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The Wars before the Great War

Conflict and International Politics before the Outbreak of the First World War

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Chapter

5 - Mass violence against civilians during the Balkan Wars pp. 76-91

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5 Mass violence against civilians during the Balkan Wars

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On 17 October 1912, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Out-powered, demoralized, unprepared and poorly equipped, the Ottoman army fought fourteen battles and lost them all, except for one. After the cessation of hostilities, the Empire was heavily truncated for good. The lands wrested from the Ottomans became the object of bitter contestation between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. Each of these nations formulated their own nationalist claims on the newly 'available' territory. Although there were clear distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, as the skirmishes unfolded into total warfare none of the armies respected this distinction and defenceless civilians were assaulted too: Muslims under Bulgarian and Greek rule, and Christians under Ottoman rule. Victims and contemporary journalists accused the Balkan armies in particular of systematic maltreatment of civilian populations, but atrocities were committed by all sides in the conflict. Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek and Ottoman forces committed mutual acts of violence including large-scale destruction and arson of villages, beatings and torture, forced conversions and indiscriminate mass killing of enemy non-combatants. This chapter will discuss these atrocities and their consequences, in order to address the overarching question: how did civilians experience the mass violence committed against them during the Balkan Wars? This chapter aims to answer this question by discussing the impact of the Balkan Wars on Ottoman Muslims. It will examine the persecution and expulsion of Ottoman Muslims in the Balkans by Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian forces, and sketch their ordeal as they were expelled to the rump Ottoman state. The chapter will examine how their experiences as refugees influenced them and Ottoman political culture.

In November 1912, the Bulgarian advance pushed the Ottoman army back to the trenches of Çatalca, 30 kilometres west of Istanbul. There, the onslaught was stopped and the imperial capital remained uncaptured. Warfare continued as two other important Ottoman cities were captured: the old imperial capital of Edirne [Adrianople] was besieged and taken by the Bulgarian army, and on 9 November 1912 the Ottoman garrison

surrendered the cradle of the Young Turks, Salonica, to the Greek army. The state of war lasted until the Treaty of London was signed on 30 May 1913, which dealt with territorial adjustments arising out of the conclusion of the war.¹ After the cessation of hostilities, the Empire was heavily truncated for good.

Although there were clear distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, as the skirmishes unfolded into total warfare none of the armies respected this distinction. Atrocities were committed by all sides in the conflict,² but contemporary journalists and victims accused the Bulgarian army in particular of systematic maltreatment of civilian populations.³ The forces commanded by the Bulgarian generals Ivan Fichev (1860–1931), Vladimir Minchev Vazov (1868–1945) and Radko Dimitriev (1859–1918) committed acts of violence including large-scale destruction and arson of villages, beatings and torture, forced conversions and indiscriminate mass killing of Ottoman Muslims.⁴ Leon Trotsky, at that time correspondent for the Russian newspaper *Kievskaya Mysl*, reported that the campaigns of ethnic cleansing and massacre were organized in particular by General Dimitriev, a man ‘deeply animated by those features of careerism including careless zeal and moral cynicism’. When his ambition to conquer as much territory as possible as fast as possible was frustrated by stubborn Ottoman defence, he ordered his troops to take prisoners no longer, and to execute all prisoners of war, included the wounded.⁵

For example, on 10 November 1912 Bulgarian *komitadjis* destroyed the villages of Maden, Topuklu and Davud, killing most inhabitants. The conservative Ottoman newspaper protested with outrage: ‘Will civilized Europe not notice savagery of this extent?’⁶ In the following days, the carnage continued and gradually became more participatory. At first, Bulgarian civilians who refused to participate in the violence were pressured and threatened by the Bulgarian soldiers, who burnt some farms around

¹ For an analysis of the Ottoman involvement in the Balkan Wars from a military perspective see: Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912–1913* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2003).

² Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 136–8.

³ George F. Kennan, *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflection on the Present Record* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993), pp. 109–35.

⁴ Momchil Yonov, ‘Bulgarian Military Operations in the Balkan Wars’, in Béla K. Király and Dimitrije Djordjevic (eds.), *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars* (Boulder CO: Social Science Monographs, 1987), pp. 63–84.

⁵ Leo Trotzki, *Die Balkankriege 1912–13* (Essen: Arbeiterpresse Verlag, 1995, transl. Hannelore Georgi and Harald Schubärth), pp. 296–7.

