

BETWEEN VOLUNTARISM AND RESISTANCE:
THE OTTOMAN MOBILIZATION OF MANPOWER
IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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2009

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Dissertation submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
History

by
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2009

Thesis Abstract

Mehmet Beşikçi, “Between Voluntarism and Resistance: The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War”

This dissertation examines the Ottoman experience of mobilization of manpower in the First World War. By focusing mainly on Anatolia and the Muslim population, it aims to explore how the Ottoman state tried to cope with the challenges of permanent mobilization for the war effort. The dissertation also aims to analyze how this process reshaped state-society relations in Anatolia. It is argued that social actors were not passive vis-à-vis the state during the Ottoman mobilization effort: they had agency and produced responses that would reshape the mobilizing policies that targeted them. Based on how social actors’ own expectations and priorities matched up with state policies under ever-deteriorating wartime conditions, the dissertation demonstrates that these responses constituted a wide spectrum ranging from voluntary support to open resistance. In turn, the state responded by revising its mobilization policies and reformulating new mechanisms of control at the local level.

The research for this dissertation is largely based on the primary sources at the Ottoman State Archives (BOA), The Turkish General Staff Military History Archives (ATASE), and the National Archives of Britain. Moreover, the relevant newspapers and journals of the period under study, and the diaries-memoirs of various people who participated in the mobilization experience also constitute a major part of the documentary basis of this dissertation.

Keywords: the First World War, mobilization, conscription, volunteers, paramilitary associations, draft-evasion, deserters, gendarmerie.

Tez Özeti

Mehmet Beşikçi, “Gönüllü Destek ile Karşı Çıkış Arasında: Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Osmanlı İnsan Gücü Seferberliği”

Bu doktora tezi Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Osmanlı insan gücü seferberliği deneyimini incelemektedir. Tez Anadolu ve Müslüman nüfus üzerine odaklanmakta ve Osmanlı devletinin, savaşın ortaya çıkardığı sürekli insan seferber etme zorunluluğuyla nasıl baş ettiğini çözümlenmeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu sürecin Anadolu’da devlet-toplum ilişkilerini nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini irdelemek de tezin hedefleri arasındadır.

Seferberlik sürecinde toplumsal aktörlerin devlet karşısında pasif katılımcı olmadıkları, kendilerini ilgilendiren seferberlik politikalarını yeniden şekillendiren tepkiler verebildikleri savunulmaktadır. Seferberliğe katılan insanların bu süreçte verdikleri tepkiler, onların beklenti ve önceliklerinin devletin talep ve beklentileriyle uyuşup uyuşmadığına göre, gönüllü destekten açıkça karşı çıkışa kadar uzanabilmektedir. Bu tepkilerle baş etmeye çalışan devlet aygıtı ise bir yandan politikalarını gözden geçirmek zorunda kalmış, bir yandan da yerel düzeyde iktidarını ve topluma nüfuz etme kabiliyetini artırıcı önlemlere başvurmuştur.

Bu tez için yapılan araştırma ağırlıklı olarak Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA) ve T.C. Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih Arşivi’ndeki (ATASE) belgelerin yanı sıra, Britanya Ulusal Arşivi’nden (TNA: PRO) belgelere dayanmaktadır. Ayrıca, araştırılan dönemin konuyla ilgili süreli yayınları ve seferberlik sürecine katılmış olan insanların yazdığı anı-günlük tarzı kaynaklara da başvurulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Birinci Dünya Savaşı, seferberlik, askere alma sistemi, gönüllüler, paramiliter dernekler, bakaya ve firar sorunu, firariler, jandarma.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many people who have supported me in the making of this dissertation. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Selim Deringil, who has always been encouraging throughout this process. I have greatly benefited from his academic professionalism and friendship. I am also grateful to my committee members Edhem Eldem, Selçuk Esenbel, Zafer Toprak and Cemil Koçak for providing me with invaluable comments and advice.

I cannot thank Arzu Öztürkmen enough for her unending support. She has been both a mentor and a friend over the past few years. She has not only provided me with immense support and encouragement in many respects, but also helped me with her thought-provoking ideas to formulate good research questions.

My dear friend Kaya Şahin has always been available whenever I needed his help, for which I am deeply thankful. He has always patiently answered my never-ending questions. He read various parts of this study and provided me with helpful comments. Moreover, he not only drew my attention to some interesting secondary sources relevant for my study, but also supplied me with some of them. I am also greatly indebted to Lale Can, who not only read some chapters and made helpful comments, but also edited them. Many thanks also go to my friends Yücel Yanıkdağ and Alp Yücel Kaya, who read the entire study and provided me with invaluable comments. I am also grateful to thank Erik J. Zürcher, İsmail Kara and Yavuz Selim Karakışla, who kindly answered my questions during my research and provided me with good hints about various aspects of my study.

The friendly atmosphere in the Department of Atatürk and Modern Turkish History at Yıldız Technical University, where I have been working as a lecturer, has made life easier for me throughout this process. I am deeply thankful to my friends and colleagues there for their support, particularly to Esra Danacıođlu, the chair of the department. I would also like to thank Ayşegül Baykan, the chair of the Department of Human and Social Sciences at the same university, for her support and encouragement.

This dissertation has been supported by various institutions. I am grateful to the American Research Institute in Turkey and the Turkish Cultural Foundation for providing me with a fellowship at the beginning of my research. I am also thankful to the Boğaziçi University Foundation for funding my trip to conduct research at the National Archives of Britain. I have conducted research in various archives and got help from their staff. I thank the helpful staff at the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (BOA) in Istanbul, the Turkish General Staff Archives (ATASE) in Ankara and the National Archives of Britain (TNA: PRO) in London. I have also worked in various libraries and encountered friendly and professional librarians. I am greatly thankful to the staff of the Boğaziçi University Library, the Library of the Center for Islamic Studies (ISAM), the Yapı Kredi Sermet Çifter Library, and the Turkish General Staff Military Museum Library. Here I would like to express my special thanks to the staff of the Near East Section of the Boğaziçi University Library, especially to Seyfi Berk and Kamber Yılmaz, for their friendly and professional support. The staff of the Graduate Thesis Office of the Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences at Boğaziçi University helped me format and edit the final version of the dissertation, for which I am grateful. I also thank Oya Arıkan, the

secretary of the Department of History at Boğaziçi University for her assistance in handling bureaucratic procedures in this process.

I feel extremely lucky for having many friends around me in the process of writing this dissertation, who have not only helped me get access to various primary and secondary sources at both domestic and international libraries, but also discussed with me many points about various aspects of my research and shared their experiences about writing a dissertation. I am grateful to Başak Tuğ, Bülent Bilmez, Cangül Örnek, Dilek Akyaçım, Emin Alper, Emre Sencer, Eray Yılmaz, Fatmagül Demirel, İlke Şanlıer, Kerem Ünüvar, Murat Yüksel, Pınar Kesen-Gibbon, Rita Koryan, Sabri Ateş, Seda Altuğ, Serhat Güvenç, Tanıl Bora, Umut Azak, Y. Tolga Cora, Yüksel Taşkın, Zeynep Altok, and others whom I might have forgotten to mention here.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family, especially my sisters Hatice, Jale, Gül and Lale Nur, who have always been available whenever I needed their help and provided me with immense support even during the hard times our family went through.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CUP Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)

Abbreviations of Archival Sources:

ATASE *T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Arşivi* (Turkish General Staff Military History Archives).

BDH *Birinci Dünya Harbi Koleksiyonu* (First World War Collection).

BOA *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri* (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives).

DH *Dahiliye Nezareti* (Interior Ministry files).

DH.EUM *Emniyet-i Umumiye* (General Security Department).
DH.EUM.ADL. *Takibat-ı Adliye Kalemi* (Judicial Pursuit Department).
DH.EUM.AYŞ. *Asayiş Kalemi* (Security and Order Department).
DH.EUM.ECB. *Ecanib Kalemi* (Department of Foreigners).
DH.EUM.EMN. *Emniyet Kalemi* (Interior Security Section).
DH.EUM.KLH. *Kalem-i Hususi* (Office of Special Correspondence).
DH.EUM.KLU. *Kalem-i Umumi* (Office of General Correspondence).
DH.EUM.MEM. *Memurin Kalemi* (Officials Department).
DH.EUM.MH. *Muhasebe Kalemi* (Department of Accounting).
DH.EUM.MTK. *Muhaberat ve Tensikat Müdüriyeti* (Department of Correspondence and Improvements).
DH.EUM.THR. *Sicil Kalemi* (Registry Department).
DH.EUM.VRK. *Emniyet-i Umumiye Evrak Odası* (General Security Department' Documents Section).
Şb. *şube* (office/division)

DH.HMŞ. *Hukuk Müşavirliği* (Legal Advisor Department).
DH.ID. *İdari Kısım Belgeleri* (Administrative Documents Section).
DH.İUM. *İdare-i Umumiye* (General Administration Department).
DH.KMS. *Kalem-i Mahsus Müdüriyeti* (Interior Ministry Private Office).
DH.MB.HPS. *Mebânî-i Emîriye ve Hapishaneler Müdüriyeti* (Department of Imperial Buildings and Prisons).
M. *Müteferrik Evrakı* (Miscellaneous Files)
DH.SYS. *Siyasi Kısım* (Interior Ministry Political Department).
DH.ŞFR. *Şifre Kalemi* (Department of Codes).
DH.UMVM. *Umûr-ı Mahalliye-i Vilâyât Müdüriyeti* (Department of Provinces and Localities).

HR *Hariciye Nezareti* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs files).

İ.HB *İrade Harbiye* (Imperial Decrees for War Ministry affairs).

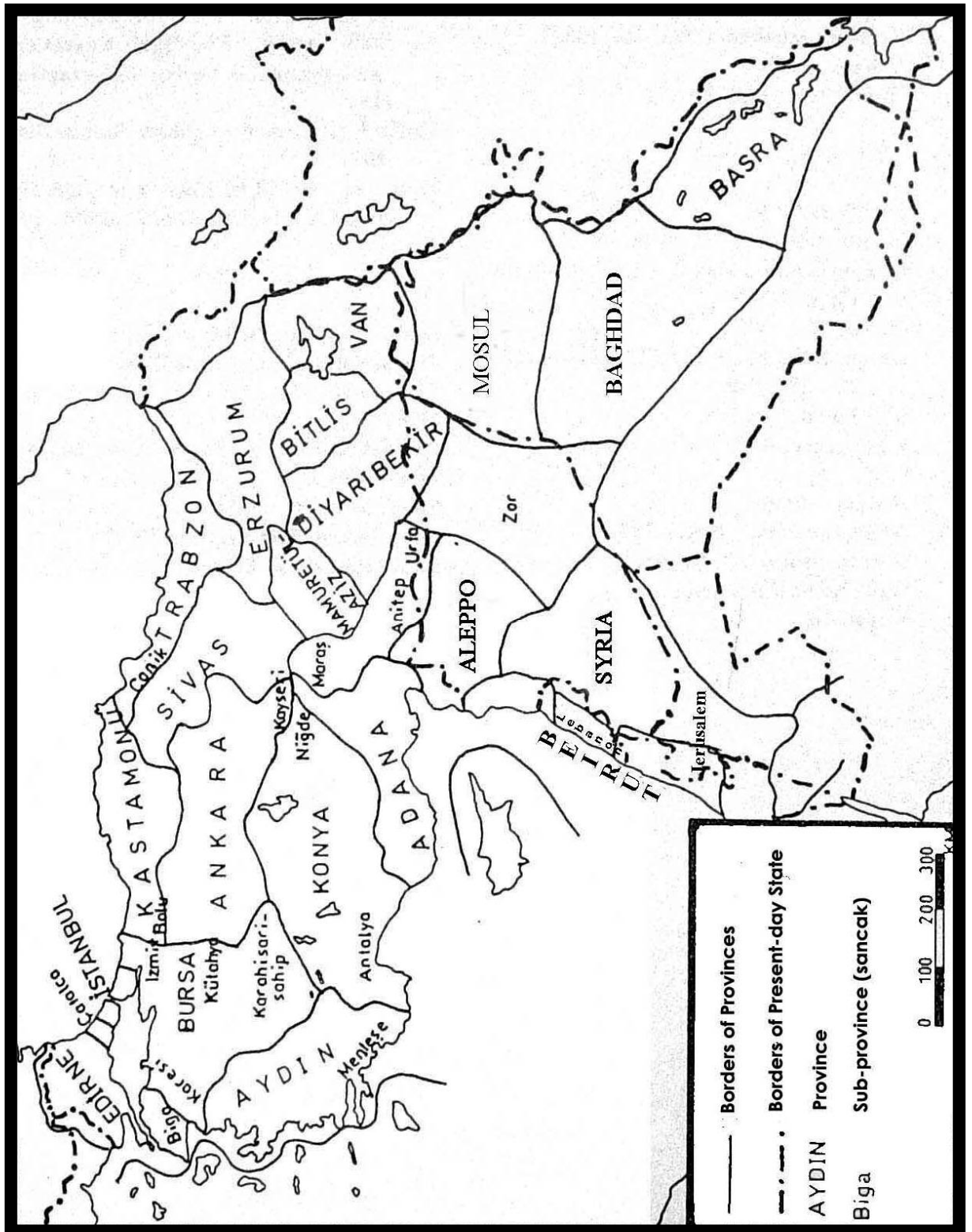
MV *Meclis-i Vükelâ Mazbataları* (Council of Ministers Proceedings).

