

Who Now Remembers the Armenians: Mass Deportation as a Homogenization Technology in the Late Ottoman Empire

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Abstract: The deportations and massacres of religious and ethnic minorities in the late Ottoman Empire are prime examples of a homogenization technology (Alesina et al. 2013), a policy implemented in order to homogenize a population along some identitarian margin (ethnic, religious, etc.). The Sultan Abdülhamid II encouraged the massacre of Armenians by Kurdish raiders from 1894-1896 in order to suppress Armenian nationalist parties. Similarly, the ideologically malleable Committee of Union and Progress attempted to unify the Ottoman Empire against the West, first through a failed policy of multi-ethnic Ottomanism, and then through an ethnically exclusionary Pan-Turkism. Turkism resulted in the mass deportation of Greeks on the eve of World War I and the Armenian Genocide, resulting in the deaths of more than one million Anatolian Armenians. The Turkish government was able to offset the costs of the genocide by an organized campaign to take land from Armenian citizens, and give it to new Muslim refugees from the Balkan states. I incorporate Johnson and Koyama's (2019) work on religious toleration and state capacity. I describe the conditions for a genocide to be a viable homogenization technology.

Keywords: Public Choice, Armenian genocide, Ottoman Empire, Nation-Building, Political Economy

At noon on November 11th, 1895, a crowd of Kurds and Turks, some 800 strong, halted in front of a military outpost in Harput, an Armenian town in Eastern Anatolia. After a meeting, the Ottoman military receded along with its cannon, and the crowd, shouting “Allah, Allah!”, assaulted the Armenian residents. The soldiers did not participate in the killing but seemed to “superintend it” (Morris and Ze’evi 2019, p. 81). Hafiz Mehmet, a Turkish soldier, informs his family that “We have killed 1,200 Armenians, all of them as food for the dogs...20 days ago we made war on the Armenian unbelievers... I myself fired 47 cartridges... If you ask after the soldiers..., not one of their noses has bled” (Ibid., p. 82). In the nearby village of Içme, fifty-two Armenian villagers were burned inside their church. The Armenian Church was turned into a mosque and the Protestant church was made into a stable. In the village of Oozoonova, Armenians were compelled to convert to Islam, but many drowned themselves in the Euphrates rather than deny their faith (Ibid., p. 83). These were just a few of many religiously and politically motivated massacres that took place between 1894 and 1896 under Sultan Abdülhamid II.

On March 13, 1914, almost twenty years later, in the town of Zeytun, government officials arrested a handful of notable Armenians in response to Armenian deserters who had shot some Turkish gendarmes. On March 25 and 26 the Ottomans burned the Armenian Orthodox monastery in Zeytun to the ground (Antreasian 1993). On April 8th, deportations from Zeytun began. All of those whose “residence in Zeytun or Maraş is deemed to be harmful” were to be deported (Morris and Ze’evi 2019, p. 167). By May 1915, U.S. Consul Jesse Jackson reported that “between 4,300 and 4,500 families, about 26,000 persons, are being removed by order of the government from the districts of Zeytun and Marash...taken southeasterly as far as Dier-el-Zor...The misery that these people are suffering is terrible to imagine” (Ibid., p. 169). Cemal Pasha, one of the leaders of the Young Turks, requested that *muhacirs*, Muslim refugees from the Balkan wars, be settled in Zeytun for “political reasons” (Ibid., p. 168). On April 20th, Constantinople queried on the fertility of Zeytun’s land, and whether or not it could support Balkan *muhacirs*. The events at Zeytun were only the beginning of an orchestrated plan to eliminate Armenians from Anatolia and replace them with a loyal Muslim and Turkish populous. The number of casualties in the Armenian Genocide (called by Armenians the *Medz Yeghern*, meaning Great Calamity) is estimated between 700,000 and 1.5 million. Today, the Armenian Genocide remains a contentious topic. Countries that recognize the Armenian Genocide may find themselves on bad diplomatic terms with Turkey. Any mention of the genocide in Turkey is a dangerous taboo (Akçam 2004, p. 24).

For a majority of Ottoman history under the *millet* system, the status of non-Muslim minorities was one of conditional toleration. Non-Muslims were allowed to hold their faith, but they operated under a different set of rules. A number of exogenous shocks began to break the *millet* equilibrium down. In 1908, the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), commonly known as The Young Turks, took power from the sultan, and attempted to unify Turkey under a secular state with universal rights. The previous sultan legitimated his rule based on religion, but the CUP was far more ideologically malleable and attempted to unite the Empire against the West under an Ottoman national identity. The CUP needed a united nation from which it could produce a much needed public good: defense against the West. Early attempts at creating an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous Ottoman identity failed, so the CUP shifted to the more exclusive Turkish identity. World War I served as an expedient moment to engineer the population to their design. Taner Akçam (2004, p. 24), a leading scholar on the Armenian Genocide, notes:

The logic of the national state requires an unavoidable homogenization. The national state must rest upon the unity or totality of feeling of persons who have decided to live together ‘no matter what.’ A shared cultural foundation that can attain this must be established. The Republic indeed did this. The remaining non-Muslims were defined as ‘the other.’ Turkish cultural identity, then, became the cement with which to build this homogenization.

The Armenian genocide is a perfect case study of state secularization and modernization, and its interaction with previous religious institutions, as well as the roles that religion and ideology play in state-building.

I will describe the persecution and massacre of Christians in Anatolia as a process of nation-building (Alesina et al. 2013). I will also employ elements of the model of religious persecution developed by Noel Johnson and Mark Koyama in *Persecution & Tolerance: The Long Road to Religious Freedom* (2019) to describe the political economy of persecution, and elements of the political economy of homogenization technologies (Alesina and Spolaore 1997; Alesina et al. 2013; Alesina et al. 2017). The essay is organized as follows: Section I is a description of theoretical concepts in institutional economics and economic history that I will use to describe the events. Section II is a broad overview of religious and ethnic persecution in the late Ottoman Empire from the Tanzimat reforms to the 1915 Genocide. Section III employs the conceptual elements to explain specific aspects of the massacres. Section IV concludes.

