¹²³ In doing so, he offers an insight into the motivations of nationalists that animate disparities among cultural forms, branding them as 'ours' and 'theirs'. According to Malešević, the 'specific moral principle' that draws people towards such binary conclusions is to do with 'remain[ing] true to oneself'. Since morality is measured by loyalty to any such group, being true to oneself would refer to what is morally required in terms of the group's distinctive norms, including 'loyalty towards the ancestry'.¹²⁴ In this light, while the rise of nationalism and the resultant disintegration of the Empire caused the Porte to take precautions to prevent any further breakaways by adhering to Ottomanisation policies, these responses from the central government gave way to the confusions of the subjects regarding their loyalty, hence identity. While, as in the example of Armenian Levon's case, such confusions of identity and galvanising inputs provoke a sense of betrayal within the community, this moral inclination, at the same time, facilitates the transition to nationalism, both Ottomanism and other nationalist ideologies.

Émile Durkheim views society as an entity with 'a superior form of collective character' which 'overpowers individual will' for the merit of constituting the foundation where 'rules of ethical behaviour' emerge.¹²⁵ The disposition of the members of society to such morals shows their 'attachment' to any such group, thus distinguishing it as a society with its own unique characteristics.¹²⁶ In other words, 'morality begins where there begins an attachment to a group of any kind'.¹²⁷ In de Bernières's novel, the issue of group attachment based on morality is exemplified by two specific occasions of

¹²³ Siniša Malešević, *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 4.

¹²⁴ Malešević, *Identity as Ideology*, p. 120.

¹²⁵ Malešević, *Identity as Ideology*, p. 119.

¹²⁶ Émile Durkheim, *Durkheim on Politics and the State*, ed. by Anthony Giddens (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 157.

¹²⁷ Durkheim, *Durkheim on Politics and the State*, p. 156-157.

public display in the town's *meydan*, the plaza. Both during the stoning of Rustem Bey's wife by the townspeople of all religions for committing adultery, and during the second public incident, in which the apothecary Levon gets beaten by Constantinos as the onlookers cheer him, the role of group attachment determining people's interactions with each other becomes visible.¹²⁸ In the first case, with men stoning the adulteress regardless of their religion, the common norms of the public are established primarily based on the loyalty of townspeople to the aga and to the patriarchal social system, but not to a particular religion or ethnicity. As opposed to Levon's Armenian identity, Leonidas's Greek propaganda does not attract as much attention, because Levon is now susceptible to being branded as betraying the Ottomans. This difference emerges as a result of the empire-wide experience with the Armenian insurgency and the war against the Russian Empire.

Some of the divisions among the Armenian population have been examined in the second chapter. De Bernières centres his focus on the Ottoman collective identity and its rupture, rather than on contradictions among various types of Armenian national-belonging, as Jenny White does. In the matter of Levon, even the modern aga Rustem Bey is driven to feeling betrayed by and becoming resentful about the Armenians because of 'the treachery and perfidy of these citizens who had turned against the Sultan, deserted the army and then attacked it from behind'. Therefore, he is depicted to be 'not at all sympathetic to the victims', and 'scowling at every Armenian he passed in the street, resenting them suddenly for the first time in his life'.¹²⁹ 'However', tells the narrator, Rustem Bey 'was intelligent enough to know that none of these particular

¹²⁸ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 112.

¹²⁹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 309-10.

Armenians had ever been near the front, and none of them had ever attacked anyone, from behind or otherwise'.¹³⁰

Malešević, writing about contemporary notions of nationalism, holds that 'if one looks only inwardly for the psychological or even biological basis of "identity claims" one may miss the outward structural, historical and ideological underpinnings of how, when and why such claims exist at the particular moment in time'.¹³¹ Accordingly, when nationalism is considered, the thesis of group belonging and the notion of betrayal can only exist in the presence of other historical and ideological preconditions. Especially in the case of the Ottoman Empire, the fact that a major clash emerged among different religious and ethnic groups under the sweep of modern nationalism, according to Smith, was due to the lack of *ethnie*-oriented polity since the state polity was based on the religion-based *millet* system, and because of the fact that the divergent *ethnies* did not necessarily live on 'clearly demarcated territories'.¹³² In other words, '[i]n the Ottoman empire', says Smith, it was 'difficult for Ottoman elites to envisage a "Turkish" nation' because in Anatolia 'Arabs, Armenians, Greek Orthodox and other *ethnie*' lived with the 'Turkic-speaking, Islamic core'.¹³³

During the transition from millet-and-religion-based understanding of community to ethnicity-based nationhood, as Paraskevas Konortas argues, nationalism did not have the same effect it did in urban locations; in other words, nationalism was predominantly an urban progression because its spread in the countryside was slower due to the lack of organisation, networks of education and press, and other related reasons; therefore, the

¹³⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 310.

¹³¹ Malešević, *Identity as Ideology*, p. 5.

¹³² Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 1986; repr. 1988), p. 143.

¹³³ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 143.

effect of nationalism could not be discerned forthwith throughout the empire.¹³⁴ Furthermore, in rural areas, the role of loyalty and identification have an even more personal value during such transitions. For instance, in certain groups, especially in closed, rural communities, while identifying oneself with the core or a non-core group may mean exerting a strict restraint to breaking away from certain established ethical norms, those who do not comply with the practices of such groups may thence carry the risk of being declared immoral. An example of social aggravation that is analogical with the beating of the Armenian apothecary by his fellow townspeople in *Birds Without Wings* can be found in *The Stone Woman* by Tariq Ali. The death of Dmitri, the Greek school inspector in *The Stone Woman* who is indeed married to a Muslim woman, comes as a result of a commotion which was precipitated by ‘the Young Turks, who saw all Greeks as the agents of Britain, Russia and France. These were the people who wanted to create a pure and modern empire’.¹³⁵ These two examples, alongside the fear of Kamil Pasha in *The Winter Thief* that his loyalty would be questioned if the truth about his role in the rescue of the socialist Armenian group came out, tell similar stories of the bumpy process of transition from communities that primarily function based on a consensus of a variety of religious and traditional values to nations with unified homogenous ‘national’ values.¹³⁶

3.7. In Defence of Ottoman Citizenship

The gradual transition from millet-religion based understanding of community to secular nation came not only as a result of rising nationalism, but also as a result of a series of reforms and the evolution of the relevance and significance assigned to religion

¹³⁴ Paraskevas Konortas, “Epilogue”, *State Nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire, Greece and Turkey: Orthodox and Muslims, 1830-1945*, ed. by Fortna, Benjamin C., Stefanos Katsikas, Dimitris Kamouzis, and Paraskevas Konortas (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 221-225 (p. 224).

¹³⁵ Tariq Ali, *The Stone Woman* (London: Verso, 2000; repr. in paperback 2001), p. 109.

¹³⁶ Jenny White, *The Winter Thief* (USA: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), p. 386.

in the administration of the Empire. Within this context, as Benjamin Fortna points out, the reforms in the nineteenth century had also the ‘unintended’ consequence of alienating the millet groups from each other.¹³⁷ For instance, with the *Islahat Fermani* of 1856, the Ottoman government attempted to reify the official resolution of the first half of the nineteenth century for the centralisation of power; and, in line with this resolution, it was also stressed in the decree that no subject of the Empire would be ‘inferior to another class, on account of their religion, language, or race’. According to Fortna, this latter decision came ‘at the expense of “millet” or national sub-identities’, since originally the intention was to uphold ‘the still somewhat’ immature ‘sense of Ottomanism (i.e., the collective allegiance of all subjects, regardless of religion, language or ethnicity to Istanbul)’.¹³⁸ By enforcing such rules, the Porte also intended ‘to assuage the growing insistence of the Great Powers for “reforms” that would in practice improve the condition of the non-Muslim subjects of the empire.’¹³⁹ As Fortna argues, this was ‘an internally contradictory’ act, and wound up ‘reinforcing the very particular national (‘millet’) identifications that it had set out to soften and to weaken the imperial institutions such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate on which it depended’.¹⁴⁰ The edict, according to Fortna, ultimately, evoked ‘a heightened awareness of the very communitarian boundaries that it had sought to blur.’¹⁴¹

Michelle Campos, in her *Ottoman Brothers*, in which she explores ‘the meaning of liberty, citizenship, and public life in the last Islamic empire’, proposes an alternative perspective to the ethnicity-centred and ‘Islamic core’-oriented definitions of Ottoman

¹³⁷ Benjamin C. Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after: From a state of “nations” to “nation-states”’, *State Nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire, Greece and Turkey: Orthodox and Muslims, 1830-1945*, ed. by Benjamin C. Fortna, Stefanos Katsikas, Dimitris Kamouzis and Paraskevas Konortas (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-12 (p. 9).

¹³⁸ Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after’, p. 9.

¹³⁹ Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after’, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after’, p. 9.

¹⁴¹ Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after’, p. 9.

identity.¹⁴² She challenges the idea that ethnic identities in the Empire were strictly demarcated. In her book, she also questions the generic belief that the inevitability of ethnic nationalism was the reason for the Ottoman Empire's dispersal.¹⁴³ Campos points out that empires like the Ottoman Empire were seen by nineteenth-century Western travellers and diplomats as the 'prisons of nations' as it was believed that empires could no longer meet the demands of the time.¹⁴⁴ She criticises the claims that in a period in which the 'homogenous nation-state' was so 'idealized and normalized', the Ottoman Empire, with its 'dozens of religious sects, languages, and ethnic groups' proved to be an 'anachronism' for Europe.¹⁴⁵ The perspective of nineteenth-century Western nationalism essentially challenges the applicability of the notions of *liberty*, *equality* and *fraternity* to the heterogeneity of an empire, assuming that these ideals could only be accomplished in less diverse conditions.