TNA: PRO The National Archives of Britain, Public Record Office.

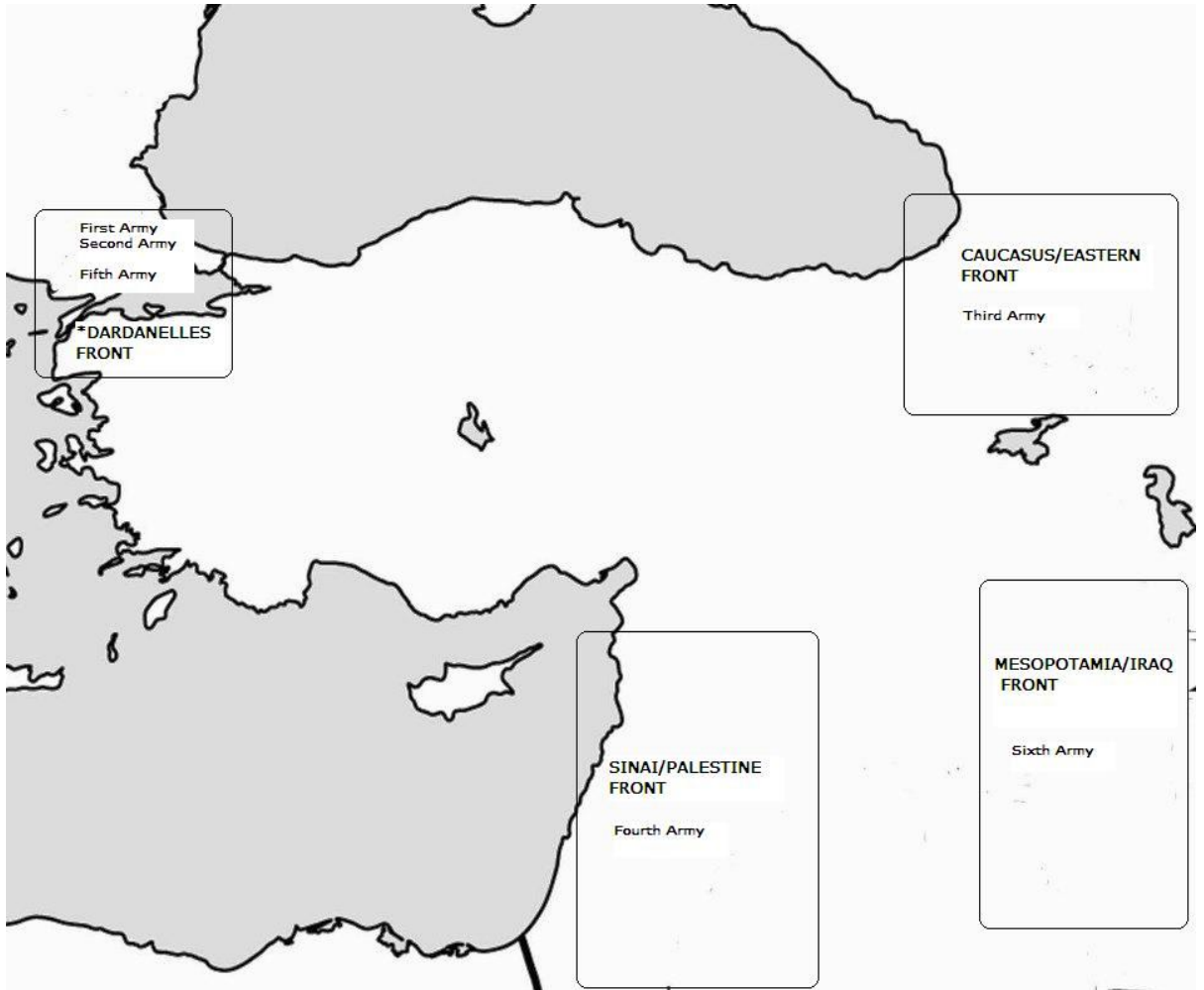
FO Foreign Office files

WO War Office files

Map 1. Ottoman Provinces in 1914



Map 3. Major Ottoman Fronts in the First World War and Disposition of the Ottoman Armies in the Early Years of the War.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In terms of the extent, intensity and duration of mobilization, the First World War surpassed all previous military conflicts. In addition to military implications such as the continual increase in the destructiveness of war, the magnitude of mobilization also redefined and reshaped state-society relations in the belligerent countries, including the Ottoman Empire. This dissertation is about the human dimension of the Ottoman mobilization experience during the First World War. In particular, it examines the mobilization of manpower for the Ottoman war effort from a social history perspective. By focusing mainly on Anatolia and the Muslim population, I aim to explore not only how the Ottoman state tried to cope with the challenges of permanent mobilization of men for the war effort, but also how this process re-shaped state-society relations in Anatolia.

I examine how the conditions of wartime mobilization pushed the state to become more centralized, authoritarian and nationalist. I contend that the constant and large-scale manpower mobilization required the state to increase its control at the local level and to permeate into deeper and deeper levels of provincial society in order to implement its mobilization policies –both by reinforcing existing mechanisms and creating new ones where needed. However, I argue that this increasing dependence on people for the war effort paradoxically also enlarged the space of action of social actors in their encounter with state authority. In this sense, I contend that social actors were not passive vis-à-vis the state during the Ottoman mobilization effort: they had agency and produced responses that would re-shape the mobilizing policies that targeted them. Based on how social actors' own expectations

and priorities matched up with state policies under ever-deteriorating wartime conditions, I demonstrate that these responses constituted a wide spectrum ranging from voluntary support to open resistance. In turn, the state responded by revising its mobilization policies and reformulating new mechanisms of control at the local level.

Furthermore, I demonstrate how the Ottoman mobilization experience during the First World War was a constant and two-pronged attempt on the part of the state at accommodating voluntary participation and containing resistance. In this process, new alliances – or a kind of new “social contract” – were formed between the state and those social groups which the state tried to mobilize and which were willing to situate themselves inside the consensus with the state. The manpower mobilization during the war had a dual function: firstly, its participatory dimension helped shape new alliances between the state and the Anatolian Muslim population on the one hand and secondly, its resistance dimension required the state to revise its mobilization policies and reinforce its control mechanism in order to better permeate into the local level. While the former phenomenon led to the formation of new bonds between the state and Anatolian society, it also marginalized other social groups which did not become a part of this new consensus (such as non-Muslim groups). In the latter case, we see an increase in the state’s control in provincial Anatolia. This increase in the control mechanism at the local level, I argue, facilitated the armed struggle during the National Struggle period (1919-1922).

This dissertation’s focus on the issue of manpower mobilization will help us to better understand the broader Ottoman mobilization experience during the First World War and, integrate the Ottoman experience of the War within world history. In addition to providing a basis for comparative history, this dissertation also has another, perhaps more general aim, which is to contribute to broader discussions of

how state-society relations were reshaped in Anatolia during the emergence of Turkish nation-state. A more comprehensive understanding of the issue of manpower mobilization during the Great War will undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of how the social infrastructure of Republican Turkey was shaped by processes in place at the end of the Ottoman Empire.

The Total War Paradox

After the emergence of the July Crisis in Europe on 28 July 1914, the Ottoman state declared mobilization on 2 August and entered the war in late October. However, like the other belligerent countries, the Ottomans would soon realize that the war they had just entered was a different kind of war. The First World War was a long and multi-front war of attrition, which required the belligerents to mobilize all of their resources to keep up with the war effort. In this war, preparation for war became as important as the battle itself, and the home front and the battlefield became closely interconnected.

This “total” character, which made warfare much more catastrophic, resulted from a combination of various factors which had actually been in process since the mid-nineteenth century. These factors included “industrialized mass society, nationalism, chauvinism, and racism, the participation of the masses in politics, mass armies equipped and provisioned with modern weapons, industrialized economies that provided the means for large-scale destruction, and the erosion of distinctions between soldiers and civilians.”¹ In fact, according to some historians, signs of such

¹ Stig Förster, “Introduction”, in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4.

total warfare had already emerged in various wars in the nineteenth century, of which the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the German Wars of Unification (1870-1871) have been presented as earlier examples.² Recent historiography has also demonstrated that the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 was also a precursor to catastrophic conflicts in the age of world wars.³ In this respect, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the Ottoman Empire's Balkan War experience in 1912-1913 also included a "total" character in some respects, especially in terms of the process during which the home front had become an integral part of warfare.

While modern warfare had already begun to acquire a total character in the nineteenth century, the Great War⁴ far more remarkably surpassed all the previous war experiences in one specific aspect, namely in the mobilization of manpower for war, which is the subject-matter of this dissertation. It can be said that the well-known Prussian military historian Carl von Clausewitz's earlier claim that war had become "people's war" in the modern era,⁵ a claim which he made after observing the Wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, was actually realized in full extent during the Great War. The concept of a "citizen army" which emerged during the French Revolution had become an established system in the form of universal and compulsory conscription in almost all of the belligerent countries on the eve of the Great War.⁶ And, "of the male population between the ages of fifteen

² See, for example, Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler (eds.), *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³ See, for example, David Wolff et al. (eds.), *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Rotem Kowner (ed.), *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Selçuk Esenbel, "1904/05 Rus-Japon Savaşı", *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 176 (August 2008), pp. 69-71.

⁴ Throughout the dissertation, I am using the "First World War" and the "Great War" interchangeably.

⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J. Matthijs Jolles (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 457.

⁶ Conscription is the subject-matter of Chapter 3.

and forty-nine on the eve of the war, a huge proportion became soldiers: about 80 percent in France and Germany, 75 percent in Austria-Hungary, between 50 and 60 percent in Britain, Serbia, and the Ottoman Empire, and 40 percent in Russia.”⁷

Of course, as the development level of the industrial economy, mass politics or modern weapons, etc. (the factors which have been mentioned above) varied from one country to another on the eve of the war, the question of just “how total” the war was varied as well. The First World War as a total war certainly did not have a standard history. But it did have a global history, and the Ottoman Empire was definitely a part of it. The intensity and duration of the war pushed the war experience of each belligerent into the tendency of totality, though the degree at which each went through it varied. The Ottoman Empire remained on the battlefield throughout the four years of the war. Moreover, although its performance greatly diminished in the later half of the war and it was ultimately defeated, the Ottoman army also performed surprisingly well on many notable occasions.⁸ It was a multi-front war for the Ottomans, and Ottoman forces waged war on four major exhaustive fronts (the Dardanelles, the Caucasus, Sinai-Palestine, and Mesopotamia-Iraq), as well as on less intensive ones (Arabia-Yemen, Romania, Galicia, Macedonia, Persia, Azerbaijan).⁹ As in all the belligerents, the Ottoman economy was mobilized for the war effort.¹⁰ Moreover, the civilian population was not only subjected to continuous

⁷ “Introduction”, in Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Habeck (eds.), *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 2.

⁸ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (London: Abacus, 1994), p. 283.

⁹ For an official military history of the Ottoman fronts in the First World War, see Turkish General Staff publications, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi*, 8 vols (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1967-1996).

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the Ottoman economic mobilization, see Zafer Toprak, *İttihad – Terakki ve Cihan Harbi: Savaş Ekonomisi ve Türkiye’de Devletçilik, 1914-1918* (Istanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2003). For a short overview, see Şevket Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I”, in Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison (eds.), *The Economics of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 112-136.

requisitions of the state to provide provisions for the troops,¹¹ but civilians were also asked to contribute to the financial mobilization for war, as in the case of an extensive internal borrowing (*dahili istikraz*) campaign which took place towards the end of the war.¹² The home front was an integrated part of the war in other respects as well. The demographic structure of Anatolia was exposed to the nationalist homogenization by the CUP-dominated government.¹³

The tendency of totality in the Ottoman mobilization for war was evident even in the very term of “mobilization” (*seferberlik*) used by the Ottomans. Especially in the popular usage, the word “*seferberlik*” was used by people not only in the specific sense of manpower mobilization for the armed forces, but also in a more general sense to describe the entire war experience.¹⁴

On the other hand, while the concept of total war is now commonly used to describe the characteristics of the First World War in the present historiography, it also poses certain problems and needs revision in certain respects. As Roger Chickering has warned, uncritical uses of the concept as a master narrative

¹¹ The issue of provisioning the Ottoman armed forces in the First World War has not yet been studied in detail in a synthesized work. For a study which deals with the issue in the Ottoman Third Army Zone (namely, the Northern-Eastern Anatolia), see Tuncay Ögün, *Kafkas Cephesi'nin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1999). But, though this is a comprehensive account, it examines the issue by relying mostly on issued laws and regulations concerning the problem, and does not penetrate enough into its practice.