I. A THEORY OF PERSECUTION AND STATE-BUILDING

In *Persecution and Toleration* (2019), Johnson and Koyama develop a model of religious persecution and apply it to the development of religious freedom in Europe. Their model is built on a few fundamental concepts, primarily the dichotomy between identity rules and general rules. To an identity rule, someone's identitarian characteristics (race, family, religion, gender, etc.) determine the judgment. Your race determined if some law applied in the Jim Crow South. Who your parents are determines whether or not you are in line to rule in a hereditary monarchy. To contrast, a familiar example of general rules are traffic laws. They apply to everyone equally regardless of status. Even the President can be pulled over for speeding (at least conceptually). The standard of an entirely general rule is admittedly difficult to define and is near impossible to implement in practice (Hayek 1960, p. 316). The idea of general rules and their importance to a liberal polity is prevalent in the social thought of F. A. Hayek, but can be traced all the way back to David Hume and Adam Smith (Hayek 1960; Hayek 2013; Hume 1978; Smith 1976). Douglass North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast apply the concepts of general and identity rules to economic history in *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (2009).

Another important concept is state capacity. State capacity is a way of measuring the effective capabilities of a state. It is made up of fiscal capacity, the ability for a state to levy taxes, and legal capacity, the ability of a state to effectively administer law (Johnson and Koyama 2017; Piano 2019). Core to Johnson and Koyama's framework is the relationship between state capacity and general or identitarian nature of rules. They find two self-reinforcing equilibria: one where identity rules and weak state capacity mutually reinforce one another, and another where general rules and strong state capacity do likewise (Johnson and Koyama 2019, p. 37).

Identity rules are cheaper to enforce and thus are attractive to a weak state. Weak states cannot establish a legitimate rule by force, and often have to "buy" their legitimacy in the eyes of the people. They can be seen as legitimate if they successfully convince the masses that they are supported by a prevailing religious or cultural authority, which they develop by enforcing identity rules. Johnson and Koyama discuss an exchange between European nobles and the Roman Catholic church, in which the nobility would enforce conformity to the faith in exchange for legitimacy from Rome (Ibid., p. 32).

Identity rules also prevent a nation from developing widespread impersonal exchange, a key component of economic growth. Weak growth in turn supports weak states creating a vicious cycle. General rules and a strong state together create a virtuous cycle. The costs of enforcing general rules can be borne by a strong state, and the economic growth that comes from widespread impersonal exchange supports high fiscal capacity. The two equilibria are shown in Figure 1. For a polity to transition from one equilibrium to the other, some exogenous force must make the equilibrium unstable.

Johnson and Koyama discuss the application of their model to 20th century states that committed genocides such as Nazi Germany (Ibid., p. 399). The development of state capacity is necessary but not sufficient to develop general rules. Fascist states have high state capacity, but they use it to enforce identity rules more effectively. Nationalism and democracy had risen as alternatives to religious legitimacy. Nationalism could be inclusionary or exclusionary. Inclusive nationalism was built on the idea of citizenship, a status that anyone could take on. Exclusive nationalism is founded on immutable and non-transferrable characteristics such as race. Rulers employing exclusive nationalism buy their legitimacy through forcing out populations who do not fit into their strict national identity.

The work of Alberto Alesina comments on the dynamics of heterogeneous populations that are relevant to the choice a ruler will make between inclusive or exclusive nationalism. In "On the Number and Size of Nations" (1997) Alesina and Spolaore discuss the equilibrium quantity and size of political boundaries. A nation's elite want the population to be as large as possible in order to maximize the tax base, develop public goods at lower rates, exert more efficient forms of taxation, benefit from economies of scale and trade, and have more insurance against negative shocks. However, as a nation grows in size, the likelihood of its people being dissatisfied with central decisions is higher. Thus, there is a reason for larger nations to

prevail: they are stronger and can produce more public goods. There is also a reason for larger nations to break up. Subsets of the population are more likely to be distant from the public decision-making process and revolt or at least hinder the development of the state.

In “Nation-Building and Education” (2013), Alesina, Giuliano, and Reich discuss nation-building. Nation-building is “a process which leads to the formation of countries in which the citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences that they do not wish to separate from each other” (Alesina et al. 2013, p. 2). The state and the nation are not always the same. When the new Italian state was founded, one of the coalition’s leaders Massimo d’Azeglio remarked, “Italy has been made; now it remains to make Italians.” The process, if successful, eliminates the issue discussed in Alesina and Spolaore (1997). If a state successfully homogenizes the population, then it does not have to worry about disloyalty and disharmony more likely among a larger population. A policy with such a goal is called a “homogenization technology.” If we imagine that the state has a choice between bifurcating the nation or employing a homogenization technology to maintain control of the populous, they will make the decision on the cost margin. If the cost in terms of public goods is greater in a split than the cost of implementing the policy, then they do not implement it, but if the policy is cheaper, then the state will set out to make a nation of itself.

The homogenization process is likely to take place during the transition from an autocratic state to a democracy. When the state starts to look down at its people for legitimacy as opposed to other elites, they begin to wonder how they can shape the population in their favor. The elites in the autocracy want to set up the populous so that under democratic rule, they reserve power and keep the nation together. Alesina, Giuliano, and Reich use the example of compulsory education as a homogenization technology. They find an empirical link between the implementation of compulsory education laws and the threat of democracy.

From the perspective of elites who want to homogenize their population, the choice to promote inclusive or exclusive nationalism is dependent on the existing demographics. If certain groups are more distant from public goods production and the benefits of citizenship, they will identify less with the nation. For inclusive nationalism to successfully homogenize a population, the disparate social groups need some higher uniting interests, a situation that is unfortunately too rare. John Jay in *Federalist No. 2* noted that the thirteen former colonies were in such a unique position as they were composed of a population who were of similar ethnic, linguistic, religious, and philosophical background and who recently fought a successful revolution together, a once in a millennia opportunity for a new formative identity (Hamilton et al. 2001, p. 6). When this coincidence of interests fails, inclusive nationalism may incite rebellion against the center. Exclusive nationalism in favor of some majority population may be a cheaper option for a country that is desperate to homogenize and legitimize the state under an ethnic narrative.