As opposed to the various currents of national consolidation, Campos claims that, after the Young Turk Revolution, the change of regime to democratic monarchy reinforced the definition and actions of the Ottoman Empire as a united nation with members with a common historical past. The Ottoman nation could be in the league of modern nations since subsisting as an 'imperial collective' required the collective effort that involved the building up of the language and the cultural association which gave a state the form of a 'traditional' nation and its people the notion of nationalism.¹⁴⁶ In her criticism of nationalist narratives, Campos highlights that such an intrinsic imperial change was ignored in most of the discourses of nationalism of the late Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁷ Campos calls such nationalism 'civic Ottomanism', and defines it as 'the premise that all

¹⁴² Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴⁶ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁷ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 5.

citizens, irrespective of religion or ethnicity, were partners in the imperial project'.¹⁴⁸

Hence, the delimiting attitude regarding the 'Islamic core', according to Campos, is overcome by this 'universalizing discourse' of Ottomanism, even if it was kept alive temporarily and for a short space of time after the revolution.¹⁴⁹

Campos views 'the Ottoman nation, not simply as an "imagined" or discursive imperial community, but as a shared field of social and political interaction and contestation'.¹⁵⁰

De Bernières, too, sees 'imperial multiethnicity', to use Campos's words, 'not solely as a significant component of imperial collapse or a predictor of rising nationalisms', but as a uniting aspect of communal fellowship and its own testing mechanism, which ascertain imperial 'collective belonging, and identity', and even 'political membership'.¹⁵¹ A representative of this perspective, the Greek nationalist Leonidas's father, incarnates the unionist perspective as an Ottoman gentleman.¹⁵² Unlike his son, he has faith in the future of the Ottoman Empire, and reminds his son of how Turkish rule no longer means, if it ever did, Turkish domination in the social hierarchy; social classes are permeable, and Turks labour as well as govern:

'We are all Ottomans now. Times have changed. Anyway, look at all my servants. What are they? They are all Turks. Look at Georgio's servants. They are all Turks. Who digs the roads and carries away the night-soil? Turks. Who slaves in the fields to grow the produce that we sell on? Turks. Don't tell me we are governed by Turks, when the evidence to the contrary is right in front of your eyes. What would we do without them? How can a son of mine be so stupid? That's what I want to know! And you want to destroy everything we are!'¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 6-7.

¹⁵² As Leonidas's father exemplifies, population diversity was inevitable in an empire. The Ottomans did not separate or contained communities according to religion nor did they attempt to force or blend different religions together. Moreover, the distinctions in the Empire were not only religion-based. Campos narrates how Western powers wanted more European and Westernised Christian communities, especially around the port cities. Because of that, 'non-Muslims' socioeconomic position was far more stable and enviable than that of Muslim peasants and workers in the empire' (Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, pp. 8-9).

¹⁵³ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 259.

It is a common phenomenon that, like Leonidas's father, many of the local businessmen, the clergy and the 'military chieftains' remained loyal to the Empire during Greek nation-building, primarily because they enjoyed their powerful and privileged status within the empire. Özkırmılı and Sofos argue that these elite people were seen by Greek nation-builders as indifferent and sometimes hostile to the nationalist cause as they felt 'threatened by the whole project of Neohellenic Enlightenment'.¹⁵⁴ The need to modernise the Greek society was urged and acted upon 'by the mainly diasporic Greek intelligentsia and the emerging mercantile middle class' who 'supported and cultivated' the promulgation of 'a perception of Greekness'.¹⁵⁵ Despite being a politically non-governing member of the elite, Leonidas's merchant father argues that he is in a position of authority and power, while the Turks, in this context, by not being part of the wealthy elite, do not possess any ruling power. The quotation above, therefore, presents a counter image to the idea that the non-Christians constituted a repressed section of the Ottoman society, and presents a response to the view that the Empire was ruled by the Islamic core. This conflicting opinion presents a good example of the changing understanding of what being an Ottoman meant, particularly after the sultanic decrees of 1839 and 1856. The 1856 Imperial Rescript was aimed at 'promoting an equal discourse among subjects of the empire' and acted as a harbinger of the process of turning non-Muslims from *zimmi* to *teba*.¹⁵⁶ In any event, it was declared in the Ottoman Law of Nationality of 1869 that 'all subjects of the empire are without distinction called Ottomans, irrespective of whatever religion they

¹⁵⁴ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁵ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 25; While the Greek intelligentsia constituted a small fraction, it had an Orientalist angle: They were using the arguments of backwardness as a weapon in the fight against the Ottoman rulers.

¹⁵⁶ *Zimmi*: Non-Muslims under the protection of a Muslim ruler; *teba*: subject; Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 61.

profess'.¹⁵⁷ Leonidas, on the other hand, despite these political and social changes, does not show any belief in having an Ottoman identity; he only adopts a Greek identity. Regardless, in the novel, both the *teba* status of the Greek and the idea that Asia Minor and Constantinople rightfully belonged to the Greeks are contested with the onset of the Great War.

In his practical presentation of the role of 'ethnic nationalisms in the breakup of the Ottoman Empire', de Bernières demonstrates in his individual stories of what befalls the townspeople of Eskibahce the challenges to the concept of universal imperial citizenship. In this sense, de Bernières does not follow the genre of nationalist literature that celebrates Turkification or Hellenization, which at the same time anticipates the empire's termination; rather, he embraces the Ottoman diversity and the subtle variations between the rulers and the ruled, as well as the winners and the losers. Ethnic nationalism like that of Leonidas is a determinant only so long as these groups are supported and instigated by forces that arise outside the individual communities. The characters are described as unsuspecting and unassuming of any threat when the sergeant of the Hamidiye troop informs the Armenian residents that they would be 'relocated in the interests of the Sultan Caliph and for their own protection'.¹⁵⁸ Despite an earlier beating of Levon the apothecary in the *meydan*, the centre of the town, Gadar, Levon's wife, lacking necessary cynicism, thinks that her local community would protect her: 'Why should we go? We don't need protecting. No one will hurt us here'.¹⁵⁹ However, when the news that the Hamidiye is sent to transport them comes out, Gadar realises the seriousness of the situation, and says: 'Who would protect us now?

¹⁵⁷ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁸ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 306.

¹⁵⁹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 306.

Everyone calls us traitors. No one wants us any more!’¹⁶⁰ Gadar seeks Leyla Hanım’s help, although in vain as Rustem Bey is not in the town. In her plea, Gadar tells Leyla Hanım: ‘Our families came here all the way from Van thirty years ago, just to get away from people like them. They’re tribesmen, horsemen, Kurds. They’re savages, and they hate us’.¹⁶¹ This example suggests that, despite the commitment of many of the subjects in the imperial unity, ‘pan-Ottoman identification’, as Benjamin Fortna puts it, ‘inevitably, failed to satisfy everyone’.¹⁶²

Özkırmılı and Sofos mention that the use of ‘[e]thnic designations such as “Serbs”, “Bulgarians”, “Greeks” or “Turks”’ during the rule of the Empire was frequently devoid of ‘ethnic connotations’ even if they carried ‘reference to linguistic groups or ethnicity’.¹⁶³ The reason for this is that ‘[f]or many, locality remained a strong anchor of identity throughout the nineteenth century and even in the twentieth’.¹⁶⁴ Accordingly, the Ottomans found their loyalty in their ‘immediate locality, be it a town or a village, or a religious community’; therefore, ‘the concept of a fatherland’ represented little to their identification.¹⁶⁵ It was only as the concepts of ‘empire and nation’ gained increased prominence in the empire, the project of nation-building thrived.¹⁶⁶ The famous example of the battleships that the British government failed to deliver to the Ottoman government can be regarded as a representation of this booming national identification and highlights the increased sense of awareness of membership of the Ottoman nation among common citizenry. This incident is usually described as the breaking point of the relationship between the English and the Ottomans, which welded

¹⁶⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 307.

¹⁶¹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 308.

¹⁶² Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after’, p. 9.

¹⁶³ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, pp. 16-7.

¹⁶⁴ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, pp. 16-7.

¹⁶⁵ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 44.

¹⁶⁶ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 16-7.

the relations between Germany and the Ottoman Empire after Germany lent support to the latter, leading to the Ottoman involvement in the Great War.

In both *Birds* and Dennis Wheatley's *The Eunuch of Stamboul* (1935), it is mentioned that disappointment at national grassroots level can lead to catastrophic results.¹⁶⁷ From the perspective of Reouf, a member of a secret organisation in modern Turkey, which Swithin Destime, the protagonist of *Eunuch*, is attempting to infiltrate, the incident of the battleships was to blame for the participation of Turkey in the war:

‘In 1914,’ said Reouf, ‘Great Britain was building two big warships for Turkey. When the crisis came they were ready for delivery *and they had been paid for* – yet, at the urgent request of the Russian Foreign Office Britain detained them in her yards. On August 4th the British Navy was the stronger by two battle cruisers of the latest type but she had alienated the whole of the Turkish nation. Those ships had not been built and payed for by budget money but by patriotic subscription to which even the widow and the orphan had contributed their mite. Turkey might have been kept neutral but for that stupidity. As it was even the children felt they had been robbed by Britain and the nation stood behind Enver Pasha's pact with Germany to a man’.¹⁶⁸

In this passage by an English author, attention is drawn to deteriorating English-Ottoman relations and the Ottoman involvement in the Great War as a result.