¹² Extensive patriotic-nationalist propaganda also accompanied this campaign. See Toprak, *İttihat – Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, pp. 117-126.

¹³ For a recent study on the CUP's nationalist homogenization applications in Anatolia during the Great War, see Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi: İttihat ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği (1913-1918)* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008). The Armenian population, which was subjected to forced migration in 1915, suffered most from this policy. According to the statistical information in the recently published personal files of Talat Pasha, Interior Minister of the period, the total number of Armenians who were subjected to deportation (*Tehcir*) was 924,158 (out of a total of approximately 1,500,000). See Murat Bardakçı (ed.), *Talat Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrukesi* (Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2009), pp. 77, 109. Many of the deported Armenians were massacred on their way, and many others died of disease or unbearable living conditions on the roads. There is still no consensus among historians on how many were killed and died. But the result of this process is that almost the entire Armenian population in provincial Anatolia came to an end. An in-depth analysis of the Armenian question is outside the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁴ This usage is particularly common in the memoirs about the war experience. Many of such memoirs are cited throughout the dissertation.

describing the war experience as the absolute outcome can cause “historical myopia.” What the concept of total war actually represents is not an absolute outcome, but an absolute “toward which the development of warfare is tending.”¹⁵ No war can actually be entirely total. In this sense, it can be said that total war “resembles a mathematical asymptote, or Xeno’s paradox, always approaching a limit but never getting there.”¹⁶ At least in the Ottoman case, the Great War experience was surely not entirely total in the sense of ensuring the complete use of all resources and providing the full participation of all people for the war effort. But it was definitely a process towards totality, because it wanted to suck in increasingly more manpower and resources as the war prolonged and turned into a battle of attrition.

Rather than being a master narrative, the concept of total war should function as an analytical tool. It “represents an ideal type of the sort that Max Weber envisaged.”¹⁷ Here I also find it important to warn about the use of total war as an all-pervasive model of modern warfare to justify the “national security” ideologies in the post-war period. By this I primarily mean what the German general Erich Ludendorff pioneered in theorizing after the defeat of Germany. Ludendorff argued that the major defeat of Germany was because of lack of total commitment to the war effort,¹⁸ and that the requirements of modern warfare “demanded the ruthless mobilization of all society’s material and moral resources”, which necessitated a military dictatorship.¹⁹ This strategic outlook, and similar versions of it, equated the

¹⁵ Roger Chickering, “Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept”, in Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 16.

¹⁶ “Introduction”, in Winter, Parker, Habeck (eds.), *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Chickering, “Total War”, pp. 15-16.

¹⁸ Förster, “Introduction”, p. 4.

¹⁹ Chickering, “Total War”, pp. 16-17.

issue of national security with constant preparation of society for a future total war. Ludendorff's outlook was actually the continuation and adaptation of Colmar von der Goltz's idea of "nation-in-arms" (*Volk in Waffen*) which asserted that in the age of modern warfare, society always needed to be ready for mobilization through an extensive system of obligatory military service.²⁰ This perspective paved the way to the prioritization of military issues over all others, and sometimes served to make militarism a "normal" state of affairs.²¹

More importantly in the context of this dissertation, I particularly take issue with the preconception that stems from the understanding of total war as an absolute outcome. I specifically refer to the assumption that in the Great War as a total war, people's participation in the mobilization was a given fact, or the views that people were passive actors vis-à-vis the state in this process and that the total war increased the state power so much that people did nothing but totally complied with the state's requirements. Rather, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, the Ottoman mobilization of manpower was not characterized by such passivity on the part of the people targeted by state mobilization policies. Resistance to mobilization was a major part of the process. Moreover, even when people volunteered to contribute to the mobilization effort, this volunteerism actually became a part of the relationship of power between the state and volunteers, in which the act of volunteerism served to

²⁰ See Colmar von der Goltz, *The Nation in Arms: A Treatise on Modern Military Systems and the Conduct of War*, trans. Philip A. Ashworth (London: Hugh Rees, 1906 [1883]). Goltz's ideas were highly influential on the late Ottoman military thought and practice. Goltz's perspective continued to influence the Turkish military during the early republican period and was one of the main sources of the national security (milli güvenlik) ideology in modern Turkey. See Gencer Özcan, "Türkiye'de Cumhuriyet Dönemi Ordusunda Prusya Etkisi", *İdea: A Journal of Humanities*, no. 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 15-69. For an ethnographic-anthropological study on the evolution of such a national security ideology in the educational system of Turkey, see Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). There will be more discussion on Goltz's influence on the Ottomans in Chapter 4.

²¹ I use "militarism" in a broad sense that has been defined by Michael Mann: "I define militarism as a set of attitudes and social practices, which regards war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable activity." Michael Mann, "The Roots and Contradictions of Modern Militarism", in Michael Mann, *States, War and Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 166.

promote the status of the volunteer groups within their consensus with the state authority.

It is true that wartime conditions increased the tendency of the CUP government, which had already established a single-party rule with a coup in 1913,²² toward becoming more authoritarian. The total character of the Great War mobilization expanded the state's capacity of control on society.²³ But the need to sustain a large-scale and permanent mobilization under wartime conditions also required mass participation. It also increased the state's dependence on people. In order to demand increasingly more sacrifices from people for the war effort, the state needed to maintain a certain legitimacy vis-à-vis the people it targeted. The dependence on people and the need for legitimacy actually formed a reciprocal relationship, or a "tacit contract" between the state and people, in which the state of course continued to make its claims on society, but people were emboldened to voice their concerns and expectations about the requirements of the mobilization. The bottom line of this tacit contract for the Ottoman enlisted man – namely the ordinary soldier – was that 1) his and his family's basic needs were provided by the state in return for his service; 2) his collaboration with the state increased his social status; 3) he was to remain convinced that the war effort was worth sacrificing himself; and, 4) the duration and conditions of his military service remained unchanged from when he was initially mobilized. Failure to maintain this tacit contract could produce responses such as various forms of resistance to the mobilization effort. As will be

²² Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 116-121; M. Naim Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military and Ottoman Collapse* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 205-213.

²³ This was also a global phenomenon: "Certainly, the world wars did promote far greater state control in its broadest sense as a response to wartime challenges." Ian F. W. Beckett, "Total War", in Arthur Marwick, Clive Emsley and Wendy Simpson (eds.), *Total War and Historical Change: Europe, 1914-1955* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), p. 32.

discussed in the case of desertion in Chapter 6, some forms of resistance could become a persistently extensive problem, no matter how they were condemned legally, religiously and culturally. In its attempt to cope with such responses, it was incumbent upon the state to revise and re-shape its mobilization policies by taking the populace's demands and expectations into consideration. Inspired by Geoff Eley's essay on the relation between war and state formation in Europe in the twentieth century, I call this "the total war paradox." Eley has argued that the two world wars in the twentieth century increased the power of the state and expanded its claims on society, but they also served to open channels towards democratization.

More directly related with wartime conditions, he says:

The militarization of public life and the latter's heavy limitation via censorship, suspension of debate, surveillance, emergency legislation, and states of siege do not exactly conduce to the opening up of the public sphere in democratic ways, but rather make the latter more difficult. At the same time, the conditions of wartime mobilization and the terms of the associated patriotic discourse also legitimized the voice of all those groups willing to situate themselves inside the consensus. This process certainly helped bring new groups into the recognized political nation –most obviously the organized working class, but also groups with less of an established collective history, such as women and other social categories now available for political address, including youth and the ordinary soldier.²⁴

Needless to say, Eley's argument is primarily about the Western European experience, and my concern in this dissertation is not to discuss the issue of democratization in the Ottoman context. But his general argument still presents significant implications that would help us tie the Ottoman mobilization experience (with its peculiarities) in the Great War to the broader discussion of how the Great War transformed state-society relations.

Here I do not claim that this quest for legitimacy made the CUP-dominated state less authoritarian and less ruthless during the war. As Zürcher has argued, mass

²⁴ Geoff Eley, "War and the Twentieth-Century State", *Daedalus*, vol. 124, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 166, 170.

participation in Ottoman politics in the last five years of CUP rule “became much wider, the political game became less elitist”, but “at the same time it also became more brutal.”²⁵ Moreover, despite its pragmatic desire to maximize contributions to the war effort from the Anatolian non-Muslim population, the CUP government was ready to give up this desire whenever these contributions would cause a demand for more consideration than the state was able or willing to give since this could be a “risky” venture from the nationalist perspective of the CUP government. This perspective thus precluded the non-Muslim Anatolian population from entering into the tacit contract described above. The state rather dealt with the responses coming from the Anatolian Muslim population which constituted the main manpower pool of the Ottoman mobilization effort.

This relationship also redefined the balance between coercion and persuasion in the state’s attitude towards society. The mobilization was a process which could not rely entirely on coercion.²⁶ It also included collaborative methods such as working with semi-official voluntary associations that aimed to mobilize popular support in civil society. It also included persuasive methods and new alliances with certain social groups. This was particularly the case in regions where the Ottoman state’s level of the “infrastructural development”²⁷ was poor, such as in the Kurdish-populated provinces. As will be discussed in the third and fourth chapters, rather than

²⁵ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), p. 127.

²⁶ John Horne, “Remobilizing for ‘Total War’: France and Britain, 1917-1918”, in John Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 195.

²⁷ I am using “infrastructural development” in the sense Michael Mann has used it. See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, vol. 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Also see Linda Weiss, “Infrastructural Power, Economic Transformation, and Globalization”, in John A. Hall and Ralph Schroeder (eds.), *An Anatomy of Power: The Social Theory of Michael Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 167-186.

insisting on the application of compulsory conscription system, the state chose to resort to more “persuasive” methods such as recruiting men from these regions in the form of “volunteers”, the methods which were applied in return for incentives offered to local notables of these regions. Such new alliances under wartime conditions constituted a major factor which contributed to the reshaping of the Anatolian population in the process toward the emergence of the Turkish nation-state.

On the other hand, the state’s attempt at coping with resistance also created a move towards restructuring control mechanisms at the local level. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, especially in dealing with the problem of desertion, the state almost totally overhauled the gendarmerie as the main armed force in order to cope with deserters in provincial Anatolia. Though it was never completely successful in this process, this attempt constituted a working internal security system which was effective to a certain extent. While the Ottoman Empire practically dissolved at the end of the Great War, there was still a working recruitment mechanism which could be used in carrying out another manpower mobilization. I argue that this structuring process greatly contributed to the relative success of mobilization during the National Struggle (1919-1922).

A Critical Evaluation of the Existing Literature

The historiography of the Ottoman First World War experience has had difficulty in becoming an autonomous field for a long time. By “autonomous” I do not mean studying the First World War period in isolation from the pre- and post-war periods and developments. Rather, as I hope to demonstrate, the First World War was

marked by such extensive and intensive internal dynamics that a scholarly attempt at understanding them requires a more singular focus and in-depth research on this period. Only such an understanding of the Ottoman Great War experience will allow us to situate it in a wider context and continuum, which would then allow us to examine continuities and discontinuities with the pre- and post-war periods.

Compared to the dynamic and rich literature in the European historiography of the Great War, Ottoman/Turkish history has only recently begun dealing with the Great War. Paradoxically, there is no shortage of studies on the end of the Ottoman Empire in general, and the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918) in particular; furthermore, there is even less a shortage of studies on the National Struggle/Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) and the foundation of the Turkish Republic. But the status of the First World War has remained relatively marginal. There are both ideological and historiographic reasons for this.

On the one hand, the official historiography of republican Turkey, which had more or less maintained its dominant position in larger academic circles through the early 1980s, always tended to treat the National Struggle process as a major break (*kopuş*) from the Ottoman past, and to exaggerate the Turkish War of Independence as the main military episode in recent Turkish history. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's *Speech (Nutuk)*, which constituted the main source of the official historiography of the National Struggle and the early republican period (1919-1927), began this process with his landing in Samsun on 19 May 1919. In this epic speech, Atatürk devoted only one paragraph to the situation resulting from the Great War and described it as a total catastrophe.²⁸ The Great War experience was treated as a

²⁸ "When I landed at Samsun on 19th May 1919, the situation was as follows: The group of powers which included the Ottoman Empire had been defeated in the Great War. The Ottoman Army had been crushed on all fronts an armistice had been signed with harsh conditions. The people were tired and poor. Those who had driven the people into the war had fled and now cared for nothing but their

disastrous period which was followed by a “real” struggle of the people, in which the Turkish nation was entirely reborn. Consequently, the historiography which was based on this narrative tended to marginalize the Ottoman Great War experience, focusing only on episodes of victory such as the Dardanelles Victory (*Çanakkale Zaferi*), which were selectively included in the story of the Turkish rebirth.