A genocide presents itself as a horrifically straightforward homogenization technology. However, there are some unique differences with the model that Alesina et al. (2013) present.¹ If the goal of the nation-state is to obtain a large homogenous population, a genocide may not be the best option. It may make the population more homogenous, but it will also make it smaller. Genocide only functions as a viable alternative homogenization technology if the cost in population is sufficiently counterbalanced. For genocide to be an effective homogenization technology some or all of the following conditions should hold: (1) A significant portion of the population is seen as holding distant interests from the whole, (2) the cost of otherwise converting the minority population into the primary identity is high, (3) a complementary population influx that can smoothly assimilate is available, (4) the likelihood of successful resistance or foreign intervention is low.

II. RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC PERSECUTION IN THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

a. The Ottoman Empire and the Millet System

For most of its history, the Ottoman Empire legitimized itself on Islam and the enforcement of sharia law. The Ottoman state was autocratic with the sultan in command of the whole empire. The Ottoman Empire had no dominant landowner class. This is likely a reason that no constitutional limits ever developed endogenously on the sultan. In the West, barons were instrumental in providing a check on the king and developing early constitutions such as *Magna Carta* (Blaydes 2017). By the end of the eighteenth century the imperial center often had only nominal control over the periphery (Hanioglu 2008, p. 3). “In practice, the reach of the Ottoman government in Istanbul rarely extended beyond the central provinces of Anatolia and Rumelia, and then only weakly” (Hanioglu 2008, p. 7).

An Ottoman subject’s primary identity was more often religious than ethnic (Hanioglu 2008, p. 25). Sharia does not require that all subjects become Muslims. Christians and Jews can obtain *dhimmi* status. The rules of *dhimmis* are examples of identity rules in the Muslim context. *Dhimmis* are allowed to practice their religion freely, but they must pay additional taxes called *jizya* and follow specific regulations laid out for *dhimmi*. For example, Jews and Christians were barred from military and bureaucratic service. Islam prohibited the lending of money on interest granting non-Muslim minorities an effectual monopoly. The Pact of Umar is the name for these ad hoc arrangements that resulted in the *millet* (meaning nation) system. Each minority would obtain and regulate their own *millet* under a Sultanate. The Ottoman state also banned printing in Arabic, an action that potentially deterred an Islamic parallel to the Protestant Reformation (Rubin 2017). Printing in other languages such as Armenian, Greek, and Latin were not prohibited. Various sultans persecuted marginal Muslim groups such as the Mu’tazilites (Martin, Woodward, and Atmaja 1997).

The millet system was the conditional toleration equilibrium in the Middle East, the vicious cycle of identity rules and a weak state. Muslim heresies were condemned and suppressed as they threatened to split apart the sultan’s rule, while non-Muslim minorities were granted special status. Non-Muslim minorities were tolerated on the condition that they continued to obey the rules of the *millet* system and pay the *jizya* taxes. The system relied heavily on identity rules, and prevented the Ottomans from developing a strong state. Local rulers were more often legitimized by the consent of the governed (Hanioglu 2008, p. 56). It was a self-reinforcing equilibrium that could only be broken by some exogenous event.

b. The Rise of the West and the Tanzimat Reforms

The Modern Era began in Europe. A combination of military technology spurring state capacity and the Protestant Reformation generated the perfect storm for general rules to be both demanded and supplied. Most of Europe was headed on a track towards liberalism, general toleration, and economic growth. Western nations began to dwarf even classical empires. Timur Kuran argues in *The Long Divergence* (2011) that the lack of adaptability in Islamic institutions put them behind the West. The great powers struck fear into the heart of the sultanate and placed the future of the Ottoman Empire on unstable ground. “In some ways, the imperative of change facing the rulers of the Ottoman Empire was a direct result of the upheavals in Europe, which had unleashed new and dangerous forces. But the growing awareness of the need to evolve or perish stemmed equally from internal weaknesses” (Hanioglu 2008, p. 40).

The fact that the West was predominantly Christian provided some interesting interaction effects with the local minority population (Kuran 2011, Chapter 10). As the West became dominant in trade, so did non-Muslim minorities. By 1912, while only 19% of the population was non-Muslim, 85% of major local traders were non-Muslim with 66% being Christian Greeks and Armenians (Kuran 2011, p. 193). Not only did they dominate the trade in numbers, but they pioneered the new insurance industry and expanded the banking sector. A Western consul could establish himself in the Ottoman Empire in order to trade while

operating under Western legal systems. The consuls could extend these privileges to *dragomans* whom they would hire. A *dragoman*, an official interpreter, would offer local knowledge to European consuls in exchange for the ability to operate as European citizens. Local rulers would limit the number of *dragomans* in a region so that they could protect Ottoman merchants (Hanioglu 2008, p. 47). The Ottoman rulers would charge fees to individuals who wished to become *dragomans*. Their decision was on the margin of selling a productive asset in the form of a taxable citizen. The ability to operate under a Western legal system allowed the non-Muslims in the Middle East more freedom and adaptability to change than Muslims in the same region. Often French consuls would select Catholic *dragomans*, while Russian consuls would select Orthodox ones. The *dragomans* were considered native foreigners. Many Western consuls would later serve as valuable witnesses to the events of the Armenian Genocide.