⁶ *Hikmet*, 11 November 1912, p. 4.

the town of Çorlu.⁷ But popular participation in the expulsions and killings of Muslims increased when the Bulgarian authorities announced that Muslim properties, including farmland, would be distributed among the Bulgarians. This led to a significant rise in popular participation in violence.⁸ The Serbian authorities, too, encouraged 'local police officers, secret agents and lawyers, to terrorize the Muslims and to make a calm life for them impossible'.⁹ According to one Ottoman gendarmerie report from Ezine, the Serbian authorities confiscated, from 4 individuals, a total of 16,000 kuruş worth of property and livestock in Priština. The Bulgarian authorities confiscated from only 13 individuals a total of 395,060 kuruş in the towns of Ipsala, Babaeski and Malkara.¹⁰

Besides confiscation, war crimes were another category of mass violence. According to one contemporary account, whenever Bulgarian forces captured Ottoman prisoners of war, they would frequently set the Christians free but execute certain numbers of the Muslims among them.¹¹ The violence also came to target culture. When the Greek army occupied Salonica, it prohibited all publications in Ottoman Turkish for an indefinite period of time.¹² Upon entering the town of Drama, the Bulgarian army converted all mosques into churches and took down signs of Islamic culture.¹³ Since the fez was widely seen as a sign of Ottoman culture and allegiance to Istanbul, the hat was prohibited. As it was also an ethnic marker for Muslims, when the Bulgarian and Serbian armies invaded their home towns, Muslims hid their fezzes and wore hats instead, for example in Varna and Salonica.¹⁴

The Ottoman government then set up the 'Association for the Study of Oppression' (*Tetkik-i Mezalim Cemiyeti*), headed by the journalist Ahmed Cevad Emre, whose team was assigned with documenting the atrocities. The association's members in Edirne were a multi-ethnic group, headed by Reşit Saffet Atabinen, and manned by Faik Kaltakkıran, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, Mahmud Nedim Bey, Kalbiyos Efendi, Orfanides Efendi, the teacher Garabed, the lawyer Abraham Papazian, Hagop Sherbetjian and Chaim Bahores – in other words, four Muslims, two Greeks, three Armenians and a Jew. The committee produced reports that were

⁷ *Hikmet*, 14 November 1912, p. 1. ⁸ *İkdam*, 5810, 25 April 1913, p. 3.

⁹ Katrin Boeckh, *Von den Balkankriegen zum Ersten Weltkrieg: Kleinstaatenpolitik und ethnische Selbstbestimmung auf dem Balkan* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996), pp. 165, 199.

¹⁰ Ahmet Halaçoğlu, *Balkan Harbi Sırasında Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri (1912–1913)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995), p. 43, see appendix document 4.

¹¹ Ahmed Cevad, *Balkanlarda Akan Kan* (Istanbul: Şamil, n.y.), pp. 118–19.

¹² *İkdam*, 5668, 30 November 1912, p. 2. ¹³ *İkdam*, 5689, 21 December 1912, p. 2.

¹⁴ Abdurrahim Dede, *Rumeli'nde Birakılanlar* (Istanbul: Otag Matbaası, 1975), pp. 151–70.

compiled, edited and published by Ahmed Cevad Emre as ‘The Blood that flows in the Balkans’ (*Balkanlarda Akan Kan*).¹⁵ The plan backfired to some extent when radicals began using the content as propaganda for revenge acts. Victimized groups who fled to their ‘ethnic brethren’ with their stories of terror kindled counter-terror against populations associated with their victimizers. Thus, whereas Bulgarian army units ignited the campaigns of terror and ethnic cleansing, the responses of Greek and Ottoman forces against Bulgarian villages could be at least as violent.¹⁶

The territorial erosion of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and in the Caucasus during the nineteenth century was a process that produced humiliation and refugee streams.¹⁷ The total and permanent loss of the Balkan Peninsula in 1913, however, was a watershed that affected the very existence of the Empire. It is no exaggeration to state that the effect of the Balkan Wars on Ottoman society was nothing short of apocalyptic. The loss of many major Ottoman cities, property, human lives and face was unbearable to a proud Ottoman elite who were dismayed at the helplessness of the imperial army. The shock of the war would have a severe and lasting impact on Ottoman society, culture and identity. From 1913 on, the hitherto viable umbrella Ottoman identity was no longer seen as feasible by hardliners on either side of the political spectrum. Recent research on the Young Turk *coup d'état* of 23 January 1913 reveals a radical and activist Turkish-nationalist core around Dr Bahaeddin Shakir (1874–1922), Dr Mehmed Nâzım (1872–1926), Mehmed Talaat (1874–1921) and İsmail Enver (1881–1922), who definitively gave up hope of the ideal of Ottoman unity and inclusive citizenship after 1913.¹⁸ Without their experience in the Balkan Wars, this radicalization does not seem to have been possible.

The refugee crisis

The most immediate repercussion of the war was the refugee crisis. In the first half of 1913, Istanbul was bursting with hundreds of thousands

¹⁵ Ahmed Cevad, *Balkanlarda Akan Kan* (Istanbul: Şamil, undated).

¹⁶ Elçin Kürşat-Ahlers, ‘Die Brutalisierung von Gesellschaft und Kriegsführung im Osmanischen Reich während der Balkankriege (1903–1914)’, in Andreas Gestrich (ed.), *Gewalt im Krieg: Ausübung, Erfahrung und Verweigerung von Gewalt in Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Lit-Verlag, 1995), pp. 51–74.