This historiography did not produce any in-depth studies on the Great War experience as an autonomous field, but preferred to deal with it in a series of general surveys on the “History of Turkish Revolution” (*Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*).²⁹ Ironically, a few early monographs-surveys on the Ottoman Great War experience, which remained the only surveys for a long time, were written either by non-historian intellectuals, such as journalist Ahmed Emin Yalman³⁰, or by non-Turkish officer-historians or diplomats,³¹ who lived through the period.

As is well known, the break paradigm has been greatly challenged and revised in the last decades by new studies on social-economic-cultural history of the late Ottoman Empire and the early republican period, which approach this process from a more multi-dimensional and world history perspective. Ottoman/Turkish

own safety. Vahdettin, the Caliph, was seeking some way to save his person and throne...”. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *The Speech*, trans. and abridged by Ömer Renkliyıldırım (Istanbul: Metro Book, 1985), p. 24. For a full text of the Speech, see Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk (1919-1927)* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1997).

²⁹ A significant example in this respect is Y. Hikmet Bayur. See Y. Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi, vol. 3, part 1: 1914-1918 Genel Savaşı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1953). This is a political history of the period and, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, mostly focuses on the issue of the Ottoman entry into the war.

³⁰ Ahmed Emin Yalman, *Turkey in the World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930). This book has still not been translated into Turkish.

³¹ See, for example, M. Larcher, *La Guerre Turque dans la Guerre Mondiale* (Paris: Etienne Chiron, 1926) [For its Turkish translation, see M. Larşer, *Büyük Harbde Türk Harbi*, trans. Mehmed Nihad [Istanbul: Matbaa-i Askeriye, 1927] and Joseph Pomianowski, *Der zusammenbruch des Ottomanischen Reiches : erinnerungen an die Türkei aus der zeit des weltkrieges* (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1928) [For its Turkish translation, see Joseph Pomianowski, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküşü: 1914-1918 Birinci Dünya Savaşı* trans. Kemal Turan, third edition (Istanbul: Kayıhan Yayınları, 1990)]. Larcher was a French officer-historian and Pomianowski was an Austria-Hungarian military attaché in Istanbul during the war.

historiography now emphasizes significant continuities in economic, social and cultural spheres from the late Ottoman through early republican periods, as well as exploring discontinuities. But, again ironically, this revision did not bring about much concentration on the Ottoman Great War experience. Perhaps for the sake of emphasizing the long-omitted continuity in the armed struggles which had shaped the process from the end of the Ottoman Empire through the foundation of the Turkish nation-state, the new perspective preferred to situate the First World War experience in a longer process, which has been called “the Ten-Year War” (*On Yıllık Savaş*), covering the period from the Balkan War of 1912-13 through the National Struggle of 1919-1922. This designation is certainly not wrong and it has actually served to broaden our understanding of social-military processes of the end of the Ottoman period, thus situating these events and developments in a broader context. But on the other hand, the historiography continues to minimize the importance of the Great War experience by equating it with much smaller experiences of the Balkan War and the National Struggle. I do not underestimate the political importance of the Balkan War and, particularly, the National Struggle for recent Turkish history. But in terms of the scale of mobilization, restructuring of state-society relations, demographic transformation, changing of the geographical borders, and the extent of casualties, the First World War was unique, and, therefore, deserves to receive a singular, or autonomous focus.³²

In studying the Ottoman First World experience as an autonomous field, Feroz Ahmad’s works have made a remarkable contribution. Although his approach still deals with the war experience in a larger process of the entire Young Turk era,

³² For a similar argument, see Yücel Yanıkdağ, ‘Ill-fated’ Sons of the ‘Nation’: Ottoman Prisoners of War in Russia and Egypt, 1914-1922 (Ph.d. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2002), pp. 6-7. Yanıkdağ also aptly argues that the “ten-year war” view is actually selective and ignores the guerilla war in Yemen (1891-1911), which took serious commitment on the part of the Ottoman state and was considered no less important than the Balkan War.

his articles on various social and economic dimensions of the Great War, particularly on the popular mobilization process at the outbreak of the war,³³ have made a pioneering contribution to the development of the social history of the war that had hitherto been analyzed from purely political, diplomatic or military points of view. The social history of the Ottoman Great War experience has been evolved into a more developed field by the works of Zafer Toprak. His major works on the “National Economy” policies of the CUP government and the process of economic mobilization during the war, as well as his many articles on various aspects of social and economic history of the war,³⁴ have not only greatly contributed to our understanding of the period, but also inspired many graduate-level students to conduct further in-depth research in the field. However, neither Ahmad nor Toprak has attempted to “infiltrate” subject-matters which had been regarded as purely military issues, such as the mobilization of manpower, and, in this sense, their studies did not alter the traditional division of labor between military and social histories in Ottoman/Turkish historiography.

A major exception in this respect is Erik J. Zürcher, whose inspiring essays on various aspects of the Ottoman mobilization experience in the Great War greatly contributed to the awareness of the rich potential of this process for studies of social

³³ See, for example, Feroz Ahmad, “War and Society under the Young Turks, 1908-18”, *Review*, vol. XI, no. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 265-286; Feroz Ahmad, “Ottoman Armed Neutrality and Intervention: August-November 1914”, in *From Empire to Republic: Essays on the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008), pp. 121-148 [originally published in *Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History*, no. 4 (1990), pp. 41-69]. I will discuss Ahmad’s works also in Chapter 2.

³⁴ Other than his recent book on the economic mobilization during the war (Toprak, *İttihad – Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*), also see his classical study on the “National Economy” policies: Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat, (1908-1918)* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982). Among his many articles and essays in the field, here is a selection: Zafer Toprak, “Nationalism and Economics in the Young Turk Era (1908-1918)”, in Jacques Thobie and Salgur Kançal (eds.), *Industrialisation, Communication et Rapports Sociaux en Turquie et en Méditerranée Orientale* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994), pp. 260-266; Zafer Toprak, “Osmanlı Devleti’nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı Finansmanı ve Para Politikası”, *ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi* (1979-1980), pp. 205-238; Zafer Toprak, “Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda İstanbul”, *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2, 1994, pp. 239-242.

history. More importantly, his essays have shown that the ordinary Ottoman soldier's experience in the war would reveal significant clues for a broader understanding of Ottoman/Turkish history from the Great War through the National Struggle. He has also drawn attention to the importance of the problem of desertion which was long ignored by Ottoman military and social historians.³⁵ However, despite his thoughtful insights, Zürcher's essays represent an introductory character, an invitation to in-depth and comprehensive studies on the subjects he revealed, rather than being detailed analyses based on archival documents.

Stanford J. Shaw's recent two-volume survey of the Ottoman Empire in the Great War must also be mentioned here in terms of being a first serious attempt to write a comprehensive history of the Ottoman Great War experience.³⁶ In terms of the large range of documents, which include both military and non-military material, and issues dealt with, Shaw's work can also be regarded as a contribution to the total and interdisciplinary history of the Ottoman Great War experience by amalgamating various sub-fields. However, it can be contended that Shaw's work suffers from two significant deficiencies. First, it seems that Shaw could not decide exactly whether this work would be a general survey having an explanatory purpose or an in-depth monograph having definitive arguments. His work attempts to address almost every issue related to the Ottoman experience during the war. This attempt in itself is quite

³⁵ See Erik J. Zürcher, "Little Mehmet in the Desert: The Ottoman Soldier's Experience", in Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London: Leo Cooper, 1988), pp. 230-241; Erik J. Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918", in Erik J. Zürcher (ed.), *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia, 1775-1925* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 79-94; Erik J. Zürcher, "Between Death and Desertion: The Experience of the Ottoman Soldier in World War I", *Turcica*, vol. 28 (1996), pp. 235-258.

³⁶ Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I, vol. 1: Prelude to War* (Ankara: Publications of Turkish Historical Society, 2006) and Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I, vol. 2: Triumph and Tragedy, November 1914-1916* (Publications of Turkish Historical Society, 2008). The second volume has been published posthumously. According to his wife Ezel Kural Shaw's preface to the second volume, the work was actually planned to be three volumes.

difficult and unreasonable for a one-man effort, given the extensity, intensity and also diversity of the issues. This situation causes an inconsistency in the sense that while Shaw presents only a descriptive and relatively short account of certain issues such as the manpower mobilization which are not dealt with in entirety, he delves into certain others much more deeply and makes definitive judgments, such as the Armenian question.³⁷

The unwillingness of social and economic historians to develop interest in military issues in general, and the negligence of the subject-matter of manpower mobilization in particular largely stem from the traditional division of labor between the fields of social and military history, which is still strongly alive in Ottoman/Turkish historiography, at least in military history of the Ottoman Great War experience. However, the view that military manpower mobilization belongs to the area of military history is wrong on two counts. First of all, as I have tried to outline above, under total war conditions, the spheres of military, social or economic were extremely intertwined. The process of military manpower mobilization was related to many other issues such as demographic control, local administration, internal security, local economy, local culture, propaganda, and even religion. Secondly, contemporary scholarship on military history tends to emphasize the significance of interdisciplinary approaches and points to the fact that in the modern era military history is inseparable from other fields of history. "Military history can no more be separated from general history than can the activity of war itself from the

³⁷ I have no objection to devoting a large space in such a work to such an important issue, nor is this the place to evaluate Shaw's judgments on it. But his work gives the impression that it was actually written to analyze only certain issues such as the Armenian question, rather than doing a survey of the Ottoman Great War experience in general. Many other subject-matters only receive insufficient treatment.

societies that engage in it.”³⁸ The history of war and the history of society are not two different fields, especially when studying the social history of a war period.³⁹

This point brings us to the issue of the backwardness of Ottoman/Turkish military history in general, and the military history of the First World War in particular. The field of Ottoman/Turkish military history is still dominated by the governing military institution itself, namely the Turkish General Staff, and almost entirely written by officer-historians. The field of military history as an academic branch at university history departments is still quite underdeveloped in Turkey.⁴⁰ There is actually a voluminous official military history of the Ottoman First World War experience written and published by the Turkish General Staff.⁴¹ But this history is a fragmented but oversized account of the battles, rather than being a synthesized analysis of the Ottoman war experience. The only organizing framework in this work is the battlefronts. The work is broken into volumes and sub-volumes according to the Ottoman fronts in the war, and the narrative presents a descriptive account of what happened on a particular front in the war, which is based to a great extent on daily combat journals (*harb cerideleri*) kept by the command structure of a particular

³⁸ Michael Howard, “World War One: The Crisis in European History, The Role of the Military Historian”, *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 57, no. 5 (October 1993), p. 127.

³⁹ For a similar argument, see Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 51.

⁴⁰ Regarding Ottoman military history studies, the situation is much more developed at American and European universities. Especially military history of early modern Ottoman Empire is relatively well studied. For a few works, see Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700* (London: UCL Press, 1999); Gabor Agoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Virginia Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow: Longman/Pearson, 2007).

⁴¹ *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi*, 8 vols. Relevant information about the First World War also exists in the following volumes of the history of the Turkish Armed Forces series published by the same institution. See *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6: 1908-1920* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1971) and *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 10: Osmanlı Devri, Birinci Dünya Harbi, İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1985). For a bibliographic essay on the official military histories of the Ottoman Great War experience, see Edward J. Erickson, “The Turkish Official Military Histories of the First World War: A Bibliographic Essay”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3 (July 2003), pp. 190-198.

front. This official account is characterized not only by a nationalist perspective to a remarkably restrictive degree, but also an old conventional military history approach. However, since this official history has been written by using primary documents maintained in the archives of the Turkish General Staff, they contain valuable first-hand information that can be used in secondary studies.