Wheatley's character Reouf recommends not taking lightly the patriotic feelings of the common people, which were ignited and turned against the English by the battleship incident. In *Birds*, it is also mentioned along similar lines by the narrator that ‘the British are withholding them because Churchill has not been deceived about Enver's intentions as war breaks out’.¹⁶⁹ The narrator in *Birds* also adds that ‘two German battleships synchronicously turn up, [...] and Germany becomes ever more popular with the Turkish people’.¹⁷⁰ In Wheatley's novel, Reouf links the inability of the Ottomans to avoid the war with the illiteracy and financial hardship of its people, and

¹⁶⁷ Dennis Wheatley, *The Eunuch of Stamboul* (London: Arrow Books, 1935; repr. 1975).

¹⁶⁸ Wheatley, *The Eunuch of Stamboul*, pp. 84-5

¹⁶⁹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 283.

¹⁷⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 283.

establishes a connection between their conditions of poverty and their feeling of national disgrace: 'in the low state of education in general in Turkey before the War, the people could not be expected to appreciate anything except that they had been deprived of those two glorious ships, paid for by self-denial and the nation's pocket money'.¹⁷¹ The display of loyalty to Ottomanness is revealed in relation to personal attachment to a central cause, which is seen as exposed by the overcircumspection of the English towards the Ottomans. In addition to Turkish-British diplomatic relations, Wheatley's *The Eunuch of Stamboul* sheds light on Turkish nation-building and the preservation of the nation, foreshadowing some of the central concerns of de Bernières, including the failure of the Ottomans to prevail as a nation.

3.8. The Politics of Nation-Building

Ernest Renan classifies states as those which are 'individual historical units', like France, England, Germany and Russia¹⁷², and those which have not reached their national unities, like Turkey [that is, the Ottoman Empire], with subgroups such as the Turks, the Slavs, the Greeks, the Armenians, the Arabs, the Syrians, and the Kurds.¹⁷³ Agreeing with Renan's definition, Ernest Gellner also adds that the Ottoman Empire, unlike its precedents in Anatolia, did not become 'an ethnic melting-pot'.¹⁷⁴ In recent studies, the Ottoman Empire has generally been praised for adopting policies that preserved the faith and culture of their subjects while their peers in Europe have been criticised for using assimilation policies further to expand their imperial influence on their colonised territories.¹⁷⁵ With the rise of nationalism, empires such as the Ottoman

¹⁷¹ Wheatley, *The Eunuch of Stamboul*, p. 85.

¹⁷² Ernest Renan, 'What Is a Nation?', trans. by Martin Thom, in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 41-55 (p. 43).

¹⁷³ Renan, 'What Is a Nation?', pp. 41-55 (p. 44).

¹⁷⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge University Press, 1987; repr. 1988, 1993), p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ see Martin Deming Lewis, 'One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French Colonial Policy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4.2 (January 1962), pp. 129-153; Saliha

Empire and Austro-Hungarian Empire, which contained diverse population groups, came under an intense pressure from ethnic political groups within their political borders. In order to prevent the collapse of the empire and the disintegration that would follow, the Ottomans attempted to appeal to the ‘ideology’ of Ottomanism, which ‘aimed at promoting universal loyalty to the dynasty and equality under the law for non-Muslims’ with the aim of ‘prevent[ing] the spread of new nationalist ideologies among non-Muslim subject populations as well as to neutralize European interventions on their behalf’.¹⁷⁶ The formation of an Ottoman identity in the early twentieth century inevitably encompassed everyone from each of the ethnic groups, previously called *millets*. Today, this ideology of Ottomanism, which inevitably failed to sustain the adherence of the imperial subjects, is also seen as an attempt to form a genuine national identity; not only as a strategy to save the empire, but to turn its subjects into respected citizens. The research focus of Michelle Campos’s *Ottoman Brothers* has been whether the Ottoman identity, as a nation-state identity, even for a temporary period, could be established and embraced. Informed by Ernest Renan’s famous pioneering conclusion that nation is a group of people who agreed to live together, this is a valid question to be posed.

In *Birds without Wings*, despite the celebration of shared traditions and habits across religions through the accounts and the stories of the main characters of Eskibahçe, this optimistic view on Ottoman nationalism and the formulation of Ottoman citizenship is at times challenged. The lack of a united Ottoman nation is also observed through de Bernières’s account of Mustafa Kemal’s biography. In the novel, ‘[t]he handsome Enver’ is reported to have ‘proclaim’ed from a hotel balcony ‘the new policy of

Belmessous, *Assimilation and Empire: Uniformity in French and British Colonies, 1541-1954* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013)

¹⁷⁶ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 61.

Ottomanism’, declaring ‘no more special privileges for particular ethnic and religious groups’ and ‘all obligations and rights are the same for everybody’.¹⁷⁷ However, instead of fully celebrating such developments, the Revolution and the new government are criticised by the narrator from the perspective of Mustafa Kemal, who finds Enver Pasha ‘vain and punctilious’ and the ‘the hocus-pocus’ of the new Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) ‘very tedious’.¹⁷⁸ The narrator also calls the revolution ‘a half-baked affair’ as it is viewed to have ‘no real plan and no real ideology beyond the intention to restore the empire to its previous strength’.¹⁷⁹ The narrator further demonstrates his reasons for why all the achievements of the CUP would come undone:

The revolutionaries do not comprehend the power and seduction of the new nationalisms. The Christians are not necessarily pleased at having earned the right to do compulsory military service and become free Ottoman citizens, and very soon the Young Turks find that they have accelerated the disintegration of the empire instead of arresting it. Bulgaria declares independence. Crete declares union with Greece. Austria illegally and opportunistically annexes Bosnia and Herzegovina, thereby setting in train the dismal events that will distort the entire course of European history for more than a hundred years.¹⁸⁰

The excerpt above taken from de Bernières’s novel evinces the narrator’s conviction that nationalism is an overriding and corrosive power, and after nation-building starts, it arrives at the expense of other peoples and nations.

The destructive process of national ‘awakening’, which was what Ozkirimli and Sofos call a ‘belated but nonetheless inevitable’ development in the Ottoman Empire, ran in parallel to the processes of modernisation and democratisation that were officially initiated with the reform edicts and the 1908 Revolution, and presented additional challenges to Ottoman national consolidation.¹⁸¹ As the Young Turk movement tried to

¹⁷⁷ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 147.

¹⁷⁸ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 147-8.

¹⁷⁹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 148.

¹⁸⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 148.

¹⁸¹ Özkirimli and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 6-7.

prevent the culmination of the demise of the Empire by reinforcing and consolidating the centralisation efforts that were already in place in the nineteenth century, it created divides among the population it sought to bring together. As Benjamin Fortna suggests, such efforts were directed towards ‘remov[ing] what has been referred to as “empire of difference”’, organisation of the state in a way that offers legitimate rule over diverse populations and replacing it ‘with a linguistically, politically and in many cases ethnically homogeneous bureaucratic structure that would cement loyalty to the empire qua nation state led by a core group who were animated by Muslim (and later Turkish) nationalism’.¹⁸² The chosen path of Turkish Muslim nationalism not only tightened the physical boundaries of the Empire and alienated Muslim groups within the Empire such as the Albanians and the Arabs, but also accentuated complications ‘in eliminating distinctions made on religious, ethnic or linguistic grounds during what would later be seen as this period of imperial to national transition’.¹⁸³

Among contemporary theories that set out to interpret the phenomenon of nationalism, *ethnosymbolism* stands out because of the groundwork Anthony Smith provides for the definition of *nationalism* through his rendition of nucleus formations and affinities of nations called *ethnies* – ‘a named community of shared origin myths, memories and one or more element(s) of common culture, including an association with a specific territory’.¹⁸⁴ Anthony Smith sees *ethnie* as the bedrock of a *nation*, which he defines, similarly to *ethnie*, as ‘a named community possessing an historic territory, shared myths and memories, a common public culture and [exclusive to the definition of *nation*] common laws and customs’.¹⁸⁵ While Smith celebrates *ethnies*, nations and

¹⁸² Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after’, p. 4; Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁸³ Fortna, ‘The Ottoman Empire and after’, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Anthony D. Smith, ‘When is a Nation’, *Geopolitics*, 7.2 (2002), pp. 5-32, p.15.

¹⁸⁵ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*; Smith, ‘When is a Nation’, p. 15.

nationalism, Louis de Bernières's chapters on the biography of Mustafa Kemal portray a sceptical, and even a hostile, image of the true essence of nationalism:

The child is born into a world where the seeds of Nazism have been long sewn, and are waiting only for the dark rain. Stirred up by Austria–Hungary and by Russia, the various peoples of the Balkans and the Near East are abrogating their long coexistence and codependence. Their hotheads and ideologues are propounding doctrines of separateness and superiority. The slogans are ‘Serbia for the Serbs, Bulgaria for the Bulgarians, Greece for the Greeks, Turks and Jews out!’ There has been interbreeding for centuries, but no one stops to ask what exactly a Serb or a Macedonian or a Bulgarian or a Greek actually is. It is enough that there are sufficient opportunists calling themselves freedom fighters and liberators, who will exploit these ideas in order to become bandits and local heroes in the war of all against all. Mustafa is born into a world where law and order are fast collapsing, where looting has become more profitable than working, where the arts of peace are becoming more and more unpracticable, and personal tolerance makes less and less difference.¹⁸⁶

The political climate in the above paragraph hints at the cataclysmic nature of nationalism, which is nurtured by the perennialist rhetoric. As the Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian or Greek identities are consolidated, freedoms are won by pursuing nationalist movements, and the empire is also stripped of its identity as the ‘empire of difference’.¹⁸⁷

The critique of ethnosymbolism adheres to the idea that *ethnies* are social constructs, and similar to nations, they are invented or conceived by ‘cultural practices established over time’ by politicians or other actors involved in nation-building practices.¹⁸⁸

According to Özkırmılı and Sofos, the problem with ethnosymbolism is that it promotes ‘retrospective ethnicization’ by ‘ethniciz[ing] the past, a past that is much more complex, contradictory and ambiguous than we are led to believe’.¹⁸⁹ They believe that the nationalists make use of the past through such expedients to the benefit of ‘their struggle to define the nation’ in order to make nationalist notions ‘intelligible to the

¹⁸⁶ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 16-7.