A major moment in nineteenth century Ottoman history was the Tanzimat Reforms of 1839. These reforms kept the *millet* system intact, but relaxed many of the regulations on the *dhimmi*, granted some autonomy to millets, and simplified the *jizya* poll tax system (Hanioglu 2008, p. 76). The purpose of the reforms was both to advance equality under the law to unify a fractured empire and to improve European public opinion about the empire (Ibid., p. 77). The Tanzimat Reforms and increasing Western influence spurred a period of uproar within non-Muslim minority communities in the nineteenth century. In the 1820s the Greeks waged a successful war of independence. Greek consulates propagated the *Megali Idea* - the Great Idea - of Greek geopolitical expansion. In 1864 King George I of Greece represented a Greece that would support all ethnic Greeks no matter where they lived (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 26). The Ottoman Empire was ripe for the rise of pocket nationalisms because of the weakness of central control, numerous socioeconomic problems, and being encircled by Christian powers (Hanioglu 2008, p. 51).

The Armenian religious community, one of the oldest Orthodox Christian communities in the world, began to fracture. Western missionaries spread both Catholicism and Protestantism to Armenian villages. Because of the Tanzimat reforms they were able to establish two new *millets*. Western ideas of nationalism also began to seep into the Armenian consciousness. The ideas of Auguste Comte, Victor Hugo, and Jules Michelet influenced Nahapet Rusinian to begin the Ararat Society in 1849 (Ibid., p. 32). Now that religious conviction was no longer the binding force for the Armenian community, an edict was passed in 1847 to establish a civic government distinct from the spiritual authority in the original Armenian *millet*. Armenians formed a National Assembly and ratified their own constitution in 1863. The Armenians called it The National Constitution of the Armenians. The Ottomans called it The Regulations of the Armenian Millet. By 1880, the Armenian Patriarchate found that in six eastern provinces of Anatolia there were 1,561,600 Armenians, outnumbering 1,054,800 Muslims (Ibid., p. 23).

c. Sultan Abdülhamid II

On December 23, 1876, the Ottoman Empire adopted a modern constitution drawn up by minister Midhat Pasha and his Armenian companion, Krikor Odian. The constitution put a check on the sultan and promised general rules. It was mostly backed by the existing bureaucracy and the Islamic scholars called the *ulema* (Hanioglu 2008, p. 114). Midhat hoped to stave off European pressures by protecting Christian minorities (Ibid., p. 15). The previous sultan, Abdülaziz, was replaced by his nephew Murad V, who only lasted three months due to mental instability. Murad V was replaced by his brother Abdülhamid II. The constitutional period was short-lived. "The major blind spot of the reformers consisted in their assumption that the 'old,' being unable to compete with the 'new,' would gradually disappear from the scene" (Hanioglu 2008, p. 105). Abdülhamid soon overstepped his boundaries and dissolved the parliament in order to crush a rebellion that had arisen in Bulgaria. Former British Prime Minister William Gladstone decried the cruelty of the Turkish Race in Bulgaria. Russia, declaring themselves protector of Slavic peoples, now had the opportunity to attack Turkey (Ibid., p. 17).

After the Bulgarian war of independence, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and of course Bulgaria, received independence or greater autonomy from Constantinople. Russia established a

foothold in the Caucasus. The Armenian Patriarchate attempted to gain protection from the Russians, but their hopes were dashed. Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin (1878) commanded that the Ottomans improve conditions in the East where Armenian villagers were being raided by Muslim Kurds and Circassians. Eastern Anatolia was a whirlpool of political authority. Whoever held a gun to your head was your ruler for the day. “The countryside was dominated by shifting groups of local notables, insurgents, semi-nomadic Kurdish and Turkmen tribes, and the occasional governor sent from the capital who might ‘go native’ and disregard Constantinople’s ‘instructions’ on guidelines” (Ibid., p. 24). The Kurdish and other nomadic tribes had been driven into Eastern Anatolia by Russian armies or wars in Northern Iran, causing heightened tensions with local Christians. Constantinople largely neglected article 61. The Sultan hoped to restore the pre-Tanzimat *millet* system.

Two radical Armenian nationalist parties were formed in response to the dissolution of the Armenian National Assembly and the failure to protect Eastern Armenians. These were the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party (Hunchak), formed in 1887, and the Dashnaksutyun (Dashnak), formed in 1890 (Ibid., p. 40). Soon, two suspicious massacres took place in towns of Yozgat and Sassoun. Both cases follow a suspiciously uniform pattern. An Armenian in the village of Incirli killed a police informant and mass riots occurred in the nearby town of Yozgat, where many Armenians were killed (Ibid., p. 50). In Sassoun, the Ottomans were highly suspicious of Armenians revolting and commanded the Kurds to massacre. The Kurds were accompanied by Turkish soldiers who were disguised as Kurds (Ibid., p. 57). An estimated 3,000-6,000 Armenians were killed (Ibid., p. 60). The Turks had the ability to pass off blame to the Kurds and the general “lawlessness” of the East.

In response to the massacres at Sassoun, the Hunchaks led a demonstration with between 500 and 2,000 supporters on September 30th, 1895 in Constantinople. A clash broke out in the street. When the dust settled, a Turkish police officer was dead. In response, the Turks swarmed the city and took revenge on any Armenians they could find. Beginning the night of October 1 and continuing into October 2, a full-scale pogrom occurred against Armenians. On October 21st, the sultan issued a decree to appease the Western powers who witnessed the events in Constantinople. The sultan promised to allow Western aides to Eastern vilayets and protect Armenians from Kurdish raids. Not only were these reforms never implemented, the sultanate encouraged the further slaughter of Armenians by Kurds, in order to crush a revolution it feared the Hunchakian demonstration had ignited.