While Edward J. Erickson has attempted to write a synthesized version of the military history of the Ottoman Great War experience,⁴² it can be said that Erickson's study is a compact and cross-checked version of the history published by the Turkish General Staff. One of Erickson's main contributions is that his study situates and integrates the Ottoman Great War experience into the global academic historiography of the war—a task which has greatly been ignored due to the lack of interest of Western historians in the Ottoman case and by the parochialism of the Turkish nationalist historical perspective. Erickson also critically revises some Eurocentric (and, therefore, biased) views in Western historiography about the Ottoman case. For example, he challenges works which largely underestimated the Ottoman war performance and attributed any Ottoman successes to external factors such as the German military existence in the Ottoman Empire. Erickson examines such internal factors as leadership, command and control, doctrine and training to show that the Ottoman war performance was marked by considerable endurance during the four years of the war. Erickson's work is also worth considering in terms of his effort to present cross-checked statistical data about the number of Ottoman troops which participated in the war and, much more importantly, the Ottoman

⁴² Edward J. Erickson *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001). Also see Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 2007).

casualties, on which there has been great inconsistencies in Ottoman/Turkish historiography.⁴³

However, Erickson's work prefers to remain silent in two significant respects. First, although he aptly enters into a productive polemic with Western historiography about the latter's biased arguments towards the Ottoman war experience, he does not make any criticism of the parochial approach and nationalist comments in the Turkish official account of the war. For example, he does not question why certain problems were not included satisfactorily in the official account, such as the problem of desertion in the Ottoman army, although such problems played an important role in undermining the Ottoman war performance.⁴⁴ Second, in terms of enlarging the scope of the military history of the Ottoman Great War experience with a more interdisciplinary approach discussing military issues in a wider social history context, Erickson's work remains quite loyal to the old conventional military history writing and repeats the traditional division of labor between military history and other fields. Although he makes a strong argument that despite Western expectations, the Ottoman army proved resilient until the end of the war, the study's limited

⁴³ Perhaps the most notorious example in this respect is recurrent mistakes made about the Dardanelles Front, which is the most popular subject of Turkish nationalist historiography on the war. The number of the Ottoman soldiers who died on the Dardanelles Front has often been enormously inflated, either because of mistaking the total number of casualties with the number of dead, or because of a nationalist tendency to inflate that number to make the victory seem more heroic. For example, historian Yaşar Yücel, who was the president of the Turkish Historical Society in 1990, made the following remark in his opening speech to the International Symposium on the Dardanelles Front held in the same year: "this victory, for which we had more than 250 thousand martyrs..." ("iki yüz elli binin üzerinde şehit vererek kazandığımız bu zaferin..."). See *Çanakkale Savaşları Sebep ve Sonuçları Uluslararası Sempozyumu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1993), p. 1. The number of the Ottoman soldiers who died in combat on the Dardanelles Front actually is around 57,000, and the total number of casualties (which included the numbers of combat dead, wounded, missing, deserters, prisoners of war, those who were hospitalized, and those who died because of disease) is around 210,000-218-000. See *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi, vol. 5: Çanakkale Cephesi Harekatı, 1., 2. ve 3. Kitapların Özetlenmiş Tarihi (Haziran 1914-9 Ocak 1916)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2002), p. 244. Also see Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 237.

⁴⁴ Moreover, while he has spent great effort to cross-check and to tabulate the Ottoman casualty figures, he does not ask why the detailed official account does not include any explanatory data on the issue of desertion, and he content oneself with the data given by secondary sources. He himself mentions the problem of desertion in more detail in his second book. See Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, pp. 63, 109, 129, 144.

historiographic perspective does not fully support this argument. The Ottoman armed forces indeed managed to remain on the battlefield to the last moment of the war, but this endurance cannot be explained only by purely military factors. It can only be explained in a wider context of manpower, economic, financial and moral mobilization, as well as military performance.⁴⁵

This dissertation aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the Ottoman manpower mobilization during the First World War, but it also tries to do it in an interdisciplinary way by using both military and non-military primary resources, and a large variety of secondary literature from various aspects of the Great War experience. In this sense, it aims to be an intervention aimed at challenging the traditional division of labor mentioned above, by combining both military and non-military perspectives within a single study. This dissertation intends not only to shed light on the specific issue of manpower mobilization, but also to make a methodological contribution to the Ottoman/Turkish historiographic literature on the war.

The Scope of the Research

As a study on the social history of the military manpower mobilization in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, this dissertation is neither a military history of the Ottoman war effort, nor does it have a claim to be an analysis of all social and demographic dynamics that emerged during the war. During the Great War, nothing about people was purely military or purely non-military. The categories

⁴⁵ For critical reviews of Erickson's work, see Mehmet Beşikçi, "Cihan Harbi'nde Osmanlı Askeri Gücü: Askeri Tarihte Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Eleştiriler", *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 5 (Spring 2007), pp. 289-295.

of military and social greatly overlapped, and perhaps it was in the manpower mobilization that the social and military fields intertwined most.

Therefore, parallel to the concept of total war, the concept of “mobilization” has also come to refer to a much wider process which includes not only the recruitment of men for the armed forces, but also economic, financial, technological and even cultural preparation for the war effort. In this sense, the use of the concept has become almost synonymous with a total social mobilization for war especially in the recent European historiography on the Great War. I am totally aware of this usage of the concept and I myself also sometimes use mobilization to refer to a larger social phenomenon in this study. But this dissertation is about only one the above-mentioned aspects that are included in the wider use of the concept, and, therefore, I mainly use mobilization in a more specific sense, namely in the sense of manpower mobilization for war. However, as it will become clear throughout the study, even this specific dimension of the concept is sometimes interconnected with many other social, economic and cultural aspects. Therefore, transitions from the specific to wider usages of the concept are unavoidable.

After this thematic specification, the contents of the research need to be limited in other and more concrete aspects as well. Let’s start with geography and the population. Although the Ottoman Empire had lost a considerable amount of its European territory and population after the defeat at the Balkan War of 1912-13, it was still geographically a vast country during the Great War, and its population included different religious, ethnic and linguistic elements.⁴⁶ The main geographical focus of this study is on Anatolia and its immediate surroundings, while the

⁴⁶ On the eve of the First World War, the total territory of the Ottoman Empire covered present-day Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Other than the majority Muslim population, the major components of which were Turks, Arabs and Kurds, the empire also had a non-Muslim population comprising different elements, the major ones of which were Christian Armenians and Ottoman Greeks, and Jews.

demographic element on which it concentrates is the Anatolian Muslim population. In other words, what this study focuses on geographically and demographically more or less overlaps with the territorial and demographic basis of the modern Turkish nation-state.

There are both thematic and practical reasons for this limitation. Firstly, during the Great War, the governing elites of the Ottoman Empire, that is to say the people who made the decisions concerning the Ottoman war effort, were almost entirely composed of Muslims, and in this Muslim body Turkish nationalism increasingly became the dominant factor. But what is more relevant in terms of my focus on the Anatolian Muslim population is that it constituted the main manpower pool of the Ottoman military mobilization. As will be discussed in more detail in the dissertation, although the Ottoman conscription system became more universal and was extended to almost all religious and ethnic groups on the eve of the Great War, in practice it was still the Anatolian Muslims (namely, Turks, Kurds, and to a lesser extent Circassians and Laz elements) who formed the main human profile of the Ottoman armed forces.⁴⁷ Similarly, it was this population which was mainly targeted by the mobilizing policies of the state, and its willingness or resistance to the expectations of the state greatly reshaped the mobilization process throughout the war. Therefore, any analysis of the Ottoman mobilization effort needs to pay primary attention to this population. Thirdly, I chose to focus on Anatolia and the Anatolian Muslim population because one of my aims in this dissertation is to explore how the mobilization process during the Great War transformed the human infrastructure and state-society relationships in Anatolia, and what sort of legacy this process left to be

⁴⁷ For a similar argument, see Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, pp. xv-xvi.

taken over by the subsequent mobilization process during the Turkish National Struggle which resulted in the establishment of the Turkish nation-state.

However, it should also be noted that this geographical and demographic limitation does not mean to underestimate the contribution (and, of course, also the resistance) of the other demographic elements of the empire during the Great War. First of all, the limitation that has been outlined above does not mean that there will be no references to other social groups. At relevant points, I do refer to and discuss the various issues about the involvement of Arabs, Armenians, Ottoman Greeks, Jews and other religious/ethnic groups of the empire in the mobilization process. Moreover, any focus on the human dimension of Anatolia during the Great War cannot ignore how the multi-ethnic and multi-religious demographic structure was transformed in favor of a more homogenous Muslim-Turkish population and how non-Muslims were affected in this process, especially the Armenians who had to go through a catastrophic episode called the “Deportation” (*Tehcir*) in official Turkish historiography, at the end of which their existence in provincial Anatolia virtually came to an end. But my point is that it is practically impossible to make an in-depth analysis of the roles of all these groups in the Ottoman mobilization effort within a single dissertation. In fact, the story of each group can, and should, be the subject matter of separate in-depth studies. There are also some other practical factors which make such all-encompassing research difficult, at least in my case. For example, since the Ottoman Empire was also a multi-language entity, a researcher who would dare to undertake such an attempt needs to have mastery over many more research languages than only Ottoman/Turkish, such as Arabic, Armenian, Greek, Judeo-Spanish, etc. Moreover, such a study would also require conducting research in many different archives located in many different countries today. A reasonable suggestion

in this respect could be that as more in-depth studies on the different roles played by different social groups in this process become available in future years, studies which better synthesize comprehensive arguments about the Ottoman mobilization experience during the Great War would become possible.

In terms of dealing with the roles of men and women during the war, to a great extent, my study tells the story of men. Some would say there is no surprise here by considering that military service was a male business. It is true that the Ottoman military manpower mobilization almost totally targeted the male population. But it is certainly also true that the process was not all about men. Under total war conditions, female labor was mobilized for industrial and agricultural sectors in all the belligerent countries, including the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁸ But, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, when the labor force was urgently need, women were also used in fields which were more directly related to the military mobilization, such as the transportation of military supplies or provisioning of the troops. I do refer to such significant points concerning the use of female labor in the mobilization effort, but I must say that I neither conducted comprehensive research particularly on this issue, nor do I have any claim that this dissertation aims to fill in a major gap in gender history of the Ottoman Great War experience. As regards the role of Anatolian Muslim women in the Ottoman mobilization experience, I can only hope that the points that I discuss in my study serve to draw Ottoman gender historians' attention to this important, potentially rich, but equally understudied subject-matter.

Lastly, the implementation of mobilization was a provincial phenomenon to a great extent, and any analysis of that process needs to focus on what took place in

⁴⁸ While there are many good studies from gender history perspective on the mobilization of female labor in European and American historiography on the Great War, this issue still remains an understudied field in Ottoman/Turkish historiography. For an exception, see Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Women, War and Work in the Ottoman Empire: Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women, 1916-1923* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archive and Research Centre, 2005).

provincial Anatolia and to get as close as possible to the local level. While my research has been motivated by this consideration and I have tried to compile as much information as possible from local units across Anatolia, my analysis presents a picture of the mobilization process as it was seen to a large extent from the center. I use many documents belonging to the local level, but these are usually correspondences or reports sent from local administrations or military units or local people to the central state administration or military headquarters in Istanbul. The center was always a main side in this interaction. In other words, local information has been compiled through the sources at the center. This does not mean that this information was always filtered or distorted by the center; as has been mentioned above, sometimes the information that was produced and maintained by official authorities could be less filtered and more direct than any other form of written communications under war conditions. But more data from the local level through such sources as local newspapers, local journals or documents produced by local institutions (which my research greatly lack) could help us produce a more complete picture of the process. I leave this as a task for further research.

The Sources

Rather than solely covering what role the state itself played in the mobilization for war, my research also (actually mainly) focuses on how social actors participated in this process and interacted with the state. Therefore, I have used both official and non-official sources. By official sources I mean documents which were produced by the state and its institutions. Official documents were of course written from the state perspective and reflected an official discourse. But it should also be noted that, at

least in the context of the First World War period, they contain remarkable amounts of information and details about the actual processes and the issues that emerged throughout the Ottoman war experience. In various forms of correspondence among governing institutions, between the center and local administrative units, and between local people and authorities the sources sometimes present many different aspects of an issue under question. What is more important and interesting in this respect is that given the existence of war-time censorship, official documents could sometimes be the only written record of an issue. Similarly, again because of the censorship that was applied to all forms of communications in society, the contents of official documents could also be much less filtered (or not filtered at all) compared to the other forms of written communication.

Regarding the category of official documents, I have basically looked at both military and civilian administrative institutions' documents. While the line between the military and civilian spheres greatly blurred under total war conditions and it was the military necessities which always dictated priority on bureaucratic procedures, there was still a certain division in the governing of society. The issues about the home front were mostly dealt with by the Interior Ministry and its local administrative units. In fact, as the implementation of the mobilization required the state to increase its control function and further penetrate into deeper levels of society, it was primarily the Interior Ministry institutions which faced this challenge and tried to realize this attempt. In this sense, the Interior Ministry (*Dahiliye Nezareti*) files at the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (BOA) in Istanbul contain many valuable details about the implementation and reception of mobilization in society during the war. These files also contain significant information about how the Ottoman state tried to cope with the problems that emerged in this process, and how

it tried to ally itself with certain groups in society while it marginalized others. Moreover, the fact that the civilian and military spheres largely intertwined under total war conditions also made the civilian administrative institutions often get involved in military affairs, at least in their implementation on the home front, and, consequently, civilian administrative institutions' documents sometimes also include many valuable details about military affairs in general, and the mobilization effort in particular.