¹⁷ For an introduction see: Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton NJ: The Darwin Press, 1995), pp. 1–22.

¹⁸ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 173–81.

of refugees.¹⁹ Newspaper articles provided vivid descriptions of the state of the refugees:

Refugees from the areas of Macedonia and Kosova are flocking here . . . It is reported that another group of 6000 people has set out from Salonica. Every ferry from Salonica brings 1200–1500 refugees. Most of them do not own anything else than the clothes they wear. The poor souls were forced to flee the calamity and tyranny without a stitch on.²⁰

Inevitably, epidemics broke out among the refugees. For example, in October 1912 only, 2,549 cases of cholera were diagnosed; of this group, 1,479 people died, 1,044 recovered and 26 were under treatment.²¹ The then mayor of Istanbul, Dr Cemil Topuzlu (1868–1958), wrote:

A few days after the declaration of war refugees came into our city. But what an arrival. All of them were miserable and forlorn (*sefil ve perişan*). These ill-fated people, packed together in clippers and trains, were disembarked at Sirkeci train station, hungry and unclothed. And then those who had taken the road on oxcarts from their villages and towns. Although Istanbul's Directorate for Refugees would send a part of the Balkan War refugees bit by bit to Anatolia, despite this, we could not prevent that there would be a permanent group of 40–50 thousand sick and ragged in our city.²²

The locals took pity on the vulnerable refugees. An Armenian man from Istanbul, Armenag Badalian, witnessed a refugee who wanted to buy bread in the central Beyoğlu district, and wrote angrily about the situation: 'With just a compass in their hands, these wretched people arrive at bakeries to buy bread . . . Why do the municipal officials, sitting fifty yards further, not see this? If they are treated like this close to municipal offices, imagine what is happening far away.'²³ But not all Ottomans were happy to receive and shelter refugees. A Greek man, Mikhail Grigoriadis, wrote a letter of complaint to the government to protest the settling of Balkan refugees in his farm in the Sivrihisar district.²⁴

The truth was that the state was hopelessly overstretched in its attempt to cover the refugees' needs. The Ottoman government had to allocate an enormous array of resources to transport, house, feed, educate, equip,

¹⁹ The best study on the Muslim refugees remains: Ahmet Halaçoğlu, *Balkan Harbi Sırasında Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri (1912–1913)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995).

²⁰ *Alemdar*, 10 January 1913, p. 2. ²¹ *Alemdar*, 25 October 1912, p. 3.

²² Cemil Topuzlu, *İstibdat-Meşrutiyet-Cumhuriyet Devirlerinde 80 Yıllık Hatıralarım*, ed. Hüsrev Hatemi and Aykut Kazancıgil (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Cerrahpaşa Tıp Fakültesi Yayınları, 1982), p. 124.

²³ *Alemdar*, 19 February 1913, p. 3.

²⁴ *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (Ottoman archives, hereafter cited as *BOA*), DH.İD 85/41, 18 January 1913.

employ and clothe the refugees. Philanthropic associations such as the 'Association for Muslim Refugees from the Balkans' provided relief for the refugee community, which almost exclusively consisted of Muslims. Empty houses were requisitioned for the refugees, some of whom slept in Istanbul's Sirkeci train station. The government saw no other choice than to transform mosques temporarily into shelters. In Istanbul more than ninety mosques were initially furnished as sanctuaries. The large Nuru Osmaniye Mosque was filled to the brim already on 27 October 1913.²⁵ According to the Ottoman Red Crescent, the refugees were mainly housed in mosques, for example 125 families in the Edirnekapi mosque, 107 families in the Sultan Selim mosque and 86 families in the Murad Pasha mosque. Prominent mosques such as the Aya Sofia and the Sultan Ahmed (the Blue Mosque) were not spared either. Initially, another 643 families (2,798 people) were sheltered in makeshift huts on the outskirts of Istanbul.²⁶ Children, with or without parents, were a major concern for the government. Near the Tophane barracks, 60 poorly clad children were provided with shirts, socks, fezzes, handkerchiefs, robes and overalls, as well as alphabets and religious booklets for their education.²⁷ As Eyal Ginio cogently discusses in his chapter in this volume, the CUP instrumentalized childhood during the crisis by assigning symbolic and practical roles to children. The children's victimization was seen as a baptism of fire through which they would become 'future Turks', members of a future nation hardened by the violent struggle for existence.

If the sight of the refugees was not bad enough, the stories and trauma they brought to the capital added fuel to the fire. The horror stories were met with disbelief and rage in the Ottoman press. One commentator on the refugees' fate bewailed how 'our motherland was trampled on by the muddy boots of the poorest enemies. Our coreligionist brothers and compatriots were slaughtered in the thousands like sheep.'²⁸ The feminist and nationalist author Halide Edib (1884–1964) wrote:

The spectacle of Moslem refugees, men and women and children, fleeing from the fire and sword of the enemy; the slaying of prisoners of war, their mutilation and starvation; atrocities and massacres perpetrated on the civil population – the first of their kind in twentieth century warfare – inflicted wounds far deeper than the defeat itself.²⁹

²⁵ *Alemdar*, 27 October 1912, p. 3.