¹⁸⁷ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*.

¹⁸⁸ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 10.

¹⁸⁹ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 10.

reader' or 'to the consumer of the ethnosymbolist discourse'.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, they also maintain that, '[n]ames such as "Hellenes" or "Turks" may exist for many centuries, but their meanings and the social realities behind them undergo rapid and sometimes quite radical transformations in time'.¹⁹¹

The political desire to reaffirm the national character unavoidably leads to a retrospective search for certain identifications and attachments. This was common in the case of the French *patriots* who 'harked back to Roman virtue and glory, as well as their "Gallic ancestors"'.¹⁹² Likewise, in their attempt to escape the claims of backwardness of their contemporary national identities, the Greeks were using models from Europe that looked back in time to their ancient history. When the Ottoman Empire failed to establish an Ottoman nation, the Turks followed the example of the Greeks and sought to have a direct lineage. The reasons for this were in direct relation to these nations' image of themselves in the eyes of the world, especially the Western world. In the words of Özkırmılı and Sofos, 'both Greek and Turkish nationalisms developed an ambivalent relationship with the past, as it constituted a resource [...] for instilling national pride and establishing beyond doubt the diachronic existence of the nation, making it an acceptable member of the civilized world'.¹⁹³ Anthony Smith maintains that in order to create emotional bondage and achieve a national unity, history has to be utilised:

'History' becomes the focal point of nationalism and nation-formation. The 'rediscovery' or 'invention' of history is no longer a scholarly pastime; it is a matter of national honour and collective endeavour. Through the tracing of our history, 'we' discover (or 'rediscover') who we are, whence we came, when we emerged, who our ancestors were, when we were great and glorious, who our heroes are, why we declined [...] But the rediscovery of the 'national self' is not an academic

¹⁹⁰ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 9.

¹⁹¹ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 10.

¹⁹² Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 175.

¹⁹³ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 77.

matter; it is a pressing practical issue, vexed and contentious, which spells life or death for the nationalist project of creating a nation.¹⁹⁴

As scholars of modern nationalism agree, '[n]ationalist projects always look back in time, seeking to demonstrate the "linear time of the nation", its undisputed diachronic presence'.¹⁹⁵ Anthony Smith investigates such linearity and asks whether there's 'a measure of continuity between medieval (or ancient) ethnic or regnal formations and modern nations in at least some cases', and finds his answer in the formulation of 'longue duree' of nations.¹⁹⁶

For ethnosymbolists like Anthony Smith, nationalism is explained through 'the "recurrence of nations" throughout history'.¹⁹⁷ In this approach, recurrence is ascribed a special purpose through the entity of *ethnies* since Smith sees *ethnies* as being subject to 'conflicts' and 'discontinuities', rather than to evolutionary processes of 'ascending [...] inclusiveness of the resident designated populations'.¹⁹⁸ Since the longevity of nations and empires can be explained from this vantage point, the essence of the Ottoman Empire, which would merely depend on the evolutionary variation of land and peoples, would therefore act as a 'prison of nations'.¹⁹⁹ The continuity thesis of nationalism does not conform to inclusive population policies and oftentimes finds its footing in the gaps within the life cycle of states. The focus of ethnosymbolism is therefore directed at 'the relationship between modern nations and premodern *ethnies*' which is linked by the 'recurring nature of ethno-symbolic ties'.²⁰⁰ These national bonds are embedded in the (antecedent) ethnic symbols, memories, myths and values and the (sacred) traditions

¹⁹⁴ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 148.

¹⁹⁵ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 77.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, p. 175.

¹⁹⁷ Smith, 'When is a Nation', p. 13-4.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, 'When is a Nation', p. 14.

¹⁹⁹ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, p. 5.

²⁰⁰ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 7; Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, p. 6.

that are acquired from earlier ages and peoples.²⁰¹ According to Smith, one needs to look at these links in terms of *la longue durée*: ‘a time span which covers many centuries’ with ‘older layers [...] are not wholly erased’ and are tangible in the contemporary society.²⁰² In this approach, ‘the history of large collective cultural identities’ is viewed as one belonging to a nation which ‘continually form[s] and dissolve[s] over different periods and continents’.²⁰³

For this formulation of continuity to work, such national formations over *a longue durée* based on the assumption that nations rest on certain core units called *ethnies* unavoidably begets amnesia regarding certain historical periods that these *ethnies* may have undergone. The idea of ‘discontinuities’ that interrupt an otherwise seamless stream of *ethnies* requires such nationalist histories to disregard the very existence of certain historical periods, and by doing so, reject many of the characteristic changes these periods may have brought to the so-called *ethnies*. De Bernières explores this point by focusing on the character Leonidas, who disregards Ottomanism, considers the Ottomans as oppressors, and ignores any positive qualities worth considering, despite the fact that the Empire had for many years succeeded in maintaining the cultural heritage of various civilisations and traditions that it accommodated. Leonidas’s rejection of the Ottoman identity as part of his own character is seen as a matter of wholesale denial of Ottoman history as playing a big part of the nationalist Greek history. Leonidas’s approach not only illustrates the nationalist thesis of *longue durée*, but also shows how it disregards specific phases of history and the dynamic nature of

²⁰¹ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 7; Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, p. 6.

²⁰² Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 7; Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, p. 6.

²⁰³ Smith, ‘When is a Nation’, pp. 13-4.

national character, embracing only certain facts and episodes and eliminating others in line with the nationalist discourse in question.

In *Birds without Wings*, Leonidas's self-identification with an extraneous motherland can be identified as a typical example of elitist nation-building based on the notion of a *national homeland*. In this type of national engagement, the commitment shown for the non-core groups by the *co-ethnics abroad* and their corresponding demands, in turn, are 'targeted with exclusionary policies by the state whose sovereignty they challenge', which results in radicalising those who already feel excluded.²⁰⁴ A counter-argument to this approach, which reveals the 'shortcomings' of 'the homeland argument' supported by Leonidas, is exhibited by Leonidas's father. He not only sets out to prove that he and his family are well-off and respected people within the Ottoman rule ('Don't tell me we are governed by Turks, when the evidence to the contrary is right in front of your eyes'), but also says that the historical figures Leonidas looks up to have many defects ('How many weeping widows and raped virgins went and thanked [Alexander] for his culture, do you suppose?').²⁰⁵ The emphasised 'ethnic affinity between the external power and the non-core group' is also deemed to be unreliable because of 'the inability to account for the variation in the behavior of the "homeland" over time'.²⁰⁶

The Greek past had been formulated to possess a predominance within the legacy of Renaissance classicism, but such a narrative presented an innate inconsistency and failed to meet the requirements of the project of national historiography, in which local elements proved to be difficult to incorporate into such a narrative. As Özkırmılı and Sofos declare, 'the linear past of the nation was invariably disrupted' not only by 'the

²⁰⁴ Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*, pp. 4-5.

²⁰⁵ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 259-60.

²⁰⁶ Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*, pp. 4-5.

often “unnational” conduct of the Church, the clergy and other elites that dominated the *Rum millet* of the Ottoman Empire’, but also by ‘the establishment of a Christian (not Hellenic) Byzantine empire’, a period known as ‘the “dark” centuries of the Middle Ages’.²⁰⁷ Because of these long and influential phases in history, ‘Korais and his disciples could not account for the severing of modern Greece’s link to classical antiquity’.²⁰⁸ Ozkirimli and Sofos describe the disappointment of the nation-builders of the early nineteenth century, given the social outlook at the time:

And, despite the romantic faith of Greek nationalists and the European Philhellenes alike in the potential of the peasants and shepherds of the Ottoman Empire – identified as the heirs of Pericles, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – to undergo an eye-opening cultural regeneration experience, the situation on the ground remained disappointing for Korais and his like-minded nation-builders. Enthusiasm for the chosen privileged classical past was not forthcoming and probably not one of the priorities of a population that either had no sense of relationship to those who had produced a civilization in these lands almost two millennia ago – a civilization whose most tangible and material remnants were the ruins scattered throughout the Ottoman territories and, often unbeknown to their speakers, a host of vernaculars persevering elements of ancient Greek.²⁰⁹

Following the suit of nation-builders like Korais, Leonidas, possessing romantic notions about the ancient Greece and, even the Byzantine Empire, and longing for the days everyone will speak Greek, tries to awaken nationalist feelings among townspeople. The narrator, on the other hand, gives the bitter taste of Greek actuality through the encounter of Leonidas with the townspeople. Leonidas is amazed by how much of the lives of the people of the town is dominated by superstitious beliefs as he ponders: ‘these are the heirs of Alexander, and Constantine, and Socrates! And they’re no better than children!’²¹⁰ The confusion created by giving a central place to distant past in nationalist imagination can also be traced in *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* (1994). While Italian Captain Antonio Corelli is reflecting on his relationship with Pelagia, his Greek

²⁰⁷ Özkirimli and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 82.

²⁰⁸ Özkirimli and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, p. 82.