The bulk of the documents belonging to the Ottoman War Ministry and the General Staff, and almost all the documents belonging to the military units that carried out the actual war experience on the battlefield are kept and maintained in the Turkish General Staff Military History Archives (ATASE) in Ankara. For the documents of the Great War period, the ATASE has a special collection called "*Birinci Dünya Harbi (BDH) Koleksiyonu*" (The First World War Collection). The documents in this collection constitute a wide spectrum ranging from correspondence between authorities vertically and horizontally, daily records of affairs on the battlefield, reports on the general situation in a military zone in a particular period of time, and all kinds of military measures concerning local civilian populations. They present many relevant points regarding almost all aspects of the Ottoman Great War experience. Therefore, any original study on any aspect of social and military history of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War needs to conduct research in these archives.⁴⁹ Instead of dealing with civilian administrative and military

⁴⁹ However, I cannot say that I was able to use of every document that I wanted to see in the military archives. Certain restrictions apply concerning the access to documents in the ATASE. You can only get the documents which are relevant to the subject-matter that you declared when applying, but the decision of which documents are relevant and which not are entirely made by the staff. However, this decision can often be a tricky one at best, since the cataloguing system of the BDH Collection is based on short summaries of files of documents (not of individual documents). The number of documents that a file might contain varies from a few to a couple hundreds. So, it is not always easy to decide if a file is entirely irrelevant for a given subject. Out of my total requests of files that I compiled after

documents separately, I have tried combine them to develop a solid documentary base for my arguments throughout the dissertation.

As regards the category of non-official documents, the newspapers and periodical journals of the First World War period constitute a fundamental layer of the documentary basis of my dissertation. However, while they provide much significant information and details about what happened in the period from the declaration of mobilization through the Ottoman entry into the war, the documentary contribution of the newspapers of the war years has actually been somewhat limited for my study due to censorship. The contents of different newspapers were almost the same, and all of them gave more coverage to a standard general military narrative to the battlefield performance of the Central Powers. Thus, details about the Ottoman war effort and problems on the home front are largely absent. However, the effect of censorship should not be exaggerated. First of all, although comments almost always favored the government, many daily events about the mobilization process were still covered in the newspapers. More importantly, the existence of censorship hardly affected the publication of articles that discussed what the pro-war Ottoman authorities and elites thought and did and how they tried to justify what they did. In this sense, the journals of paramilitary and semi-official voluntary associations and various propaganda and literary journals, constitute another important source for my dissertation. Pamphlets about various issues, which were published by state institutions and semi-official voluntary associations, are also included in this category.

searching the summaries in the catalogue of the BDH Collection, I was only given access to approximately one-third of the files.

In contrast to the wealth of periodical literature, sources about what the very people who were targeted by the mobilization thought and did are scarcer. Official documents of course contain some information about what people did, especially when they caused trouble for the state, but they narrate the issues from a state perspective. Petitions that were submitted from people to various administrative units in the form of telegrams are also contained in official documents and they are important in terms of hearing the voice of people. But the available number of such petitions about the problems related to the manpower mobilization during the war is limited. In an overwhelmingly illiterate society such as the Ottoman Empire, the people who were mobilized for war left almost no written traces behind. For example, while soldiers' letters constitute a very rich documentary source in the European historiography on the First World War, we lack this kind of written source by enlisted men to a great extent in the Ottoman context. It is very difficult to hear the direct voice of the simple Anatolian Muslim peasant enlisted man.

However, the war memoirs and personal diaries of various high, middle and lower-middle ranking officers, which have fortunately been becoming more abundant in recent years, partially fill this vacuum. But there are remarkable differences in terms of contents among such written sources and they are not equally helpful. First of all, most of them were written by regular army officers, not by enlisted men. Therefore, most of them actually repeat an official perspective. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing since sometimes an insider officer's observations reveal many significant details about how the people under his command behaved in the course of the war. Still, there is a problem in that almost all of the memoirs/diaries of high-ranking officers were usually written in order to justify the deeds of the writer during the war. Details about daily life are usually

omitted. Some of these officers even attempted to write a general political history of the war. But, interestingly, this “bias” diminishes as the rank of the officer-writer diminishes. Middle and lower-middle ranking officers are usually less concerned with justifying what they did during the war; after all, the responsibilities that they were to undertake were not as big as the ones taken by high-ranking officers. Details about daily life occupy more space in their narratives and, more importantly, some are rather personal in their writings and present us with more individual observations and feelings. A more useful and interesting category in this respect is the memoirs/diaries written by reserve officers. As I explain in Chapter 3, the Ottoman military was in urgent need of lower ranking officers during the war and the practice of recruiting educated men to be employed as reserve officers in various fields of the military became even more important during the First World War. A reserve officer was actually an enlisted man, but he was also an officer. He was himself subject to the mobilization, but he was also in charge of implementing it. Therefore, these war memoirs/diaries, more examples of which have become available in recent years, provide us with significant glimpses at the Ottoman mobilization effort both from outside and inside. Moreover, in the almost absolute absence of written records left behind by the peasant soldiers, their memoirs/diaries constitute a very important, and perhaps the only, source that allow us to construct a “from below” approach to the Ottoman enlisted men’s response to the war experience.

Other than the Ottoman/Turkish primary sources, I also use documents from the British National Archives (TNA: PRO) as a “balancing” element. The observations made by a major enemy of the Ottomans sometimes help fill in the important gaps that are left open in the Ottoman/Turkish documents. I mainly use documents from the British Foreign Office (FO) and, particularly, War Office (WO)

files that are related to contacts with the Ottomans. The FO documents that I use are consular reports about the Ottoman preparation for war, which were written on the eve of the Great War before the Ottoman state formally got into war with Britain. The WO documents that I use are mostly military intelligence reports from the Sinai-Palestine and Mesopotamia fronts, where major engagements took place between the Ottoman and British forces. I especially use the British military intelligence documents in my chapter on the problem of desertion. The intelligence documents not only present general accounts of the Ottoman forces observed from the enemy side, but also include the interrogation statements taken from the Ottoman deserters in British hands and the analyses made by British authorities on the basis of these statements. The details that are contained in the intelligence documents are significant and relevant for a study on the Ottoman war experience, because they were not produced for propaganda, but to provide functional information for the use of British authorities about the actual situation in the battlefield zone. Therefore, the factor of exaggeration or distortion was usually at a minimum level. But, needless to say, sometimes the British observations themselves also need to be balanced by the Ottoman ones.

The Study

The body of this dissertation is composed of five chapters. The study will begin with an analysis of the Ottoman public mood on the eve of and at the outbreak of the Great War. Chapter 2 will mainly focus on the “war enthusiasm” issue and explore the background, mechanisms and discourses of the Ottoman call to arms with the declaration of mobilization. After presenting a discussion on how the Balkan Defeat

produced an effect of nationalist radicalization and militarization on the Muslim-Turkish Ottoman population, the chapter will mainly deal with the “armed neutrality period” and its immediate aftermath, namely from the declaration of mobilization through the Ottoman entry into the war. I will discuss how attempts at mobilizing society for war were actually carried out in collaboration between the state and civil society. I will try to show how the unique dynamics of the Ottoman public sphere created political bonds between the government and semi-official voluntary associations, which dominated the field of voluntary action in favor of nationalist and militarist ideas. This process played a double function in that while it channeled the spontaneous pro-war sentiments of people into a more organized war effort on the one hand, it marginalized all dissenting voices and obstructed the emergence of any anti-war initiative. The demonstrations that were held on the occasions of the abolition of the capitulations and the declaration of holy war in particular will be scrutinized as the main public events of a process which was orchestrated and choreographed by both official and civilian initiatives collaborated under a common political goal. Next, I will try to relate this general process to the specific subject matter of my dissertation, namely the military mobilization of manpower. In this sense, I will look at which discourses and symbols the Ottoman mobilization used to reach people and convince them to join the war effort. I will argue that a popular Islamic language always accompanied attempts at mobilization. Finally, I will also touch upon the issue of propaganda by arguing that the capacity of Ottoman war propaganda in this process was actually much larger than it has been assumed, since it was not confined to written communication techniques, but also included the widespread and effective employment of oral propaganda.

The actual process of manpower mobilization for the armed forces during the war will be dealt with in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I will present a description of the evolution of the Ottoman conscription system and discuss how the conscription practice formed a new relationship between the state and society during the war years. Since the failure to mobilize manpower was given as one of the main reasons for defeat during the Balkan War, the Ottoman conscription system underwent a major reform process to create a more efficient recruitment mechanism and a more extensive service obligation. I will show that the main challenge for this process was to re-establish the draft system at the local level, since it was the local level on which the success of the system depended. This challenge required more penetration into deeper levels of society, which worked mainly through recruiting office branches in districts, by which the central authority got into collaboration not only with local authorities to implement the recruitment procedure, but also with important local dignitaries to justify military service to the local people.

The chapter will also draw attention to the discriminatory character of the Ottoman conscription system, which became consolidated during the war. Although the official discourse of the CUP government about military service propagated the aim to join all elements of Ottoman society into the mobilization effort, this aim was actually conceived in a pragmatic Ottoman unity perspective of getting the maximum use of the available manpower potential. This approach was in fact quite nationalist and did not reflect a goal of Ottoman equality. I will discuss how the state's growing political distrust towards the non-Muslim elements in the empire, and the latter's reluctance to recruitment, produced two different service categories of armed and unarmed, which resulted in discriminatory practices such as the notorious labor battalions.

Despite the reform attempt on the eve of the war, the Ottoman conscription system continued to have certain deficiencies in various respects mainly due to infrastructural weaknesses of state power. Moreover, as the war went on and the state steadily needed more manpower on the battlefield, the conscription system also constantly needed to be adapted with necessary modifications to actual war conditions. It will be emphasized that the Ottoman state tried to overcome these challenges by combining old imperial recruitment methods with modern conscription strategies.

Resorting to volunteers was a way of coping with the deficiencies of the conscription system and the increasing need for manpower during the war will be the subject matter of Chapter 4. This chapter discusses how the use of volunteers in the armed forces—a practice that had already been applied in the previous wars in the post-Tanzimat era—became a more systematic method with new legal and practical regulations during the Great War. I will first present a general panorama of volunteers in the Ottoman armed forces during the war and deal with volunteers in four main social categories as prisoner volunteers, immigrant and refugee (*muhacir*) volunteers, tribal volunteers and religious volunteers. In the first category, I will discuss why prisoners came to be preferred as volunteers in the armed forces and evaluate how they were employed in the armed bands of the Special Organization to carry out informal military missions and guerilla attacks both on the battlefield against the enemy forces and on the home front against “distrusted” civilian elements. In the second category, I will try to show how volunteerism turned into an effective tool of mobilizing the increasing *muhacir* population during the war and why *muhacir* volunteers were employed in the military campaigns in the regions which they were familiar with. In the case of tribal volunteers, I will discuss that

resorting to volunteers in eastern and southeastern Anatolia, which mainly Kurdish tribal units inhabited, functioned almost as an alternative to the conscription system which the state could not realize in these regions due its infrastructural insufficiency. Recruiting tribal volunteers was also a way of forming political bonds between the state and peripheral tribal authorities. Kurdish tribal volunteers were usually employed as separate cavalry forces, which served as auxiliary units on the fronts that were near their native regions, such as on the fronts of the Caucasus and Mesopotamia. And in the case of religious volunteers, I will discuss how the CUP government got into collaboration with the Mevlevi and Bektaşî orders for the military mobilization effort. I will also argue that the expectations of the latter also resonated with the demands of the state. Then I will explain that religious volunteers were used mostly for increasing the troops' morale; their religious influence in society was also used for propaganda purposes to increase the legitimacy of the CUP government's war policies.

My main argument in this chapter will be that resorting to volunteers in the Ottoman armed forces during the Great War was not merely a way of increasing the available manpower, but it also, and more importantly, created a relationship of power between the CUP-dominated state and certain social groups which were preferred by the state authority on the basis of its political expectations. This was not a one-way relationship, as these social groups also showed willingness to get into such an interaction with the state authority as long as this interaction welcomed their own expectations. This reciprocity functioned in the way that it marginalized other "undesired" social groups in Anatolia and that it provided popular support and collaboration at the local level for the CUP government.

However, neither the conscription system nor resorting to volunteers sufficed for an effective mobilization as the war became prolonged and turned into a multi-front battle of attrition. As the war acquired a more “total” character, it required a permanent mobilization effort with new social mechanisms established for this purpose. The Ottoman attempts at permanent manpower mobilization constitute the subject-matter of Chapter 5 which deals with this process by analyzing the paramilitary youth associations that were conceived as an instrument to contribute to these attempts. In this chapter, I will first present a general discussion on the emergence and increasing importance of militaristic youth associations on the eve of the war. But my main focus will be the Ottoman Youth League, which was established in the middle of the war with the specific aim of mobilizing unschooled provincial and peasant Muslim Ottoman boys who constituted the backbone of the Ottoman armed forces. I will discuss that through the Ottoman Youth League, which had branches at the local level throughout Anatolia, the CUP-dominated Ottoman state aimed to permeate into deeper levels of provincial society to carry out more effective manpower mobilization. The Youth League was established to provide an extended militaristic training, both physically and mentally, for young boys from the age of 7 through 17. In this way, I argue, authorities not only aimed to prepare young boys for war by providing them with physical and military skills, but also to create a popular mechanism that would serve as a propaganda campaign to get popular support on the home front for the government’s war policies.