²⁶ *Osmanlı Hilâl-i Ahmer Cemiyeti 1329–1331 Sahînamesi* (Istanbul: Ahmed Ihsan ve Şürekâsi Matbaacılık Osmanlı Şirketi, 1915), pp. 220–5.

²⁷ *İkdam*, 22 September 1913, p. 4.

²⁸ *Balkan Harbında neden Münhazim Olduk?* (Istanbul: n.p., 1913), p. 95.

²⁹ Halide Edib, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey* (Delhi: Jamia Press, 1935), p. 80.

The British consul in Salonica witnessed the process of forced migration and reported about the refugees:

The result of the massacre of Muslims at the beginning of the war, of the looting of their goods in the ensuing months, of the settling of Christians in their villages, of their persecution by Christian neighbours, of their torture and beating by Greek troops, has been the creation of a state of terror among the Islamic population. Their one desire is to escape from Macedonia and to be again in a free land . . . They arrive in Turkey with the memory of their slaughtered friends and relations fresh in their minds, they remember their own sufferings and the persecutions of which they have been victims, and finding themselves without means or resources, encouraged to some extent by their own government, they see no wrong in falling on the Greek Christians of Turkey and meting out to them the same treatment that they themselves have received from the Greek Christians of Macedonia.³⁰

A major part of the refugee crisis was the catastrophic consequence of the war for women. The Bulgarian forays into the Thracian countryside and the Bulgarian occupation in general spelled persecution and terror, accompanied as it often was by rape of women.³¹ Indeed, the large-scale victimization of Ottoman Muslim women, both for being Muslims and for being women, was widely known among the public. For example, Ömer Seyfeddin wrote an essay based on interviews with refugees about the behaviour of the Bulgarian Major Radko Balkaneski, a graduate of Galatasaray Lycée in Istanbul and the Sofia Military Academy. Major Radko raided the town of Serres, disarmed the Muslim population and ordered his men to gather the prettiest Turkish girls. A dozen girls were brought in from the nearby villages of Cuma and Osenova and stripped naked in front of him. Two girls were pretty but they were famished and had contracted malaria. The other girls ‘were real village girls, with thick arms, legs, and hips’. Radko fed them wine and brandy and distributed them to his men, who raped the girls until they were no longer of use. Because of shame and guilt, surviving women often committed suicide.³² Those who did make it to Istanbul awaited a difficult future: poverty, homelessness and exploitation by men were all possibilities. The Ottoman government wanted to make sure that girls’ rights were respected and it therefore issued the order on 13 November 1912 ‘in no way to permit girls to be taken as housemaids under the pretext

³⁰ Quoted in Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), pp. 338–9.

³¹ *Rumeli Mezâlîmi ve Bulgar Vahşetleri* (Istanbul: Rumeli Muhâcirîn-i İslâmiyye Cemiyeti, 1913), p. 49.

³² Nesîme Ceyhan, *Balkan Savaşı Hikâyeleri* (Istanbul: Selis, 2006), pp. 217–20.

of adoption'.³³ What is certain is that Ottoman Muslim women suffered very serious social consequences as a result of the Balkan Wars. Whether the inability of Ottoman men to protect their womenfolk gave rise to a crisis of masculinity remains a subject for future study. As for the children, Eyal Ginio convincingly argues in his chapter that the Ottoman elites' concept of childhood changed as a result of the violence of the Balkan Wars. If we follow this logic, both developments go a long way to explain the fate of women and children during the Great War as both symbols and targets of violence.³⁴

The elites as victims

The effect on the Young Turks in particular was formidable as their families were overrepresented among the Balkan refugees. The Young Turk leadership predominantly originated from three areas: Salonica,³⁵ the area from Monastir (Bitola) to Ohrid and the area around Pristina in Kosovo, which were now under Greek and Serbian rule.³⁶ Young Turk leaders such as Mehmed Talaat (1874–1921), Mustafa Abdülhalik Renda (1881–1957), Mehmed Cavid (1875–1926), the up-and-coming officer Mustafa Kemal (1881–1938) and many others now became refugees with their extended families.

Two of these elite refugees merit particular attention for the paramilitary violence that would be unleashed hereafter, starting with Dr Mehmed Nâzım (1872–1926). Born and raised in a prominent and economically successful Muslim family of Salonica, he joined the Young Turk movement in 1889 and made it to director of a hospital in the city. His family had been living in Salonica for generations and ran lucrative businesses in the city. He later became a member of the CUP's Central Committee, and even made it to Secretary-General of the party. When Salonica was surrendered in October 1912, he was arrested for being a Turkish nationalist and jailed without due process for eleven months in a cell in Athens. The guards maltreated Dr Nâzım there, claiming that his family had been exterminated, that the Greek flag was flying over

³³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, nu: 584, 31 Tesrin-i Evvel 1912, 13 November 1912, p. 3.