The ensuing massacres followed a near uniform pattern, casting doubt on the claims that the massacres were not an orchestration of Constantinople. In the town of Trabzon bordering the Black Sea, two Armenians attempted to assassinate the governor, Kadra Bey (Ibid., p. 73). The actions of a few Armenians led to widespread riots and massacres of Armenians by Muslims. These included Turkish citizens and Kurds. The massacres rarely included Turkish soldiers, but the mere fact that the army did not defend Armenians testified to the government’s intention. Similar massacres happened in Maraş, Harput, Urfa, Diyarbekir, and Aintab. Armenians who willingly converted to Islam were often spared. There was scant evidence that Armenians were planning to revolt. It’s also possible that many of the trigger events were fake. Armenian’s only explicit demands were that reforms promised after the Hunchakian march be implemented. U.S. diplomat Alexander Watkins Terrell received a letter from Caleb Gates, a professor in Constantinople which read, “We are confronting a ...plan...to render the reforms useless by destroying the Christian population.” Gates also heard Turks and Kurds say that they “had orders from the Sultan to kill the Christians” (Ibid., p. 82). Estimates of the casualties range from 88,000 to 300,000. Robert Melson (1982, p. 507) offers a succinct expression of why the 1890s massacres occurred:

The sultan, and indeed the Ottoman system as a whole, could not, at one and the same time, accommodate both the Armenian renaissance, with its implications of Armenian equality, and the millet system, with its implications of Muslim superiority. Something had to give. Either Armenians had to be prevented from becoming the equals of Muslims or the ideology and practice of

Muslim superiority had to be scrapped and replaced by a genuine egalitarian pluralism. As we have seen, the sultan was not prepared to move in the direction of genuine equality.

If he had followed the liberal reformers, he may have maintained social order, but that strategy would have been self-delegitimizing. The more religiously centered massacres of the 1890s were a foreshadowing of the later genocide.

d. The CUP, the First World War, and the Armenian Genocide

In 1908, the CUP, or the Young Turks, successfully reestablished the Constitution of 1876 (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 137). They feared the partitioning of the Empire as much as the sultan did but were more progressive in their outlook as opposed to the reactionary sultan. This would require a centralized modern state, based on a loyal, tax-paying populous. The CUP's first attempt at creating a unified empire attempted to bind together all the heterogeneous cultures and religions under the Ottoman identity. The constitution and inclusive nationalism were the first attempt at this. "Among the plans that had been considered were the linkage of the various regions that did not provide soldiers or pay taxes to a central point, and the implementation of a central educational program in order to create a shared sense of unity" (Akcam 2004, p. 127). Primary schools became free and learning Turkish was mandatory to hold a government position. Bureaucratic and military service were opened up to non-Muslims for the first time.

The officials of the CUP still had not faced their central problem. The Ottoman Empire was too large and the people too diverse to unite under a single banner. They had underestimated how disconnected the people felt from Constantinople:

But it was not only the Christian population that was subjected to suppression: non-Turkish Muslim communities, whether Arab, Albanian or other, were also subjected to similar measures. Efforts were made to force other Muslim communities to learn and accept Turkish as their common language. The inevitable result was rebellion. The Albanian revolt which broke out in 1910 was in this sense an important turning point. Education actually became one of the main causes of the revolt. The revolt by the Muslim Albanians was a warning sign that the unity policies would not work (Ibid., p. 142).

The failure of these policies came to a head in the First Balkan War in which the Ottomans were defeated by a coalition of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 138). The Young Turk thinker Ziya Gökalp, started appealing to a "truer" Turkish heritage. Gökalp aspired to grow the borders of the Ottoman Empire to that of a fictional land of "Turān" that includes all ethnic Turks. When inclusionary nationalism failed to retain the loyalty of all Ottoman peoples, the CUP switched strategies to an exclusionary Turkish nationalism. Only a homogeneously Turkish and Muslim population would suffice to build the new Turkish state. The CUP blamed the failure in the war on the sultanate and used the opportunity to take full power.

Another important development of the Balkan Wars was the approximately 500,000 to 600,000 Muslim *muhacirs* (refugees) that immigrated into Anatolia from Salonica, a city which had been annexed by Greece. The first wave of the homogenization of Anatolia included the mass deportation of Greeks to their new homeland (Ibid., p. 148). Between January and June 1914, 100,000-200,000 Greeks were expelled from Anatolia. The CUP initially imposed additional taxes but became increasingly rough with Greeks as time went on. *Muhacirs* were given the abandoned land of Greeks (Akçam 2004, p. 161).

Meanwhile, tensions in Europe had reached the boiling point and the Great War began. One of the first Ottoman campaigns was to take back lands in the Caucasus region from Russia. The Third Army led by Enver Pasha was 120,000 strong and hoped to take the Russian stronghold of Sarikamis. They made the classic mistake of attacking Russia in the winter and lost the battle horribly (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 156). Their

failure was blamed on Armenians who had defected from the Ottoman Army and assisted the Russians. Soon, Armenian men who had been drafted for the Balkan Wars and now the World War were curiously shifted to labor battalions and forced to work hard conditions (Ibid., p. 157). Many died, and their villages were now left defenseless. The attack on Zeytun detailed in the introduction, was the first attempt to mass deport Armenians.

On May 27th, parliament enacted the *Tehcir*, a deportation order. The law was targeted towards rebels and resistors, but was implemented almost exclusively against Armenians (Ibid., p. 172). There were three requirements for deportation. First, resettled Armenians could not be more than 10 percent of local tribal and Muslim inhabitants. Second, new Armenian villages could not contain more than fifty households. Third, once resettled, they would not be allowed to leave their new location (Ibid., p. 173). An important early moment in the genocide is April 24th, 1915, when the Armenian intellectuals and elites were arrested in Istanbul on trumped up charges (Ibid., p. 213). This is the date reserved every year for Armenian Genocide commemoration worldwide.

Deportations seem to follow a pattern. Regions with a larger population have a higher rate of massacre. The Armenians were far more populous in Eastern Anatolia as shown in Figure 2. This is an attempt to follow the 10 percent rule and to reduce the Armenian population to a certain absolute level at which they would be politically irrelevant. Often, deportation orders were sent only days before the population was compelled to leave. The journeys were treacherous, and the Turkish soldiers were brutal. Minister of the Interior, Talaat Pasha sent an order to Dr. Mehmed Reshid in Diyarbekir with the orders to “Burn, Destroy, Kill” (Üngör 2011, p. 71). Often at the beginning of the journey, men were separated from their families and violently executed while the women and children continued their march. Women in Mamuret-ül-Aziz had disfigured their faces with charcoal and coloring to appear less enticing to the soldiers. They rarely took valuables on the journey for fear they would be stolen (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 193). The deportation trains ended in Aleppo. The final stage of the genocide in Spring 1916 was to send Armenians out of Aleppo into the desert of Der Zor. Approximately 350,000 Armenians died in the Syrian desert (Ibid., p. 242).