After describing this background and discussing the aims of the paramilitary associations, I will argue that the people who were targeted or affected by such organizations did not passively comply with the demands of the state. Based on how these people’s expectations and priorities matched up with state policies, I will try to

demonstrate that their responses constituted a wide spectrum ranging from voluntary support to open resistance. In this sense, I will argue that the Ottoman paramilitary associations often had difficulty realizing their originally conceived aims and were forced to respond to social actors by continually re-shaping themselves and their methods during the mobilization process.

A more general focus on the limits of the Ottoman mobilization effort will be made in Chapter 6, which will deal with the problem of desertion as the ultimate form of resistance to the mobilization for war. In this chapter, I will first discuss how desertions from the Ottoman armed forces, which particularly increased in the second half of the war, constituted an extensive problem which played a major role in the decline of the performance of the Ottoman military on the battlefield.

Regarding the wide scale of the problem, I will also discuss that while almost all ethnic or religious groups in the Ottoman Empire were represented in the problem, it was particularly Anatolian Muslims and Turks, the main manpower pool of the Ottoman military, who constituted a significant majority in it.

While I will explore in detail the specific reasons for desertions as explained by military authorities and, where possible, also by deserters themselves, I will situate these reasons in a wider context which approaches desertion as a unilateral termination of the tacit contract that existed between the state and the enlisted man regarding military service and sacrifice on the battlefield. I will argue that the realization of basic expectations of the enlisted men was vitally important for their endurance on the battlefield, and such factors as poor feeding and health conditions on the battlefield, the disappearance of hope for victory, feeling betrayed by the authorities, bad treatment by commanders or unbearable physical and mental exhaustion greatly contributed to the scaling up of the problem of desertion.

One of the main arguments of this chapter is that the extent of desertions was so wide that it quickly evolved into a major social problem requiring measures on the part of not only the military but also the state authority on the entire home front. In this respect, I will explore how the effort of coping with the problem opened up new channels for the state to further penetrate into society. I will particularly examine the re-organization process of the Ottoman gendarmerie as the main provincial security force to cope with the problem of desertion. I will discuss that whereas the state was never completely successful in tackling the issue of desertion, it was able to establish a reinforced basis of internal security mechanism in Anatolia. I will argue that this internal security mechanism helped the re-mobilization effort during the Turkish Nationalist Struggle of 1919-1922, which resulted in the creation of the Turkish nation-state.

CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZED SPONTANEITY: THE CALL TO ARMS IN THE OTTOMAN PUBLIC SPHERE ON THE EVE OF THE GREAT WAR

If Carl von Clausewitz was right when he said that war in the modern era had become “a people’s war”,⁵⁰ then “mass mobilization and broad social support became the basis of warfare.”⁵¹ Indeed, ensuring society’s permanent support on a large scale had come to be considered the *sine qua non* for success on the battlefield in the age of total wars. The First World War was characterized by attempts on the part of the states in all belligerent countries, including the Ottoman Empire, to carry out large scale and permanent mobilization of society. When the July Crisis emerged in 1914 and declarations of mobilization were made in one European capital after another, the Ottoman state did not wait long and declared general mobilization on 2 August 1914.⁵² From this date to the entry of the Ottomans into the war in late October 1914, the state was in a period called “armed neutrality” (*müsellah bîtaraflık*) during which society witnessed attempts at both the official and popular levels to mobilize for war. In fact, popular sentiment had already become radicalized after the mobilization experience in the Balkan War of 1912-12 and the humiliating and traumatic defeat that ensued. The core of every mobilization attempt during the period of armed neutrality involved propagating the idea that the Ottomans had good reason to prepare for the imminent war and, therefore, that every Ottoman needed to willingly support the mobilization and act upon the call to arms. These points were stressed further when the Ottoman state entered the war and the war was presented as

⁵⁰ Von Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 457.

⁵¹ Förster, “Introduction”, in Chickering and Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War*, pp. 2-3.

⁵² BOA, MV, 236/17, 10 Ramazan 1332/2 August 1914.

an opportunity for the regeneration of the Ottoman Empire and an antidote to the danger of dissolution.

This chapter will explore how Ottoman society was mobilized on the eve of and during the outbreak of the Great War. I will scrutinize the background, mechanisms and discourses of the Ottoman call to arms. I will first give a critical summary of the ongoing debate in European historiography on the issue of “war enthusiasm” in societies at the outbreak of the Great War. By doing this I will underline that new research in this debate has challenged claims that there was almost spontaneous and widespread enthusiasm for war in European societies in July 1914. I will next analyze the Ottoman case and argue that popular mobilization for war in Ottoman society was neither entirely spontaneous nor purely imposed by the state. My main contention will be that while there was no clear cut distinction between “spontaneity” and “organized enthusiasm” (in most cases these dimensions often overlapped), attempts at popular mobilization were carried out within collaboration between the CUP-dominated state and semi-official voluntary associations in the public sphere. I will try to show how the unique dynamics of the Ottoman public sphere created political bonds between the government and semi-official voluntary associations such as the Navy League and the National Defense League, which gradually dominated the field of voluntary action in favor of nationalist and militarist ideas. I will discuss how these associations not only organized and actively took part in major mobilization activities such as large public demonstrations that were held on the eve and at the outbreak of the war, but also worked with the support of the government to marginalize any potential dissenting voices against pro-war policies.

Finally, after examining the discourses and symbols of mobilization, I will argue that a popular Islamic language always accompanied the mobilization attempts as a proto-nationalist discourse. I will also touch upon the issue of propaganda by arguing that the capacity of Ottoman war propaganda in this process was actually much greater than previously assumed, since it was not confined to written communication techniques, but included the use of wide-spread and effective oral propaganda.

Debate on the “Spirit of 1914” and War Enthusiasm

In European historiography, the debate on the extent and contents of popular enthusiasm towards the declaration of war in 1914 remains vigorous. However, the once dominant argument that there was pronounced willingness for war on July 1914 in the public spheres of major European belligerent countries such as Germany, France and Britain has been challenged by recent research informed by more balanced and nuanced arguments.

To give a few examples of studies that advanced the “enthusiasm argument”, we can first mention Marc Ferro, who wrote that the anti-militarism of the post-Dreyfus period had lost its vigor by 1914, and that the Great War was “enthusiastically received by most men of military age.”⁵³ Ferro has argued that this enthusiasm was particularly evident in England and the United States, where a great number of volunteers joined the armed forces.⁵⁴

⁵³ Marc Ferro, *The Great War, 1914-1918*, trans. by Nicole Stone (London and New York: Routledge, 1973), pp. 8-9, 15.

⁵⁴ The tide of volunteerism did indeed seem to be remarkable in Britain, which did not have a compulsory conscription system until 1916. In August through December of 1914 alone, nearly 1.2 million men voluntarily enlisted in the army. See Charles Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), p. 130.

Similarly, Modris Eksteins has emphasized the voluntary spirit of 1914. Eksteins has gone as far as to claim that the density of popular enthusiasm, which unfolded in jingoistic mass demonstrations in Berlin, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Paris, and London in late July and early August of 1914, played an important role in expediting the decisions to join the war by pushing the military leadership of Europe toward confrontation. Focusing particularly on the German case he has asserted that “the momentous decisions of the last days have all been made against the backdrop of mass enthusiasm” and “no political leader could have resisted the popular pressures for decisive action.”⁵⁵

Yet, in recent years, this debate has become more diverse, and the “spirit of 1914” approach has come under severe criticism. For example, Niall Ferguson has made equally strong assertions on the other end of the continuum. He has argued that while there was certainly some popular support for war in July 1914, the extent of this enthusiasm does not allow us to generalize about the overall “spirit” of 1914. Claiming that the existing debate on the popular enthusiasm issue understates the extent of the anti-militarist movement in Europe on the eve of the Great War, Ferguson contends that “militarism was far from being the dominant force in European politics on the eve of the Great War.”⁵⁶ For example, as a counterargument to the claim that the existence of a high number of volunteers in the British case was proof of widespread popular support for the war, he has emphasized the impact of the financial crisis of 1914 in Britain and suggested that “one reason so many men volunteered in the first weeks of the war was that unemployment soared because of

⁵⁵ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2000), pp. 56, 61.

⁵⁶ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: The Penguin Press, 1998), pp. 20, 28.

the economic crisis the war had unleashed.”⁵⁷ On the other hand, another influential factor might have been the conviction that the war would be short and end by Christmas.⁵⁸ Ferguson’s argument can be further supported by the fact that the emphasis on volunteerism tends to ignore the existence of conscientious objectors to military service, which actually constituted a major problem in wartime Britain.⁵⁹

Recent studies have further deconstructed the “myth” of the spirit of 1914 in a more balanced manner. By analyzing German public opinion at the outbreak of the war through in-depth research compiled mostly from local histories, Jeffrey Verhey has argued that the generalization of war enthusiasm is baseless. Verhey explains that while certain sections of German society, such as most middle-class intellectuals, students and much of the upper class, enthusiastically supported the entry into the war, it would be inaccurate to equate their patriotic fervor with that of German society as whole. He has argued that popular enthusiasm had a limited social character. Moreover, on the issue of volunteers, he has acknowledged that the fact of volunteerism was considerable, but also stated that it would be quite misleading to assume that all German volunteers volunteered due to war enthusiasm. In addition to the fact that the German press usually vastly exaggerated the numbers of men who volunteered, Verhey has highlighted additional factors (such as the financial crisis) that might have led many Germans to volunteer in the army. For example, while many unemployed petty-bourgeois and middle-class people “may have decided to join the army as a means of getting through these difficult times”, many youths were

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 444.

⁵⁸ J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, second edition (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 29.

⁵⁹ Lois Bibbings, “Conscientious Objectors in the Great War: The Consequences of Rejecting Military Masculinities”, in Paul R. Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 2003), p. 130. For example, during 1916-18, some 16,500 men registered as conscientious objectors in Britain. See Messenger, *Call to Arms*, p. 136.

actually less enthusiastic than “curious”, and they volunteered because they saw the war “as an opportunity for personal growth [and] a chance to develop their personality.”⁶⁰

Hew Strachan has attempted to formulate a synthesized approach. He has warned that it would be equally simplistic and misleading to conclude that popular enthusiasm at the outbreak of the Great War was a “myth.” While Strachan accepts that the portrayal of widespread enthusiasm for war is certainly in need of revision with new research, he has also pointed to the fact that “the belligerent peoples of Europe accepted the onset of war, [and that] they did not reject it.” According to Strachan, “without a popular willingness to go to war the world war could not have taken place.”⁶¹ Underlining the need to avoid simplistic generalizations and to take into consideration different aspects of the debate, Strachan has reached a similar conclusion with Verhey regarding the limited character of enthusiasm. He has asserted that “genuine enthusiasm was more frequent in towns and among white-collar workers” and that, [t]he largest single occupational group in most armies was the peasantry [while...] the reactions of agricultural communities to mobilization were less positive.”⁶²

What was the situation in the Ottoman Empire? What was the mood of the Ottoman public at the outbreak of the Great War? How did the Ottoman public respond to the mobilization? Was there a “spirit of 1914” in Ottoman society? Did

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 99-100.

⁶¹ Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Volume 1: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 104, 110, 162; Hew Strachan, *The Outbreak of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 132.

⁶² Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 142. A similar balanced reassessment has also been made by Adrian Gregory who, in the case of Britain, argues that “the very idea of a uniform enthusiastic reaction from the ‘masses’ owes more to contemporary beliefs of the excitability of mass society, widespread amongst liberals and conservatives alike, than it does to empirical evidence.” Adrian Gregory, “British ‘War Enthusiasm’ in 1914: A Reassessment”, in Gail Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), p. 69.

social agency exert any effect on the Ottoman decision for war? First of all, before attempting to answer such questions, it should be noted that issues such as Ottoman public opinion in 1914, as well as the role played by popular sentiment in shaping the decision to enter into war have remained largely understudied aspects of the social history of the war in Ottoman-Turkish historiography. Therefore, these questions have hardly been addressed. The available historical literature on this subject has focused either on general political issues such as whether the Ottoman entry into the war was inevitable and what were the Ottoman war aims, or on more specific aspects of the political process such as the Ottoman search for alliances in 1914, the secret treaty signed between the Ottoman and German governments on 2 August 1914, and whether the decision to enter the war was made too early or not. Needless to say, all these issues are related fundamentally to political and diplomatic fields, and extant studies in this respect focus almost entirely on elite perspectives in this period.