³⁴ Uğur Ümit Üngör, 'Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes: Social Consequences of War and Persecution in the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1923', *War in History*, 19, 2 (2012), pp. 173–92.

³⁵ Selim İlkin & İlhan Tekeli, 'İttihat ve Terakki Hareketinin Oluşumunda Selanik'in Toplumsal Yapısının Belirleyiciliği', in Osman Okyar and Halil İnalçık (eds.), *Türkiye'nin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi (1071–1920): Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071–1920)* (Ankara: Meteksan, 1980), pp. 351–82.

³⁶ Erik-Jan Zürcher, 'The Young Turks – Children of the Borderlands?', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9 (2003), pp. 275–86.

'Constantinople' and that it was only a matter of time before Anatolia would be a Greek country as well. Only when the Young Turk regime requested the release of their brother-in-arms was Nâzım transferred to the seaport of İzmir. Exile from his home town and the sight of his hapless family, including his baby daughter, deeply upset him. Dr Nâzım began writing newspaper articles, exposing and publicizing Bulgarian atrocities against Muslims and calling for vengeance against the remaining Ottoman Christians.³⁷ During World War I he became one of the main architects of the genocide of Ottoman Armenians.

Another important Young Turk leader was Dr Bahaeddin Shakir (1874–1922). He was born in Thrace and enjoyed his medical education at the Military Medical Academy in Istanbul. After joining the Young Turk party in 1906 he moved to Paris where he continued his activism, for example by approaching Ottoman students at Sorbonne University's Department of Chemistry for help in making bombs. After returning to Istanbul he became one of the most influential members of the CUP's Central Committee in 1912. During the Balkan Wars he was trapped in besieged Edirne as the head physician of the city's hospital. The Bulgarians arrested and incarcerated him, but he was released later. It is plausible that his personal brutalization and political ruthlessness was a result of his experiences in the Balkans. Shakir's closeness to Talaat quickly allowed him to concentrate power, exemplified by the fact that he was charged with (re-)organizing paramilitary units in 1914. For his pivotal role in the persecution of the Armenians, he was shot dead in Berlin on 17 April 1922 by Aram Yerganian, an Armenian hit man and member of the revanchist organization Nemesis.³⁸

The wars had not only accelerated the long-term shift of the empire's demographic composition in favour of Muslims. Their loss also bolstered the myth of the Christian 'stab in the back', as part of a general discourse of non-Muslim treason and disloyalty. Advocates of this emerging doctrine invoked crude generalizations of the conduct of non-Muslim Ottomans during the Balkan Wars, against convincing evidence to the contrary.³⁹ Revanchism was cast in the crucible of the Balkan Wars. In a letter to his wife, dated 8 May 1913, Enver Pasha wrote, 'If I could tell you of the savagery the enemy has inflicted . . . a stone's throw from Istanbul, you would understand the things that enter the heads of poor Muslims

³⁷ Ahmet Eyicil, *İttihad ve Terakki Liderlerinden Doktor Nâzım Bey 1872–1926* (Ankara: Gün, 2004), pp. 130–2, 153.

³⁸ Hikmet Çiçek, *Dr. Bahattin Şakir: İttihat ve Terakki'den Teşkilatı Mahsusa'ya bir Türk Jakobeni* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 2004).

³⁹ Eyal Ginio, 'Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream', *War in History*, 12, 2 (2005), pp. 156–77.

far away. But our anger is strengthening: revenge, revenge, revenge; there is no other word.⁴⁰ In a personal letter to a German friend, he wrote: 'Pour sentir plus amèrement toutes les blessures et se préparer pour une vengeance plus cruelle, je veux que toutes les générations prochaines sentent les hontes que nous portons et se venge plus durement envers nos ennemis.'⁴¹ In a discussion with one of his confidants, the Pasha was even more outspoken:

How could anyone forget the plains, the meadows, watered with the blood of our forefathers; abandon those places where Turkish raiders had stalled their steeds for a full four hundred years, with our mosques, our tombs, our dervish lodges, our bridges and our castles, to leave them to our slaves, to be driven out of Rumelia to Anatolia: this is beyond a man's endurance. I am prepared to sacrifice gladly the remaining years of my life to take revenge on the Bulgarians, the Greeks and the Montenegrins.⁴²

The 1914 opening address of parliament was equally rancorous and emotional: 'Do not forget! Do not forget beloved Salonica, the cradle of the flame of Liberty and Constitutional Government, do not forget green Monastir, Kosovo, İşkodra, Yanya and all of beautiful Rumelia.' The emotional deputies exclaimed: 'We shall not forget!'⁴³