APPLYING THE MODEL

The conditions that we should expect for a genocide to be a viable homogenization technology developed in Section II are (1) A significant portion of the population is seen as holding distant interests from the whole, (2) the cost of otherwise converting the minority population into the primary identity is high, (3) a complementary population influx that can smoothly assimilate is available, (4) the likelihood of successful resistance or foreign intervention is low.

a. The Great Powers

The *millet* system was a self-reinforcing equilibrium that could only be broken by an exogenous force. This was the rise of the Western states. The *millet* system became unsustainable for two reasons. First, the military threat of a European invasion meant that the weak Ottoman state would no longer suffice. The secession of border territories at the aid of European powers over the past century made the partition of the Empire a waking nightmare for Ottoman leaders. Second, the West's rise empowered non-Muslim minorities in the Ottoman empire both ideologically and economically. The Tanzimat reforms were put in place because of pressure from the West. Because of the Western pressure, the 1890 massacres had to be disguised under the Kurds, and the WWI deportations could be excused as war casualties or outright denied. Though the West ultimately caused the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, two other factors potentially allowed more persecution.

First, the ideology of human rights, equality, and religious tolerance from the West were met with high suspicion in the East. Turks realized that when the West referred to ‘human rights’ they would rarely mention instances in which Muslims were persecuted (Üngör 2011, p. 43). The West held a double standard and

looked out for the interests of Christians under the guise of secular human rights (Akçam 2004, pp. 110-112). The general toleration language of the West appeared a mere sham to further break up the Ottoman Empire. For example, William Gladstone came out of retirement to protest the treatment of Christians in the Ottoman Empire (Deringil 2009, p. 345). Throughout the nineteenth century, Russia broke pieces off the Ottoman Empire invoking Slavic Nationalism as a cause. When non-Muslims were being oppressed, the West cried massacre, but when 20,000-30,000 Turks were killed in the 1821 Greek Revolt, the West did not bat an eye (Akçam 2004, p. 111). This selective application of general rules² may or may not have been intentional, but it likely cost the West the trust of Turks and the potential for a liberal Turkey.

Second, the main leverage that the West held over Ottomans was sheer military strength. A mass execution of Armenian citizens at any normal time would have incited the wrath of not only Russia, but likely Britain, the U.S., and France as well. As a simple matter of marginal analysis, after World War I began, the Turks no longer had anything to lose in terms of inciting the wrath of Europe. European troops were spread thin across all fronts, and all the armies that could have been deployed to the Middle East were already there. The war was a perfect time to execute a mass genocide that would have ignited a war against the Ottomans if European countries were not already in the middle of one (Akçam 2004, p. 163). This satisfies condition (4) that the marginal cost of a foreign invasion is low.

b. Ottomanization, Turkism, or Islamism

The rise of the West meant that by some means, Constantinople would need to develop high state capacity or risk becoming another puppet of European empires. Abdülhamid II was legitimated by religion, and had no choice but to operate under the old identity rule equilibrium. The ideologically malleable Young Turks had a more diverse range of options to legitimate their rule, and they took full advantage of that repertoire. Abdülhamid II, or any sultan for that matter, had much higher constraints on his available justifications than the CUP. Abdülhamid's strategic position and response can be compared to the early response by the French crown to the Huguenots Calvinists (Johnson and Koyama 2019, p. 198). When the legitimacy of France was questioned by the rise of a new religion, Francois I passed the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1540, giving the state control over the repression of heresies. After a period of heavy persecution against the Protestants, there were simply too many Huguenots and the French state was too weak to successfully eliminate the movement. With the collapse of sultanic authority, legitimacy was not gained by "looking up" to a religious authority, but "looking down" to the acceptance of the people. Üğur Üngör argues that this shift facilitated the use of population politics and population management as social tools (Üngör 2011, p. 53).

To retain any semblance of a unified nation, the Ottomans would need to create unity by some means. Ottoman unity was thus an important topic for Turkish intellectuals (Akçam 2004, p. 117). The initial attempt to unify by the CUP can be called the 'Ottomanism' phase. This is the period in which the 1876 Constitution was re-established and there was an attempt to defend the rights of all Ottoman citizens and extend general toleration and citizenship. "According to its statutes, it aimed to observe the constitution, pursue the notion of Ottomanism, end tribal warfare, and maintain 'harmony and good relations between their compatriots, the Armenians, Nestorians, and other Ottoman subjects'" (Üngör 2011, p. 47). This period in spirit began with the Tanzimat reforms, but was reborn after the CUP coup in 1908 (Hanioglu 2008, p. 106). The CUP initially opted for a "soup" model, where Ottoman subjects identified first and foremost as Ottoman citizens, and only secondarily with a religious or ethnic group (Butt 2017, p. 136). Ottomanism and constitutionalism was treated as a panacea (Ibid., p. 132). During this period, the CUP met and formed a treaty with the Dashnaksutyun to preserve "the sacred Ottoman fatherland from separation and division" (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 142). There was an effort to thoroughly "Turkify" the extent ends of the empire. The CUP fully intended to keep the Arabic speaking regions of the empire under new Ottoman terms. Turkish replaced Arabic in schools, and Arabs were demoted to lower level positions in Syria and Iraq (Ibid., p. 139).