²⁰⁹ Özkirimli and Sofos, *Tormented by History*, pp. 82-3.

²¹⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings* p. 84.

lover, he utters some thoughts about the Roman Empire in a similar vein to how Leonidas talks of Byzantium: ‘She [Pelagia] has heard me talking of the new *pax Romana*, the reconstitution of the ancient sway that brought order and peace to all, the longest period of civilisation known to man, and she frowns’.²¹¹ Captain Corelli wants to apologise to Pelagia for the occupation of the island and says ‘it was not my idea, it was not me who stole Ionia’, but he is, regardless, overpowered by the nationalist idea of the *pax Romana*, however guiltless he may be of imperialist ambitions.²¹² In de Bernières’s imagination, nationalism and irredentism can exist in every society and can assume many different forms.

3.9. Enduring Pasts

Among the factors used to establish the longstanding nature of nations, language is an important component to determine the longevity of ethnic groups. As opposed to perennial formulations, modern theories uphold the idea that even if languages in new nations are maintained, they unavoidably transform, so national languages have usually had to be fabricated. In other words, as Eric Hobsbawm suggests, ‘[n]ational languages are [...] almost always semi-artificial constructs’.²¹³ According to Hobsbawm, constructing national languages not only involves the challenge of formulation of grammatical rules or deciding the range and scope of vocabulary in relation to the past and present of the language in question, but also entails choosing a dialect ‘as the base of the standardized and homogenized language’.²¹⁴ In the case of Greece, while

²¹¹ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* (Great Britain: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1994; repr. Great Britain: Minerva, 1995; repr. 1997), p. 250.

²¹² de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 249.

²¹³ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; repr. 2012), p. 55.

²¹⁴ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 54.

Classical Greek was used officially, Attic became the chosen dialect that would have a national reach as the former was found to be impracticable.²¹⁵

Louis de Bernières also makes use of the confusion over the use of Greek language in his novel *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, in which Cephallonia is caught by the conflict brought by the Second World War, and it is occupied by Italian troops.²¹⁶ As the British would like to understand and take control of the situation, they send an English agent to Cephallonia on a mission to provide intelligence on the island. The agent is apparently chosen for his good Greek language skills, with the exception that, when he arrives on the island, he is unable to communicate with the locals. When he introduces himself to the main characters in the novel, the locals, the doctor and his daughter Pelagia, fail to understand in which language the stranger speaks. Not recognising any of the most commonly spoken languages in his speech, they even consider other less likely possibilities, such as a mixture of Romaic, Turkish or Bulgarian, or Katharevousa, Adamantios Korais's failed made-up language. After a great deal of confusion, appalled, they finally realise and decide that the stranger is trying to speak ancient Greek. This realisation startles Pelagia, who 'step[s] back for fear of being in the company of a ghost'.²¹⁷ For the English spy, however, 'it had been an awful burden to be speaking the finest public-school Greek, and not be understood. He had been told that he was the nearest thing to a real Grecophone that could be found under the circumstances'.²¹⁸ What de Bernières is accomplishing here is the exposition of a certain type of mythology via a humorous rehabilitation. As Hobsbawm explains, national languages 'are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be,

²¹⁵ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 55.

²¹⁶ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (Great Britain: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1994; repr. Great Britain: Minerva, 1995; repr. 1997).

²¹⁷ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 275.

²¹⁸ de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 275.

namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind'.²¹⁹ National languages, including those recreated from ancient languages, such as modern Hebrew, are 'almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally [...] virtually invented'.²²⁰

In *Birds without Wings*, too, the admiration for the Greek language is criticised through the figure of Leonidas. When gendarmerie officers arrive in Eskibahce to transport the remainder of Rums to Greece during the population exchanges between Greece and the now newly established Republic of Turkey, Leonidas, an outcast in the town up till that point, comes to the realisation that he has to leave his homeland for the mainland Greece. He beseeches the group of Rum villagers to stay and fight for their ancestors' land, yet he doesn't receive any support because nobody in the crowd understands the purpose of his idealism.²²¹ Not long after it leaves the town, the convoy welcomes Leyla Hanım, born in Ithaka, lives in disguise as Caucasian, and is finally primed to go to her homeland. When she speaks to the group in Greek, the priest and Leonidas try to interpret, but they don't understand modern Greek, and their knowledge of ancient Greek won't help them. Leyla Hanım finally remarks sardonically: 'I am more Greek than any of you. I was born in Ithaca, and you are nothing but a pack of mongrel Turks'.²²² This is a disconcerting sentence which makes one question what being Greek or Turk actually means. It shows that by inciting hatred between Greeks and Muslims, Leonidas and the irredentists actually experience the harsh consequences of their own demands. Through Leonidas's and the town's priest's lack of Greek language skills, de Bernières not only shows the fact that the Ottoman Greeks are no longer like the Greeks

²¹⁹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 54.

²²⁰ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 54.

²²¹ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 529-30.

²²² de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 549.

on the other side of the Aegean Sea, but they are not like the ancient Greeks either. Not only Leonidas's inability to speak modern Greek properly shows this inadequacy, but also the fact that the Greeks' inability in *Captain Corelli* to speak ancient Greek shows the rift between ancient and modern Greeks. By the end of *Birds without Wings*, having a particular national identity, in this case Greekness or Turkishness, becomes a disputable issue.

The modern discourse of nationalism holds that enduring past traditions, memories and symbols are given political significance by nationalist politicians and intellectuals for nationalist projects. Such an arrangement also receives support from social and economic groups that benefit from such developments. For Hobsbawm, from a nationalist perspective, this construction process requires that the 'nation' is recognized 'prospectively' by allowing the creation of nations based on a nationalist programme that 'exists prior to the formation of the nation'.²²³ In the modern view of nationalism, it is maintained that 'nationalism selects, reconfigures and sometimes recreates older traditions and identities in accordance with present concerns'.²²⁴ Such modern theories of nation are suggested in opposition to primordialist views that find 'nations as objective, durable phenomena, the origins of which typically can be traced back to remote antiquity'.²²⁵ Their socially constructed character is the common denominator of modern currents of theories of nationalism. The advocates of the modern interpretation of nationalism uphold that 'human actors' are not only capable of nationalist thought, but they also have the 'compulsion to turn even non-purposeful action into purposive action, that is, to reflect on and rationalize it'. In this way, nationalist actions are given

²²³ Philip L. Kohl, 'Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the Reconstructions of the Remote Past', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27 (1998), pp. 223-46 (p. 226); Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, pp. 9-13.

²²⁴ Özkırmı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 10.

²²⁵ Kohl, 'Nationalism and Archaeology', p. 225.

purpose, ‘a meaning and a direction within particular (and purposeful) hegemonic projects’.²²⁶

It is common in the studies of modern nationalism to address the narratives of the past which are refashioned by the views and interests of nation builders. Anthony Smith takes a different approach from the modernists by assigning authority to certain cultural imprints and symbols and claims that the only way to ‘understand the power exerted by such pasts’ is to make ‘an analysis of collective cultural identities over *la longue durée*’.²²⁷ However, in this way of thinking, claim Özkırmılı and Sofos, when societies are seen as ‘collective cultural identities over *la longue durée*’ and, similarly, when ‘ethnic pasts’ are allowed to ‘help to shape present concerns’, it becomes difficult to avoid presentism.²²⁸ In modern theories of nationalism, as Hobsbawm says, ‘the real "nation" can only be recognized a posteriori’, which means that nation cannot be before nation.²²⁹ In other words, in this way of thinking, it is accepted that in order to create some sense of continuity of a nation, there arises a need to omit or merge some histories, facts and findings. The ethnosymbolic approach, on the other hand, makes it possible to claim that a Greek nation ‘exist[ed] in the later Byzantine Empire, as well as in the subsequent Orthodox *millet* which was led by Greeks and a Greek-speaking clergy’.²³⁰ Such selectiveness of the past narratives and archives prohibits an Ottoman identity from being a part of this linearity; it is seen as disruptive, as having no consequence for Greek identity. The controversy between modernists, such as Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly, and ethnosymbolists is, then, about ‘dating the emergence of the nation’ and the relationship of the nation ‘to pre-modern ethnic communities’.²³¹ On

²²⁶ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 10.

²²⁷ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 8.

²²⁸ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 8.

²²⁹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 9.

²³⁰ Özkırmılı and Sofos, *Tormented by History* p. 8.

²³¹ Malešević, *Identity as Ideology*, p. 118.

the other hand, as Malešević puts it, these two approaches also ‘clash over the question of whether – as ethno-symbolists argue – common values, ideas and beliefs or – as modernists claim – political and economic interests had the upper hand in shaping the direction and intensity of nationalism’, which offers the presentist opposition to the primordial structure.²³²

3.10. Accidental Histories

The focus of *Birds without Wings*, the transition from community to nation, demonstrates the deliberateness of the act of construction of nationhood. As such, Leonidas’s nationalism that idolizes the Byzantine Empire can be ascribed to Smith’s discourse of *longue durée*. Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes that ‘[i]nterpretations of the past become a central feature’ of the strategies that form nationalist movements; in her example, the Japanese national movement was developed as a result of financial and social insecurities and in ‘an effort to ward off the forces of global change by shoring up imperilled imagined communities’.²³³ Louis de Bernières’s comment on history below extends over time and civilisation to explain the recurrent habit of use and abuse of history as a way of empowerment:

Where does it all begin? History has no beginnings, for everything that happens becomes the cause or pretext for what occurs afterwards, and this chain of cause and pretext stretches back to the palaeolithic age, when the first Cain of one tribe murdered the first Abel of another. All war is fratricide, and there is therefore an infinite chain of blame that winds its circuitous route back and forth across the path and under the feet of every people and every nation, so that a people who are the victims of one time become the victimisers a generation later, and newly liberated nations resort immediately to the means of their former oppressors. The triple contagions of nationalism, utopianism and religious absolutism effervesce together into an acid that corrodes the moral metal of a race, and it shamelessly and even proudly performs deeds that it would deem vile if they were done by any other.²³⁴

²³² Malešević, *Identity as Ideology*, p. 118.