The emotions of Young Turk elites expelled from their ancestral lands included humiliation, helplessness, anger, loss of dignity, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, embarrassment, shame: a toxic mix that, combined together, contributed to the growth of collective hate and destruction fantasies. Besides these objective effects, the subjective perception of the tragedy in the minds of the Young Turks merits perhaps even more attention. For them, the loss of power and prestige shattered the conventional myth of an Ottoman identity and Islamic superiority. One contemporary commented that for the Young Turks 'it was especially difficult to be forced to live under the rule of their own former subjects after having been the dominant element for hundreds of years'.⁴⁴ The fear of being ruled by historical enemies was a theme even before the Balkan Wars, when the Young Turk press published widely read articles with a deeply defeatist tone:

⁴⁰ M. Şükrü Hanioglu (ed.), *Kendi Mektuplarında Enver Paşa* (Istanbul: Der, 1989), p. 242.

⁴¹ Enver to a German friend, 2 April 1913, in *ibid.*, p. 237. 'In order to feel more bitterly all the injuries and to prepare for a crueler vengeance, I want all the next generations to feel the shame which we bear and to avenge themselves severely against our enemies.'

⁴² Hüsamettin Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası*, ed. Samih N. Tansu (Istanbul: Batur, 1964), p. 121.

⁴³ Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. III, p. 465.

⁴⁴ Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. II, part III, p. 250.

Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Crete were lost. Right now the grand [dear] Rumelia is about to be lost and in one or two years Istanbul will be gone as well. The holy Islam and the esteemed Ottomanism will be moved to Kayseri. Kayseri will become our capital, Mersin our port, Armenia and Kurdistan our neighbors, and Muscovites our masters. We will become their slaves. Oh! Is it not shameful for us! How can the Ottomans who once ruled the world become servants to their own shepherds, slaves, and servants?⁴⁵

After 1913, the Young Turk nightmare indeed came true as many of them became traumatized victims of ethnic cleansing. Their behaviour and political decision-making therefore was based on fear and resentment, and was aimed at gaining security for their families and, ultimately, for their nation and state.

Defeatism and revanchism

Alongside a ‘culture of defeat’, the wars generated a ‘culture of revanchism’. Istanbul was buzzing with newspaper articles, theatre plays and all kinds of political commentary denouncing both the Balkan nations and the ‘Christian West’ that kept its silence on the violence against Muslims. (The Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, had denounced the 1895 massacres of Armenians but held his peace when the Balkan Muslims suffered a similar fate in 1912.⁴⁶) The defeats were the talk of the day and their consequences were visible in daily life on the streets. The poet Cenap Şahabeddin (1871–1934), for example, wrote a call for ruthlessness:

The reason for our loss of the Great Balkans is . . . because we cherish culture, and we are too courteous and sensitive in the fields of law, humanity, and civilization. The Bulgarian mode of action has taught us that any unit that sets off into the field needs to return to the days of barbarism. We need to internalize the desire for bloodshed. We must be harsh and insensitive in order to chop up children, women, the elderly, the weak. With no respect for the property, life and honour of others. If we follow this path, then we will be accepted in the civilized world, just like the Bulgarian hordes of King Ferdinand.⁴⁷

The resentment expressed in these lines materialized very soon. A new readiness for violence emerged, one that was based on the transgression of existing norms of law, humanity and ‘honour’. The ethical rule was now

⁴⁵ Quoted in Nader Sohrabi, ‘Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew about Other Revolutions and Why it Mattered’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44, 1 (2002), pp. 45–79, p. 64.

⁴⁶ Carmichael, *Genocide Before the Holocaust*, p. 76.

⁴⁷ Ahmed Emin Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerimiz ve Geçirdiklerimiz*, vol. I: 1888–1922 (Istanbul: Pera Turizm ve Ticaret, 1997), p. 194.

reversed: instead of ‘Do to others what you would like to be done to you’, the Young Turks were now, more than ever, prepared to ‘Do to others what they have done to you.’ Chairman of the Ottoman parliament, Halil Menteşe (1874–1948) bitterly concluded at the end of the Balkan Wars: ‘In international affairs there is no place for justice and morality. There, only aggressive self-interest dominates. It was like this yesterday, today too, and tomorrow it will be like that as well.’⁴⁸

Resentful reactions like these came to dominate Ottoman political discourse towards the Balkan nations as well as the great European powers. The conservative newspaper *Hikmet* ran a sardonic article on violence and civilization, denouncing the alleged hypocrisy of Europe:

These new ‘civilizations’ (!) brought to our city are especially applied on Muslims and Jews. The [European] consuls are surprised about whom to complain to regarding the daily Inquisition scenes they are witnessing. It has become impossible to rescue mosques and synagogues from the Bulgarians and Greeks, who are after all, well known for their devotion to civilization.⁴⁹

The tone of these articles turned increasingly acerbic, with dark, even cynical humour, which did not bode well for the future. This depressed resignation about the fate of the country most of all denoted a loss of any willingness to reconcile with enemies later on. But this was not all there was to the victimization process. The conflict also raised existential questions about the nature and future of the country.