As a result of the Balkan Wars in 1912, the Ottoman Empire lost 40% of its landmass and 25% of its population, and by simple demographics, ethnic Turks were now a majority portion of the population and Anatolia became a heightened focus (Butt 2017, pp. 137-139). The Balkan Wars proved to the CUP that the empire was too large and the population too heterogeneous to sustain the former size of the empire, as per the predictions of Alesina and Spolaore. The shock of war shattered the narrative that Ottoman subjects could identify as Ottoman citizens with a common set of interests (Üngör 2011, pp. 43-44). The Young Turk officials were convinced that whatever happened in the Balkans could not be allowed to happen again (Ibid., p. 50). With the Balkan territories gone, the portion of the Empire that was non-Muslim and non-Turkish was even smaller, making a comprehensive homogenization effort more viable.

The lack of Ottoman identity was not simply a religious issue either, as many North Africans and Arabs, similarly did not feel a sense of identity with the Ottoman center (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 138). Ziya Gökalp published “Turkification, Islamization, Modernization” in 1913. Gökalp's ideas became the driving force of the Turkism phase of the CUP. Gökalp claimed that Turkish dominance was always part of the Ottoman dream. Gökalp's vision of pan-Turanian empire spanned all territories in the world where Turkish was spoken, similar to the nationalism of the Greek King George I. Gökalp's ethnic vision was complemented by an economic nationalism that rejected both liberal capitalism and socialism. (Polatel and Üngör 2011, p. 31). The economic nationalist ideology believed that the economic woes of the empire were due to capital being held in the hands of those with foreign interests. The natural response would be to get property into loyal Turkish hands (Polatel and Üngör 2011, p. 34).

Turkism as opposed to Ottomanism was not the preferred rallying point, as the Ottoman vision was larger than even an imaginary pan-Turanian one (Akçam 2004, p. 79). The CUP was originally under the impression that a majority of Ottoman citizens had common interests, and that the inclusive national narrative of Ottomanism would suffice to legitimize the state. The Balkan Wars proved this gamble wrong, and the CUP was able to shift hard to the narrative of exclusive nationalism to maintain the territories they still held in Anatolia. The CUP had the advantage of expanding their ideological toolbox beyond Abdülhamid's capabilities. The experience of the Balkan Wars solidified the perception that the remaining non-Turkish Ottomans in Anatolia, who were primarily Armenian, were untrustworthy citizens and established condition (1).

c. The Question of Conversion and the Muhacirs

Referring back to “On the Number and Size of Nations”, it seems antithetical that the CUP would massacre a large portion of their population. If controlling land and maintaining a large population is so important to developing a strong state, it may be worth it to attempt to convert the Armenians rather than massacre them even if it is incredibly difficult to do so. This objection does not stand because both conditions (2) and (3) hold. It would have been incredibly difficult to convert a majority of Armenians in a trustworthy way, and there was an alternate more loyal population to draw on.

First, many Armenians did convert to avoid slaughter in the 1890s massacres, but soon after reverted to Christianity. Many Armenian conversions during this period that appeared genuine may have been to avoid being targeted by Hamidian raids, and officially many of these conversions were not accepted (Derin-gil 2009). Learning his lesson, Talaat Pasha did not trust Armenian convert's authenticity and after a period ordered that even converts be deported (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 254). A similar phenomena occurred with the *conversos* in Spain (Johnson and Koyama 2019, p. 226). Even though the Genocide was not an essentially religious pogrom, conversion would effectively destroy the Armenian community obtaining the same homogenizing effect. Unlike the Jews in the Holocaust, an Armenian could attempt to adopt a Turkish identity and religion. Some governors presented conversion documents as name change documents so that converts would feel less shame (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, p. 256).

More often than mass conversion were the mass rape and abduction of women and children on the deportations (Ibid., p. 255). Some women and children were forced to convert to Islam. Women could be

married to Turkish men and adopt a Turkish lifestyle, whereas Armenian men could not be appropriated so easily. Orders to execute rarely included younger children, though many died during the treacherous marches. Orphans who were left on the streets of Aleppo were a testimony to the masses killed by the CUP (Ibid., p. 234). Many Armenian men had been conscripted into the army, and were either worked to death or disposed of (Ibid., pp. 157-160). The sincerity of Armenian conversions was too difficult to ascertain and the cost of mass conversion was too high, establishing condition (3).

The *muhacirs* from the Balkan wars provided a ready-made population to replace Greeks and Armenians in Anatolia. There is evidence to suggest that the CUP was aware of the importance of the refugees, and it influenced their decision to commit genocide. A comprehensive study of the program to confiscate Armenian properties to distribute them to Balkan refugees and Turkish bourgeoisie is available in *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (2011). In a 1914 speech, the president of the CUP Chamber of Deputies charged the hall to “not forget beloved Salonica”, the former home of many *muhacirs* (Akçam 2004, p. 94). He was answered by cries of “We shall not forget!” Immediately after the deportation decision, on June 10, 1915 orders were distributed to local authorities under the guise of “abandoned properties” laws. These same orders often included resettlement protocols for moving Balkan *muhacirs* into formerly Armenian homes (Polatel and Üngör 2011, pp. 44-45). Movable and perishable property was sold at auction for low prices, while immovable properties were confiscated by the state (Polatel and Üngör 2011, p. 47). In the region of Mamuret-ül-Aziz, the Directorate of Muhacir Affairs specifically requested that an eye be kept on movable property and real estate during the deportations (Morris and Ze’evi 2019, p. 142). Armenians who attempted to sell their properties in anticipation of the deportation were prevented from selling them to foreigners or Christians (Polatel and Üngör 2011, p. 68).

The number of buildings that were abandoned by (and subsequently confiscated from) Armenians, according to Talaat Pasha’s own notebooks, totaled at 41,458 (Ibid., p. 73). Also according to Talaat’s notebooks, in 1915, 20,545 buildings and 267,536 acres of land were allocated to settlers (Ibid., p. 82). Since Armenians made up a large portion of traders in the interior, the damage to the Ottoman economy was enormous. Industries such as coal, wheat, cotton, and many others declined by 50% or more. The Ottoman economy as a whole shrunk by 40%, though it is difficult to ascertain what portion of this fall is due to the war itself (Ibid., p. 96). Motivations for the confiscation and reallocation of properties were primarily ideological from the CUP leaders, but at the local levels, Turkish bourgeoisie and officials used the confusion to take spoils for themselves from the horde of Armenian wealth (Ibid., p. 103). The confiscation of property was used directly to supplant the Armenian population with the Balkan one. This opportunity and measure provide us with condition (3), that an alternate population takes the place of the genocide population.