²³³ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 7.

²³⁴ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 286.

Here, de Bernières draws attention to the timeworn habit of making poor judgements regarding one's capacity to influence the course of history in a way that benefits the individual in question. The narrator's criticism targets those who are called the 'motor of history', those who are uncompromising about their aspirations and ambitions, and those who do not learn from previous experiences, thus allowing unfavourable past incidents to repeat themselves.²³⁵ As Eric Hobsbawm puts it, 'History is the raw material of nationalistic or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction'.²³⁶

The narrator's criticism in *Birds without Wings* is not merely about the radical application of belief systems, but also, in its core, about rationalism grounded in the Enlightenment. In de Bernières's novel, this essentialism that lacks universalism is embedded in what is seen as the hypocrisy of the so-called idealists and moralists. Historical change is not attributed a noble character, and is deemed vile if it is imposed without any checks and balances. Therefore, change, for the most part, is seen by the narrator more as circumstantial and coincidental than noble. In this sense, the narrator's stance can be viewed in juxtaposition with the hypothesis of Hegel, who believed in the circumstantial, inconclusive and dialectical nature of change.²³⁷

For Hegel, such a change, driven by imperfect agencies who remained so even after the French Revolution because they possessed the knowledge of freedom in the abstract²³⁸, allowed for the next stage of change to happen until perfection is achieved. The traversing of a path to the next stage that culminates in the perfect state is not a valid notion in the novel, which sees history more in cyclical than in linear terms. Like

²³⁵ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 131.

²³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), p. 5.

²³⁷ Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Pearson Education, 2008; repr. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 81.

²³⁸ Leonidas represents this aspect in *Birds without Wings*.

Giambatti Vico, the narrator establishes a pattern of human nature, which comes about as a result of human frailty as Hegel would put it, but at the same time, unlike the defenders of the Enlightenment teleology based on the idea of progress,²³⁹ the narrator leaves much to chance and decay. Therefore, the way the narrator in *Birds without Wings* sees historical process is neither linear nor incisively and uncontrollably random. He understands the motivations of people for progress, but as in Hegel's dialectic, he sees imperfections in their plans, which, in the narrator's world view, are not necessarily achieved. So even if Leonidas is considered to act as a 'motor of history', his aspirations are seen by the narrator as flawed.²⁴⁰ Historical change, for the narrator, does not necessarily happen in a progressive, successional and linear way, but instead, it happens both consciously and randomly, with contingencies and setbacks. Even if the flawed nature of such idealisms can be recognised, ultimately it is mankind that is flawed, according to the narrator, and regardless of the number of years that have passed since the French Revolution, such flaws will surface at every turn of history, perfecting nothing and freeing no one. In the final analysis, in the novel there is no 'enlightened bureaucracy' defending the higher values of humanity and perfecting the conditions of life as there is no end to history.²⁴¹

The way history is construed is to a great extent determined by the way the role of causality in the long term is perceived. When employing history in the service of politics or in other social disciplines, the precedence given to causality determines the narrative, establishing, in the meantime, an ethical standpoint. It therefore becomes possible to contemplate whether an over-analysis or use of history allows its exploitation and abuse in contemporary politics or whether a deficient reading of events

²³⁹ like Condorcet

²⁴⁰ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 131.

²⁴¹ Iggers and Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, p. 81.

more often causes the corruption of history. According to this line of thought, when precedence is given an inordinate weight, interpretation of history becomes as salient as actively making history. Such debates about assigning history as the highest judge in making claims about the future find ample space in Louis de Bernières's novels. Eskibahce presents an example for the maxim of Arnold Toynbee, who is famous for his determination to reject chaos and look for meaning in history, that '[t]he contact of civilisations has always been, and will always continue to be, a ruling factor in human progress and failure'.²⁴² Eskibahce, or *land* in general, acts as a conduit for nationalists', and in this case Leonidas's, ambitions, acting as a site of convergence for history, rather than a meeting point of history. Eskibahce acts as an affirmation of the idea that becoming a community depends on the history of the land itself. The *contact zone*, for actors such as Leonidas, also encompasses an area of hostility, where relations are seen from the point of view of 'asymmetrical relations of power' – relations of 'domination and subordination'.²⁴³ In the novel, not only is history viewed from a contemporary perspective, but also the contribution of history to the making of history and its representation in writing are studied in a critical, even antithetical manner: History can be a source of benevolent and respectful relations in a community, or rather, it can constrain the push for violent strife.

De Bernières provides an alternative to the idealist stance that is informed by the perspectives of linear history. By doing so, the author also looks for answers to some of the questions of what or who makes and constitutes history. The chapter called 'Fritz and Moritz Accidentally Change History' forms a case in point, in which de Bernières

²⁴² Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, p. xxviii.

²⁴³ Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession* (1991), pp. 33-40 (p. 34); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992; Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003), p. 4.

discusses the idea that history actually does not happen unequivocally (with precision) in view of the results of certain actions.²⁴⁴ In this chapter, on a nice day, King Alexander of the Kingdom of Greece goes out for a walk taking his dog, Fritz, with him. According to the narrator, the King, who is passionate about cars, decides to visit the palace vet at his house to see if the vet has any new foreign magazines about cars. The narrative, in the manner of story-telling rather than a historical account, continues in the present tense: ‘Suddenly King Alexander hears barking and screaming. He breaks into a run, and finds his dog in a frenzy, attempting to devour a Barbary ape that is tied to a chain near the house of the vet’. At this point, the narrator ponders the impossibility of having a certain knowledge of what actually happened at the time, leaving gaps in the real causes of certain incidents in history. He narrates one account, according to which the apes were given to the vet by a tavern owner, who had received them from Prince Christopher, the crown prince. Another account explains how Prince Christopher elucidates the facts by giving his own account, according to which, ‘the apes belonged to a vineyard keeper whose vineyard the King happened to be passing’. The narrator, then, after mentioning how this subjectivity causes ‘the impossibility of historical accuracy’, makes further sardonic remarks as to the extent of knowledge we actually may or may not have:

one can only be certain that the grapes of the vineyard, if it was really a vineyard, and if it was really there, and if the King was really passing it, would have been producing grapes for Dekeleia wine, since in that area no other kind of grape was grown.²⁴⁵

In all its finality, the course of the history changes when:

Fritz bit Moritz and Moritz bit the King and the King died, and so there is a new king, who happens to be a previously deposed one who is detested vehemently by all the Allies. The loss of Allied support means the loss of the war.

²⁴⁴ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 481-491.

²⁴⁵ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 483.

Moritz, the Barbary ape, and Fritz, the German shepherd dog, will have successfully altered the entire course of Greek and Turkish history, but they themselves will retire modestly into oblivion and obscurity, they will leave neither simian nor canine memoirs explaining their side of the story. No one will know what happened to either of them in the end, or what would have happened if Moritz had not bitten the King.²⁴⁶

While Leonidas clings to a totalitarian way of interpreting history, a way of interpreting history that takes certain instances as teleologic facts, de Bernières's novel emphasises historical contingency. When establishing a historical narrative, gaps are filled by the writer, who uses verbs, situations, positions and even adjectives to describe feelings, attitudes, ideas, and events without having actually witnessed or listened to or read the eye-witness accounts, well aware that perceptions can be deceiving. The narrator's story-like descriptions of how the King spent his morning, followed by such comments as seen above, which stress uncertainty in history, show the possibility of the myriad of ways that events may have actually occurred. Imperfections or the potential failure of explanations based on causality cause the writer to query contingencies. Such moments of bifurcation that arise from lack of knowledge, at the same time, offer a mirror for uncertainty that tends to be disregarded in teleological explanations.

In a similar vein, in the postscript of his novel where he gives a glimpse of the town that hosted the fictional town Eskibahçe, de Bernières attempts to determine where the name Fethiye originates from. For this purpose, he gives different accounts of the story of the contemporary name of this town, reaching in the end the conclusion that history is impossible.²⁴⁷ The postscript gives depictions of Fethiye in the twenty-first century, teemed with people at the marketplace, local people, Western tourists, and Turks who have lived abroad, a mixture of modernity and tradition in a vivid recreation of lived experience. Despite this rich texture and social mixture de Bernières ends with a

²⁴⁶ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, pp. 490-1.

²⁴⁷ de Bernières, *Birds without Wings*, p. 623.

significant absence: that of the Greeks who had formerly inhabited these shores. The question of minorities and the end of Ottoman multiculturalism still reverberates.

In his writing, Louis de Bernières views civilisation from a conciliatory lens, and presents instances of both disruptions and complications created through past events in an effort to communicate a sense of harmony across numerous communities that came to exist throughout history. As such, by repeatedly overlaying his descriptions of the Lycian tombs and the ruins of the Roman theatre with the accounts of relatively more recent constructions in the town such as the Muslim graveyard or a fountain erected by a Rum philanthropist just before the First World War broke out, de Bernières is able to create a powerful sense of continuity, harmony and balance between the past and present inhabitants. Recurrent mention of the Lycian tombs and the artefacts of ancient Greece serves as an affirmation of the existence of the Greek heritage and gives a notion of intricate continuity between past and present, but at the same time acts as a reminder of the transient nature of civilizations. By debating the methods of historiography and the construction of nationalism, de Bernières criticises the abuses of history, and urges us to consider it as what it is – as history to learn from. He makes use of the town, to prove the civilisation at work, with its faults, but also with its strengths. As a representative of civilisation(s), de Bernières urges us to look for what Leyla Hanim recognises in Eskibahce: a sense of community and a host of diversity and harmony that an old garden, *eski bahçe*, can accommodate.