The young Ottoman journalist Falih Rıfki Atay had been through the Balkan Wars and later became a secretary to Minister of Navy Cemal Pasha. In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, he noted in his diary:

When they took Belgrade from us, the enemy delegations also wanted Niš. The Ottoman delegation stood up: ‘That’s it, what, you want Istanbul too?’ For our forefathers Niš was so close to Istanbul. We thought that the Turkish people would not survive if we would abandon Vardar, Tripoli, Crete and Medina. I did not know Turkey, when I took the train from Haydarpaşa to the most distant provinces. . . . Our illusions about Istanbul, Cairo, Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo and Baghdad were being abandoned and we began to worry about our own lives. I always wondered, will they also enter Istanbul?⁵⁰

Atay’s anxiety reflected a much broader existential problem of the Ottoman state. Where could the Ottoman Empire legitimately rule? If the Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians shook off Ottoman rule, then this could

⁴⁸ Halil Menteşe, *Osmanlı Mebusan Meclisi Reisi Halil Menteşe’nin Anıları* (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı, 1986), p. 158.

⁴⁹ *Hikmet*, 133, 13 December 1912.

⁵⁰ Falih Rıfki Atay, *Zeytinadağı* (Istanbul: Dünya, 1957), p. 10.

have been seen as a precedent for the Armenians, Kurds, Arabs – these three being the largest remaining minorities in the Ottoman Empire.

There is sufficient evidence to substantiate the claim that revanchism was not merely an elite affair but was widely disseminated into society. In an autobiography published in 1950, the noted essayist Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901–62) expressed this popularization of vengeance in literary non-fiction: ‘It was that desperately feverish year in which the Balkan Wars came to an end. We children were immersed in the bitterness of a defeat which we could accept no more than the adults, who had learned to bow their heads with their gaze averted. Every song spoke of strange vengeance marches.’⁵¹ Another contemporary Ottoman author summarized the Balkan drama as follows:

The people of the Balkans turned Rumelia into a slaughterhouse for Turks . . . The Turks have not forgotten this pain. By retelling the story to students at school, to children at home, to soldiers in the barracks, Turks have awoken a national spirit, a national grudge. They have infected people with a spirit that longs one day to settle accounts for the humiliation and oppression suffered by Turkdom. On maps Rumelia now appears in black. The entire army is urged to avenge its besmirched honour. Soldiers went to training every day singing the song: ‘In 1328 Turkish honour was sullied, alas. Alas, alas, alas, revenge!’ Soldiers returning to their villages would sow more seeds by singing this song.⁵²

These were more than just words as a severe crisis raged within Ottoman society. At that time, non-Muslim religious leaders of Eastern Thrace were petitioning the Interior Ministry to complain about the harassment they were constantly enduring from Muslims exacting revenge for their losses. These petitions reported an unprecedented atmosphere of hatred and revenge reigning in Thrace.⁵³ German diplomatic and military personnel, present in the Ottoman interior, were keenly aware of this backlash. A month after the outbreak of hostilities, Ambassador Wangenheim wrote to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg: ‘The Turkish provocative activity has increased lately. Since the Balkan war, a great number of agents has been sent into various regions of Asia Minor, where they are carrying on a violent propaganda against the Christians.’⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (Istanbul: Dergâh, 1973), p. 54. For an analysis of this novel from the perspectives of historiography and literary theory see: Erdağ M. Göknaç, ‘Ottoman Past and Turkish Future: Ambivalence in A. H. Tanpınar’s *Those outside the Scene*’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102, 2/3 (2003), pp. 647–61.

⁵² Mehmet Cemil Bilsel, *Lozan* (Istanbul: Ahmet İhsan, 1933), vol. I, p. 126.

⁵³ *BOA*, DH.ŞFR 39/163, Talaat to Edirne, 5 April 1914.

⁵⁴ *Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt* (German National Archives, hereafter cited as *PAAA*), R14082, Ambassador Wangenheim to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 15 November 1913.