CONCLUSION

After the defeat of the Central Powers in WWI, Ottoman fears came true. Britain and Russia descended upon Anatolia, and began to break it up into smaller territories, including a new Armenian Republic that still exists today. The invaders would not last long as the hero of Gallipoli, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, led a Turkish independence movement and retook Anatolia for the new Republic of Turkey, the state of Turkey that currently exists (Morris and Ze’evi 2019, p. 142). The issue of whether or not Atatürk’s rebellion would have been successful without the homogenization measures of the CUP is left to the realm of speculative alternate history. There are other questions not addressed in this paper such as the role of Islam in the massacres and the relationship between the Turks and Muslim minorities such as the Kurds.

The massacres perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire against non-Muslim minorities were not only outburst of racist hatred. Though real resentment existed, there was a degree of cold calculation on the part of the CUP, that mass murder was the only way to preserve a Turkish population upon which to build a nation and thus a state. The genocide occurred because the Armenians were unable to revolt or receive foreign aid, the Balkan refugees provided an alternative population, and the CUP were convinced that massacre was the only path to homogenization. This essay has shown that genocide can be successfully employed as a homog-

enization technology if certain conditions are met. Unfortunately, horrific events such as the Armenian Genocide have not been rare in the 20th Century.³

NOTES

- 1 In Alesina et al. 2017, the authors include a footnote that states, for the purposes of their model, they “do not consider genocide since the size of the population is constant.”
- 2 This would make them de facto identity rules.
- 3 I thank Yahya Alshamy, Hayden Busby, Jacob Hall, Logan Hansen, Clara Jace, Mark Koyama, Caleb Petitt, Ennio Piano, Dominic Pino, Alex Madajian, Seth Ourfalian, Suzanne Shera and an anonymous reviewer for assistance of various forms over the course of writing this paper.

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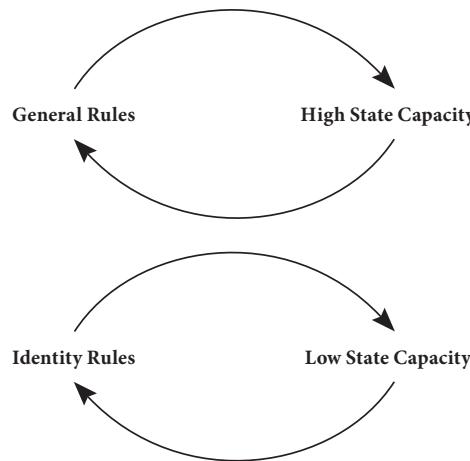
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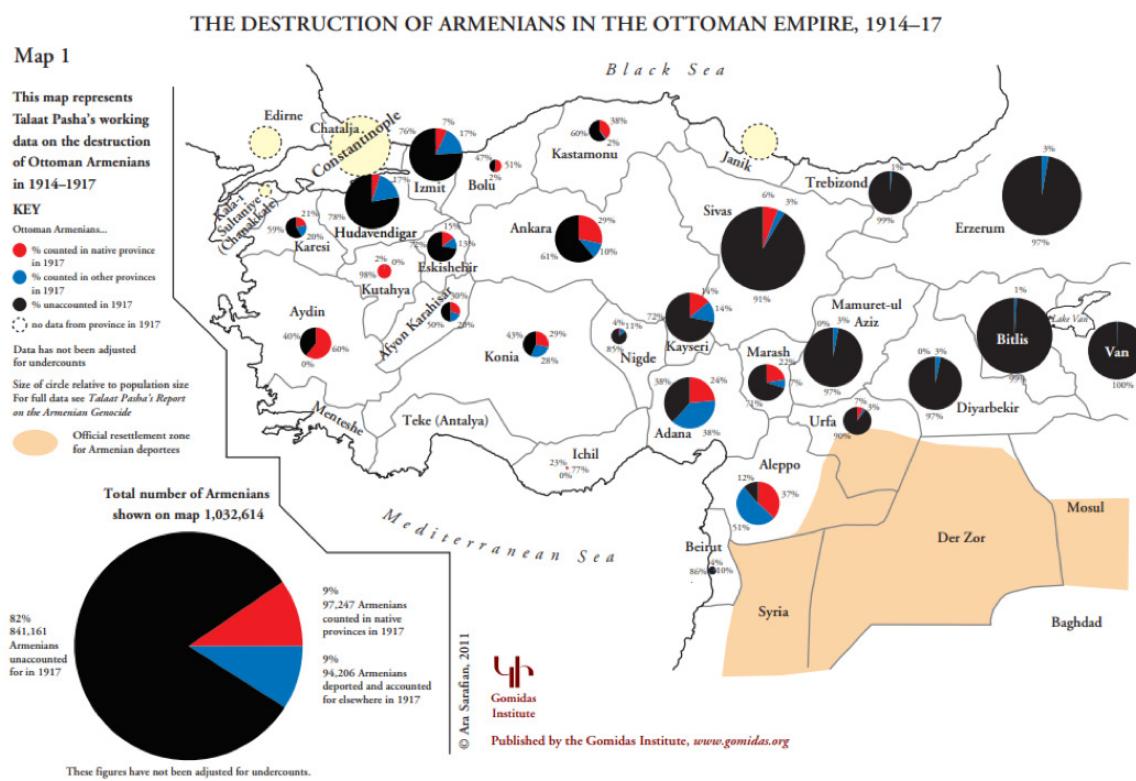
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FIGURES

Figure 1. Rules and State Capacity

Source: Johnson and Koyama 2019, 37 and 41

Figure 2. Talaat's 1917 Report of the Genocide

Source: <http://gomidas.org/uploads/Talaat%20Pasha%20Report%20Map%201.pdf>