Conclusion

The conclusions we draw from engaging with history are not only shaped by the events that take place in history, but also by the actors involved in the production of the narrative, by the instruments with which the actors create narratives, and by the consumers, whose perceptions depend on their own predispositions about their past, present and expectations for the future. The narratives of the last century of the Ottoman Empire, both fictional and scholarly, have generally undertaken the mission of understanding or explaining the causes of the *decline* of the empire through the exposition of specific symptoms such as the corruption of the Janissaries or Sultan Abdülhamid's spies with a view to understanding or shaping the present post-Ottoman state. The narratives of so-called Ottoman decline have changed, evolved and varied in a number of ways as new data or political or scientific perspectives have emerged. One of the components of such changes is the shift in the focus of historiography in that historians, and historical novelists, have increasingly sought to understand social circumstances, beyond or independent of official histories based on imperial archives, by, for example, focusing on local conditions and histories from below. Another change has appeared as a result of the shift in the ways historians and the authors of historical novels reorganise the data and present it. The persistence of authoritative singularity or officialdom in the voice of academic historians began to lessen in the 1980s, as new nexuses of communication appeared, inspiring new narrational styles and assertions. As a result, another change has occurred in the world of readers and their 'own position in the present', as Tessa Morris-Suzuki puts it; '[s]uch a chain of relationships [...] creates diversity: a multitude of differing accounts and images of the past.'¹ These changing

¹ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 28.

notions of historiography have increasingly focused on social, in addition to institutional, approaches to history, and they have allowed the historical novel to develop its reach. As a result, today, we are obliged to speak of, in Olivier Bouquet's coinage, *homo-Ottomanicus*, that is to say, the Ottoman person with his/her complications as a human being, defined outside politicised dichotomies.²

In this thesis, I have aimed to structure an argument which focuses on the diversity of narratives in their description of what being an Ottoman meant in the last century of the Ottoman Empire. I have viewed a number of novels by Western writers as part of an ongoing attempt to understand, and to some extent contest, the 'decline' paradigm of the Ottoman Empire primarily within the context of its multicultural structure. This places this current thesis within an intriguing field of study since multiculturalism began to act as a double-edged sword within the Empire in the nineteenth century as a result of the changing dynamics of power relations around the world. As Deringil puts it:

As the monarchies of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire included, came to find themselves increasingly hard pressed to legitimate their existence towards both their own subjects and the outside world, they felt 'the need to provide a new, or at least a supplementary, 'national' foundation for this institution.'³

This challenge was taken up by contemporaries when they provided a common nationalist basis for the Ottoman identity - Ottomanism. The *Tanzimat* reforms have been regarded by Ottoman historians as the point of emergence of this thought, even though ethnic nationalism, Islamism and Turanism also sprang up as alternative ideologies towards the end of the nineteenth century.

² Olivier Bouquet, 'Is It Time to Stop Speaking about Ottoman Modernisation', in *Order and Compromise: Government Practices in Turkey from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early 21st Century*, ed. by Marc Aymes, Benjamin Gourisse and Élise Massicard (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 45-67 (p. 48).

³ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 44.

Today, the challenge to define the Ottoman man (or woman) has its own challenges. The tools the authors choose in their identification of points of contention, as I suggested in the Introduction, are, to a large extent, dependent on the novels' plots being formulated in a teleological manner. Therefore, the strengths or weaknesses of an Ottoman character, through which the three authors studied here choose to represent a particular group or convey a particular message, become part of an aspect of the Ottoman identity that they would like to reassert or challenge. This diversity proves the impossibility of reaching a consensus on the definition and description of ideologies, religious affiliations, events, specifications of locations, in short, any one particular discourse related to Ottoman decline. This possibility of the multiplicity of contemporary representations of both historical change and the Ottoman identity in the last century of the empire is an important reason that Ottoman studies has attracted a host of attention with many participants eager to contribute their own representations and defend their own positions. The descriptions of the last century of the Ottomans tend to depend very much on the identified challenges the Ottomans encountered. Likewise, the period of choice very much depends on the story the authors would like to tell and the issues they wish to explore in the Ottoman historiography.

In many ways, both Yashim's and Kamil Pasha's sleuthing, following up of leads and clues, and their investigation into the motives of criminals, are in large part carried out to redeem a central position for the detectives, whose characters are sketched as likeable – and even ideal – Ottoman figures. Crimes in these criminal fictions, murders or thefts alike, are not only unethical, but also unnational, stemming from the fact that the perpetrators are either not able to keep up with the changes in laws or in contempt with them, or they demand new regulations, increased sovereignty or even a new national

existence. Worthington argues that such crimes comprise evidence for social change and as such it is possible to read social changes through an investigation of crimes:

[c]rime, criminals and criminality, then, are evidence of deviance from the cultural and social norm; as such, they offer a useful way into reading the changes in cultures and societies over time. But what such study demonstrates is that crime is temporally and culturally conditional; consequently, the definition of what constitutes crime is constantly shifting.⁴

Crime fiction novels based on the nineteenth-century Ottoman history demonstrates precisely such ‘push and pull of larger social, political, and economic forces’ and tell the story of a struggling but aspiring empire.⁵

In his unique interpretation of the impact of the Napoleonic scare on the Ottomans, in his first historical novel, *The Janissary Tree*, Goodwin creates an Ottoman version of the ‘counter-revolutionary response to the French Revolution’ based on Ottoman nationalism and loyalty to the Sultan.⁶ Jason Goodwin, by making use of the traditional device of oppositional forces of tradition and modernity, as well as the well-known historical character Napoleon Bonaparte, secures in his *The Janissary Tree* the traditional structure of the historical novel form in the long tradition of novels which have Napoleon’s expansionism as part of their plot, including *War and Peace* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The historical novel has come to be seen since George Lukacs’s *The Historical Novel* as ‘a product of romantic nationalism’, which, as Perry Anderson explains, emerged as ‘the European reaction against Napoleonic expansion’.⁷ In addition to the ‘popular roots’ of this reaction, Anderson holds that nationalism was ‘also driven by the need of the continent’s different ancien regimes to mobilise local

⁴ Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. x.

⁵ Andrew Pepper, *Unwilling Executioner: Crime Fiction and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 17.

⁶ Anderson, ‘From Progress to Catastrophe’, p. 24.

⁷ Perry Anderson, ‘From Progress to Catastrophe: Perry Anderson on the Historical Novel’, *London Review of Books*, 33.15 (28 July 2011), 24-28 (p. 24).

enthusiasm for the defence of crown and altar'.⁸ The author of *The Janissary Tree* seems critical of the possibility of an Ottoman submission to the expansion of French influence, mainly referred to as 'modernisation'; therefore, he portrays the possibility of a total modernisation from an unfavourable light, since it can endanger the integrity of the Ottoman monarchic system. Goodwin's reservations regarding the need for reforms can be traced through Yashim's defence of the Sultan as opposed to the Seraskier's republican coup, as well as the tragic descriptions of the end of the traditional institution of the Janissaries and the head eunuch's absorption in the symbolic power he takes from Napoleonic jewellery in his helpless attempt to protect the traditional institutions of the empire. Such a plot and character construction suggest the author's conviction that a backlash would be bound to happen, should the reforms take place expeditiously, since those reforms would unequivocally exclude certain elements of the society from social protection.

As contrasted with the people Yashim surrounds himself with, who represent a world that has ended or is about to end, including the ambassador of a defunct empire and a valide sultan who had become a slave before becoming the mother of an Ottoman sultan, Kamil Pasha, having received some legal education at Cambridge, in contrast, is absorbed in a Europeanised modern elite world. As opposed to Yashim's escapism from the ineluctable changes taking place in the empire as a result of the increased interaction with the Western countries, fifty years later, Kamil Pasha is presented at peace in his world of modern elites as a prosecutor in Pera, the European neighbourhood of Istanbul. Within this context, Goodwin and White, in their crime fiction series, re-enact two different settings of the bureaucratic world and daily life, half a century apart. The transformation of the Empire into a working bureaucratic machine with notable pashas

⁸ Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe', p. 24.

and working police force, who are also in contact with their counterparts abroad, embodies the backbone of the historical change between the two models of the empire, which has major significance for how White's crime fiction is constructed. The operation of Ottoman law enforcement is particularly embodied through the differences between eunuch and magistrate protagonists, carrying archaic and modern markers of the same profession, respectively. The authors even demarcate such difference with the distinguishing zests of their detectives, similar to Sherlock Holmes's eccentric and deranged opium addiction. Goodwin's detective protagonist Yashim enjoys spending his free time cooking, a Romantic and bourgeois pastime, which gives the character a hint of exoticism, distinguished by the sensory characteristics of the taste and flavour of Ottoman cuisine. White's Kamil Pasha, on the other hand, is engrossed in his private garden of orchids, his correspondence with orchid collectors around the world about the names of the species demonstrating his commitment to scientific method.