As the crisis deepened, some Ottomans foresaw the looming cataclysm. The Armenian newspaper *Azadamard* not only summarized the sentiments of many Ottoman Armenians but also provided a fairly accurate account of the impact of the refugee crisis:

If it is imagined that they will be sent to towns populated by Armenians, it is conceivable that, because they attribute the causes of the disaster of the Balkan war and the disaster they were subjected to on the Balkan Christians, they may attempt to exact revenge, and because they may not understand the difference between Bulgarians and Ottoman Armenians, and if they are nevertheless sent to places inhabited by Christians, we declare that this could cause a new set of difficulties.⁵⁵

After the conclusion of the Balkan Wars, the CUP stepped up from behind the political scenes and gradually imposed a ruthless authoritarian regime upon the empire. By the end of 1913, the CUP government had firmly established itself as a dictatorship. Enver Pasha promoted himself to general and became Minister of War. The new cabinet stood under the auspices of Talaat Pasha, who went from party boss to Interior Minister. This lent these revolutionaries legitimacy and transposed the severely depacified political culture to Anatolia, causing what may be called 'the Balkanization of Anatolia'. Their experience of warfare in the Balkans was transplanted into the offices of the Ottoman government. By the beginning of 1914, the CUP regime launched a large-scale expulsion programme of the Ottoman Greeks in the west of the country. As a test case for large-scale nationalist expulsion, the 1914 campaign restructured the horizon of the Young Turks. It made realizable the politically unrealizable and unimaginable. In this period, the liberal politician Lütü Fikri Bey wrote in his diary:

Despite the battle fought, alliance with Greece is necessary, because our common enemy is Bulgaria. Therefore, we need to forget our history for the security of the fatherland. Furthermore, we will benefit from this agreement, because we will achieve a good relationship with our Greek population. Approximately two million of them will still remain with us. Surely they cannot be all expelled into the Aegean Sea? It is obvious that the Unionists cannot continue with this policy.⁵⁶

But Fikri was wrong, as much more than that expulsion was possible. In his 1913 book on the Balkan Wars, Aram Andonian (1875–1952) wrote with considerable concern that 'the principle of nationality' had spelled disaster in the Balkans and was utterly untenable in the eastern provinces,

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Alemdar*, 93–158 (14 November 1913), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Yücel Demirel (ed.), *Lütü Fikri Bey'in Günlüğü* (Istanbul: Arma, 1991), p. 78.

where most Armenians lived.⁵⁷ Andonian had planned to write a second volume to his book. He was never able to do so, because he was deported in April 1915 along with one million Armenians.

Discussion

The consequences of massacre and expulsion on the Balkans strained the relationship between Muslims and Christians at all levels. From the political elites down to the ordinary people on the ground, polarization sharpened as extremists were keen on driving the groups apart. Young Turk radicals broadcast propaganda to spread fear and hatred towards Ottoman Christians. Social interaction between Muslims and Christians decreased in major cities, provincial towns and villages. The extremists also targeted moderates, intimidating and silencing the political centre.⁵⁸ This propaganda signalled to Ottoman Muslims, including the refugees, that acts of revenge would be overlooked or tacitly condoned. As a result, there was a sharp rise in anti-Christian violence in the remnant territories. For example, the Greek bishop of the Eastern Thracian town of Çorlu complained that Balkan refugees had attacked the Greek church, stolen clothes and oil lamps, and violated women. In order to soothe the situation, the refugees were moved to a Muslim village, where they were provided with basic necessities.⁵⁹ But the relative deprivation of the refugees and the resentment of the elites simmered. Most of all, the Young Turk elite's perception that the catastrophe of the Balkans should never be allowed to happen to the remaining territories of the Ottoman Empire, especially the eastern provinces, would give birth to unprecedented forms of violence. One major outcome of these processes was a deep fear, or perhaps a complex, of loss. The fear of losing territory became a veritable phobia of late Ottoman political culture.

With the luxury of hindsight, many Turkish historians have dubbed the period 1912–23 the 'Ten Year's War' (*on yıllık harb*). They drew little or no distinction between the Balkan Wars, the First World War and the 'War of Liberation', although each was divided from the others by a break of at least a year.⁶⁰ For them, the unifying motive in these wars was the 'salvation' of the Ottoman Empire, which was struggling in an existential battle for its very existence. When the Balkan Wars erupted, however,

⁵⁷ Aram Andonian, *Balkan Savaşı* (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 1999, transl. Zaven Biberian).

⁵⁸ George W. Gawrych, 'The Culture and Politics of Violence in Turkish Society, 1903–14', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 22, 3 (1986), pp. 307–30.

⁵⁹ *BOA*, DH.EUM.EMN 72/39, 16 April 1914.

⁶⁰ İsmet Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu 1912–1922 (Balkan-Birinci Dünya ve İstiklâl Harbi)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1993).

not even the most astute commentators were able to foresee the imperial apocalypse that was looming over the empire. Contemporary observers such as Ottoman intellectuals, the officer corps and rank-and-file soldiers did not perceive that apparent single continuum of conflict and crisis. Many Ottomans believed that the Balkan Wars and ensuing violence against and humiliations of Muslim civilians were the worst things that had ever happened to the empire. They believed that the inevitability of separatist nationalism had now caught up with the empire that finally had to face these realities. Within five years, the Ottomans would witness a series of events that were experienced as even more apocalyptic and shocking: the fall of the historical city Erzurum, the loss of the holy cities of Jerusalem, Mecca and Madina, as well as the occupation of the major cities Istanbul, Baghdad, Aleppo and Smyrna/İzmir.