This difference comes to the reader's attention particularly because of the writers' choice of genre. The nature of the crimes in the crime fiction discloses the daily struggles of the people in relation to the criminality in the society; therefore, crime fiction has been a powerful genre in the description of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire because of its 'strong socio-political content', which can effectively be used 'as a weapon to criticize social, political, and gender inequalities'.⁹ Unlike many other types of character in fiction, in crime fiction, the detective has to tackle crimes and pursue criminals, giving hints to the reader about the extent of the degeneration in the society and about the difficulties ahead as the end of the empire is approaching. By looking beyond the question of 'who is guilty?', the novels examined in this thesis

⁹ Sue Neale, 'Crime Writing in Other Languages' in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 296-307 (p. 300).

attempt to answer the question of ‘what is to blame: what has caused this problem called “crime” in the first place?’ and also to identify issues related to both the Ottoman and international systems of justice.¹⁰ In other words, as Ed Christian puts it, by ‘mov[ing] from the interrogation of suspects to the interrogation of society, where crime stems from flaws in the political, social, and [legal] systems’, crime fiction has been functional in highlighting historical changes during the last century of the Ottoman Empire with a view to making a social and historical analysis of the struggles of the Ottomans.¹¹

As to the choice of genre in the service of distinguishing historical conditions and change, Jon Thompson suggests that ‘[t]he capacity of crime fiction to evaluate different historical moments in the experience of modernity is not an accidental feature; rather, it is a dominant convention of the genre’.¹² The period in which Goodwin has chosen to set his fiction saw the discussions about the initiation of increased ‘qualitative changes’ with the declaration of the *Tanzimat* (1839-76), which has been thought of as initiating Ottomanist ideology by assuring the implementation of ‘the legal equality of Muslim and non-Muslim, the rule of law, the state’s guarantee to safeguard the lives, property and honour of its subjects’.¹³ Selim Deringil distinguishes the Ottomanism of the *Tanzimat* period from that of the late nineteenth century by calling the former ‘ostensibly supra-religious’ while he argues that the latter was the product of ‘a sort of “Imperial supranationalism”’.¹⁴ The major difference between the two periods is the emphasis placed on the role of Islam in the latter, while early reformers had intended to

¹⁰ Pepper, *Unwilling Executioner*, p. 12.

¹¹ Ed Christian, ‘Ethnic Postcolonial Crime and Detection (Anglophone)’, in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 283-295 (p. 284).

¹² Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 2.

¹³ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 46.

smooth over such religious demarcations, a topic Jason Goodwin avoids even touching upon. I have criticised this avoidance as a limiting aspect of Goodwin's fiction in terms of the way it oversimplifies the discussions of modernity and tradition, reducing them to their superficial and mostly material properties such as the transformation in outfits. This simplification leads to the author's ignoring the legal implications of the *millet* system, which facilitates and reinforces the demands for equality and eventually European nationalism in the nineteenth century.

In other words, the *Tanzimat* was an attempt at reforming the state structure and bonding believers across the Empire by establishing uniform codes of law in a wide range of areas. Jason Goodwin's rightful concern regarding the homogenising aspect of the edict and the challenges regional differences across the empire may pose ('would it work as well in the highlands of Bulgaria as in the deserts of Tripolitana?') does not extend to legal differentiation of rule among religious denominations codified through the separate legal practices of the millets.¹⁵ By placing the edict at the centre of crimes in *The Janissary Tree*, Goodwin actually challenges the efforts of the palace to implement structural reforms which involve radical material changes, but by doing so, the author precludes an informed discussion on the advantages of an Ottomanist ideology that would reposition Ottoman identity, from a religion-centred to a nation-centred foundation. By pitting conflicting ideas against each other, the author defends the untenable status quo during such momentous changes as the *Tanzimat* despite the worldwide developments linked with revolutionary nationalism. This view shows the desire to perpetuate the Ottoman system of *millet* administration, completely ignoring the destruction created by the existence of several different legal practices in the empire based on religious demarcations, which allowed these groups to enjoy privileges that

¹⁵ Jason Goodwin, *The Janissary Tree* (Croydon: Faber and Faber, 2006; repr. 2007), p. 150.

Ottomanist nationalism could not or could no longer provide without undermining a newly egalitarian ideology.

In Jenny White's novels, by contrast, religious discontent among the populace appears manifestly. Kamil Pasha's commitment to the Ottoman rule of law is an indication of the terminus of the *millet* system, which was based on the premise of religion and was increasingly replaced by a single definition of Ottoman citizenship for all through all-encompassing regulations, although still under the leadership of Muslim elites. Anthony Smith explains that among theories of nationalism '[t]he modernist paradigm emphasizes the novel economic and political features of modernity, and the role played by nationalism, the ideology, in disseminating the culture of modernity, and thereby creating nations'.¹⁶ Questions of modernity and nation-belonging have been addressed in both the second and third chapters in connection with the failure of the builders of Ottoman nationhood to provide a sufficiently substantial corpus of shared sense of belonging which could have achieved loyalty to the Sultan. Afterall, as Selim Deringil notes, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the efforts of the Sultan to maintain the loyalty of his people fell short as '[t]he Ottoman rulers faced the challenge of nationalism, not only from their Christian subjects and ex-subjects in the Balkans, but also from their own Islamic peoples'.¹⁷ In the literature on the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ottoman Empire, the relationship between modernity and nationhood has been an unavoidable part of the discourse that explains the road that leads to the collapse of the empire, and the works I have chosen to analyse in this thesis do not escape this tendency.

¹⁶ Anthony D. Smith, 'When is a Nation', *Geopolitics*, 7.2 (2002), pp. 5-32 (p. 14).

¹⁷ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 45.

In this thesis, the strengths and weaknesses of both the *millet* system and Ottoman nationalism have been investigated in the light of the imaginative interventions by Goodwin, White and de Bernières of both of these systems. Particularly Jenny White's and Louis de Bernières's novels contain diverse views on conflicting nationalisms of the nineteenth century. In *The Abyssinian Proof*, Jenny White participates in the exploration of an interfaith dialogue through an emphasis on common values of the three Abrahamic religions, such as the Proof and syncretism. On the other hand, the author has also offered a criticism of the idea of the sustainability of an interfaith dialogue through the disappearance of the Proof, for the objects of power are open to abuses of power-seeking people and entities. My own criticism of the interfaith dialogue, in White's fiction and in historical accounts, has also revealed the shortcoming of Ottomanism under the rule of a Muslim Sultan – or any other ruler with a strong religious affiliation, without any other measures or checks and balances on such power through, for example, institutionalised representation of communities. Jenny White's contribution to the idea of Ottomanism, essentially, lies in her act of reminding her audience of the multitude, the heterogeneous complexity, which any blanket definition of identity or approach to identity contains. White demonstrates the possibility of multiple formulations of any given identity across her body of fiction: A Russian Armenian and an Ottoman Armenian may not have similar feelings about Ottoman rule; one does not have to be a socialist -- or Armenian -- to want to live altruistically (Vera overcomes her fear of Muslims when she receives help from a fisherman); not all socialists have the best interests of mankind at heart – some may prioritise creating nations to caring for humans.

De Bernières achieves a similar goal through his depiction of the life of a community. We can see that an Ottoman aga can be protective of his townspeople equally (Rustem

Aga defends Polyxeni's deceased mother's innocence and saves the Armenian apothecary's daughters from Kurdish irregulars); both Christians and Muslims want to serve their Sultan; a Muslim Ottoman boy can write in Greek letters; being born Greek doesn't mean one is actually a Greek and can speak Greek. As Bouquet explains, this is what lies behind the modern notion of Ottoman identity: 'It is [the] ability to move within different worlds which, in my opinion, characterises the modernity of the Ottomans, both in the use they made of it and in the limits they encountered'.¹⁸ The concept of Ottomanism has been best described in these terms in de Bernières's imagery of the Ottoman community representing a civilisational being – a simple, largely harmonious coexistence.

All three authors' works examined in this thesis have aimed at, and to a large extent achieved, a vision of and for the Ottoman Empire, in which 'multiculturalism' is viewed as being not only 'about the rights of minority cultures', but also 'about the value of cultural diversity'.¹⁹ Through their works, Goodwin, White and de Bernières have portrayed the strengths and the flaws of both the *millet* system and the nationalist ideology of Ottomanism which aimed to eliminate the shortcomings of the *millet* system after the emergence of nationalist separatism. By doing so, the authors have challenged the devastating consequences of nationalism by upholding cultural diversity. The diversity of representations points towards the intricacy, fragility and even dissonance of the Ottoman past and post-Ottoman ideologies and identities. This diversity, however, more importantly indicates the possibility of gaining strength from this

¹⁸ Bouquet, 'Is It Time to Stop Speaking about Ottoman Modernisation', p. 64.

¹⁹ Bhikhu Parekh's view on multiculturalism, in Tariq Modood's words, is that 'multiculturalism is not about the rights of minority cultures but about the value of cultural diversity'; in Tariq Modood, 'Their liberalism and our multiculturalism?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3.2 (June 2001), 245–257 (p. 247); Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000).

multiplicity and of reconstructing a multi-dimensional Ottoman society with complex, fully-realised characters, at once diverse and unique.

The historical moments of confrontation represented in these novels point towards the difficulties and problems the authors choose to foreground and the forgotten or hijacked histories they would like to rescue. Such historical investigation, when implemented within the capabilities of the historical novel form, helps us readers appreciate the past, 'define and redefine our position in the present' and redeem the possibility of shared futures.²⁰ The representations of all these spaces of heterogeneity unfurl possibilities for empathy even though political boundaries may restrain further efforts or conversations. With literature's reach in contemporary society, books keep such possibility alive. Fiction can reach audiences that academic history cannot. We might wish that more world leaders would become novel readers.

²⁰ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us*, p. 28.

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