The political history of various aspects of the Ottoman decision for war in 1914 is, relatively speaking, quite dynamic and well documented. Earlier studies in this field emphasized the idea that the decision for war was made under heavy pressure from Germany and only by the initiative of an ambitious faction within the CUP, and without adequate deliberation or consensus. An influential representative of this approach is Y. Hikmet Bayur, whose comprehensive work (though now mostly considered outdated) argued that the decision was fatalistic and there were no compelling reasons for entering the war.⁶³ Ulrich Trumpener's classic study on German-Ottoman relations has challenged this view by arguing that the Ottoman state was not a passive party vis-à-vis Germany, nor was it forced into war by Germany. On the contrary, he has argued that the Ottoman state also shaped the

⁶³ See. Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 1: *1914-1918 Genel Savaşı*.

course of the alliance by its own terms and that the event that provoked Russia to declare war on the Ottomans—namely the bombing of the Russian ports on the Black Sea coast by the *Yavuz (Goeben)* under the command of the German admiral Souchon in late October 1914—was actually planned in collaboration with leading Ottoman and German politicians.⁶⁴ An important article by Kemal Karpat further challenged Bayur’s argument and clarified Ottoman war aims in the political context of the period.⁶⁵ Likewise, Mustafa Aksakal’s recent study has critically reevaluated the existing literature and used new primary sources to argue that Ottoman participation in the First World War was neither a *fait accompli* nor a result of a decision taken by a handful of hawkish politicians. Instead, Aksakal asserts that it represented continuity in Ottoman political thinking. In this sense, he argues that there was considerable support for entry into war not only among the Ottoman elite, but also in Ottoman society as the only acceptable course of action for “saving” the empire.⁶⁶ But Aksakal’s study revolves almost strictly within the circle of political history and elite perspectives. Thus, it does not explore the social parameters of how this support had evolved and how it resonated with the pro-war policies of the government. What Aksakal means by public support is actually the support given by politically interested elites whose expectations converged with those of the CUP government regarding the entry into the war.

Feroz Ahmad’s studies have represented a major attempt to contribute to this discussion from a more social perspective, and have attempted to balance the

⁶⁴ See Ulrich Trampener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) and also his, “Turkey Entry’s into World War I: An Assessment of Responsibilities”, *Journal of Modern History* 34 (December 1962), pp. 369-380.

⁶⁵ See Kemal H. Karpat, “The Entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I”, *Belleleten*, no. 253 (December 2004), pp. 687-733.

⁶⁶ See Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

political narrative with explorations at the social level. In particular, two important articles have presented significant details about the changing nature of CUP attempts at popular mobilization from the Balkan War through the Great War.⁶⁷ His exploration of the collaboration between the CUP government and Muslim trade corporations in mobilizing the public is worth mentioning in this respect. However, despite their pioneering contributions, Ahmad's articles can be considered complementary essays to his main work on the Young Turk regime, and they have mainly presented a general description of the social and political affairs leading to the war, rather than being in-depth discussions that specifically focused on the Ottoman mobilization effort.

Militarization of the Ottoman Public Sphere after the Balkan Defeat

Was there an Ottoman public sphere on the eve of the Great War, where social actors could form voluntary action and express their opinions and expectations vis-à-vis the state? Historical studies on the evolution of the public sphere were once heavily influenced by Jürgen Habermas' notion of a liberal bourgeois public sphere. According to Habermas, the public sphere emerged in Western Europe from the eighteenth century onwards as a result of specific historical circumstances, such as the development of the modern state, the rise of industrial capitalism and the emergence of print capitalism accompanied by mass media. During this process, a new distinct social domain was opened between the private sphere and the state authority, where bourgeois social actors could form civic initiatives, establish autonomous mechanisms to pursue their own economic interests, gather in common

⁶⁷ See Ahmad, "War and Society under the Young Turks" and Ahmad, "Ottoman Armed Neutrality".

forums to influence political action and enter into negotiation with the state. In Habermas' words, "in its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented *before* the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse *by* the people."⁶⁸

The liberal notion of the public sphere assumes an antagonistic relationship between the state and civil society, placing them in binary opposition. It tends to attribute democratic implications to the development of the public sphere. This notion assigns a key role to civil society associations as the main source of voluntary action vis-à-vis the state, and some analysts even tend to "predict a positive correlation between their density and the vitality of democracy."⁶⁹

This understanding of the public sphere has proved to be too limited to explore the dynamics of the public sphere in non-Western societies whose experiences do not exactly correspond to the Western European model. From the liberal perspective, the existence of a strong authoritarian state could be seen as a sign of a weak public sphere or its entire absence, which usually characterized "latecomer" societies in the modernization process. This approach has been subject to extensive revision in recent years. For example, as Harry Harootunian's analysis of the Japanese experience of modernization has shown, modernization needs to be perceived as a multiple process, which situates unique experiences within a shared

⁶⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. xi.

⁶⁹ Frank Trentmann, "Paradoxes of Civil Society: Introduction", in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern German and British History* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), p. 5. Also, for a critical reevaluation of the limits of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere within the context of the nineteenth century, see Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century", in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 289-339.

framework of contemporaneity without erasing their differences.⁷⁰ Therefore, instead of using the liberal notion as a prototype or litmus test to measure the maturity of a particular civil society, the liberal notion should be regarded as just one among various types of public sphere within a “multiple modernization” framework.

The relationship between civil society and the state can be much more complicated and blurrier than the binary opposition implied by the liberal approach; civil society institutions could sometimes even assume governmental functions, collaborating with the state.⁷¹ Similarly, Joseph Bradley’s study on voluntary associations in late imperial Russia has shown that the existence of an authoritarian state did not preclude the emergence of dynamic voluntary action in the expanding public sphere, and the relationship between the state and civil society was much more complicated than the liberal notion would suggest.⁷² The historiography on the Great War now also tends to run counter to this liberal perspective and the emphasis is increasingly being put on the argument that “voluntary organizations compensated the shortcomings of the State, proving indispensable in the mobilization of the material and cultural resources of the nation, and even benefiting from the war.”⁷³

This revisionist approach to civil society has been influential in late Ottoman historiography as well. For example, Nadir Özbek’s study on philanthropic activities

⁷⁰ “Japan’s modernity...was rather an inflection of a larger global process that constituted what might be called co-existing or co-eval modernity, inasmuch as it shared the same historical temporality of modernity (as a form of historical totalizing) found elsewhere in Europe and the US...What co-eval suggests is contemporaneity yet the possibility of difference.” Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. xvi-xvii.

⁷¹ For this argument in a study on gymnastics clubs in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Daniel A. McMillan, “Energy, Willpower, and Harmony: On the Problematic Relationship between State and Civil Society in Nineteenth-Century Germany”, in Trentmann (ed.), *Paradoxes of Civil Society*, pp. 176-195.

⁷² See Joseph Bradley, “Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy in Tsarist Russia”, *American Historical Review*, vol. 107, no. 4 (October 2002), pp. 1094-1123.

⁷³ Pierre Purseigle, “Warfare and Belligerence: Approaches to the First World War”, in Pierre Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in the First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 23-24.

in the late Ottoman Empire demonstrates that philanthropic associations and related voluntary initiatives contributed to the development of a dynamic public sphere, which was not antagonistic to or distinct from state authority. Rather, the ruling authority managed to bring philanthropic associations under its control, and tried to use them as instruments to expand its control over society and to consolidate its legitimacy.⁷⁴

In fact, the Young Turks' 24 July 1908 revolutionary intervention and subsequent restoration of constitutional monarchy opened channels in Ottoman society for voluntary social action. A great range of civic and semi-official associations emerged within the aura of "liberty" which had been propagated by the Young Turks during the revolutionary process and its immediate aftermath. Impressed by this development, Tarık Zafer Tunaya has written that socio-political life during the Second Constitutional Era was characterized by associations rather than by political parties.⁷⁵ The change was indeed striking. While only seven associations were established in Istanbul in 1907, 83 new associations were established during the last five months of 1908; 70 new ones were added to these in 1909.⁷⁶ Moreover, a legal framework was also created by issuing the Law for Associations on 16 August 1909, which provided a legal base and legitimacy for newly emerging civil society organizations.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See Nadir Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet: Siyaset, İktidar ve Meşruiyet, 1876-1914* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002) and Nadir Özbek, "Defining the Public Sphere during the Late Ottoman Empire: War, Mass Mobilization and the Young Turk Regime (1908-18)", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 43, no. 5 (September 2007), pp. 795-809.

⁷⁵ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler, vol. 1: İkinci Meşrutiyet Devri* (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1988), p. 367.

⁷⁶ Mehmet Ö. Alkan, "İstanbul'da Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları, 1856-1945: Toplumsal Örgütlenmenin Gelişimi", in A. N. Yücekök, İ. Turan and M. Ö. Alkan (eds.), *Tanzimat'tan Günümüze İstanbul'da Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), p. 105.

⁷⁷ "Cemiyetler Kanunu", 5 Ağustos 1325/16 August 1909, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 1, pp. 604-607; Zafer Toprak, "Cemiyetler Kanunu", *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), p. 205.

A considerable expansion in the freedom of press also accompanied this process. Within two months after the 1908 Revolution, more than 200 rights to publish a newspaper were given. In total, 353 newspapers and journals were published in Istanbul between 1908 and 1909; this number was 130 in 1910, 124 in 1911, 45 in 1912, 92 in 1913 and 75 in 1914.⁷⁸ This growth in the realm of print media could well be described as an important step in the development of “print capitalism” in the Ottoman Empire, which certainly played a significant role in setting the stage for the rise of a nationalist mentality.⁷⁹

However, although this sudden increase of freedom in the realm of civic action was impressive and significant, it was only temporary. The pluralistic aspect of this process proved to be as fragile as the regime became increasingly authoritarian in the 1910s, especially after the coup of 1913, when the Committee of Union and Progress forcibly declared single-party rule. This fragility further increased during the beginning of the First World War with the introduction of firm censorship applications.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, although the state under the Young Turk regime increasingly became more authoritarian, it did not exert complete control on associational life and print media in civil society. Rather, it tried to shape the voluntary action according to its own terms in part by forcing public actors to collaborate with the state. This involved certain restrictions on potentially dissident

⁷⁸ Orhan Kolođlu, “Osmanlı Basını: İçeriđi ve Rejimi”, *Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), p. 90.

⁷⁹ Irvin Cemil Schick, “Osmanlı Döneminde Matbuat Kapitalizmi”, *Virgöl*, no. 126 (January-February 2009), pp. 58-63. On the relationship between the rise of print capitalism and nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1993).

⁸⁰ In fact, various formal and informal censorship applications had already begun with the CUP’s seizure of power on 23 January 1913, after which Ottoman politics became increasingly authoritarian. But the censorship during the war years was more systematic and strict. Erol Korođlu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity: Literature in Turkey during World War I* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 13 [This book is an abridged translation of Erol Korođlu, *Propagandanın Milli Kimlik İnşasına: Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı, 1914-1918* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004)].

and non-conformist associations, but it also offered various incentives as long as voluntary initiatives in civil society acted along the lines of the nationalist and militarist tendencies of the government. Thus, civic associations that were at the same time voluntary and “semi-official” characterized associational life in the Ottoman public sphere towards the First World War.

Two such associations were particularly significant in terms of influencing public opinion both on the eve of and during the First World War. These were the Ottoman Navy League (*Donanma-yı Osmanî Muâvenet-i Milliye Cemiyeti*) and the National Defense League (*Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*). Both these associations propagated nationalistic ideas and worked to arouse popular enthusiasm among the Ottoman population for the war effort. They also organized important fundraising campaigns to make material contribution to their own specific aims. With the support and protection of the state authority, their nationalist and militaristic discourse and practices had “the effect of marginalizing other civic initiatives not directly related to patriotic goals.”⁸¹ In other words, they served as instruments not only for creating bonds between the ruling authority and the public sphere, but also for containing and suppressing any potential popular dissent to that authority.

The Ottoman Navy League was established on 19 July 1909 by four middle-class Ottoman professionals: physicians Hafız İbrahim, İsmail Hakkı and Petraki Papadopoulos, and the chief engineer Haşim Bey.⁸² The Navy League emerged at a time when the CUP circles propagated the pressing need to create a powerful Ottoman navy to confront the Greek threat in the Aegean Sea, where the Crete

⁸¹ Özbek, “Defining the Public Sphere”, p. 797.

⁸² For a detailed account of the Ottoman Navy League and its activities together with an analysis of its membership structure and discourse, see Mehmet Beşikçi, *The Organized Mobilization of Popular Sentiments: The Ottoman Navy League, 1909-1919* (master’s thesis, Boğaziçi University, 1999). For an institutional history of the league, also see Selahattin Özçelik, *Donanma-yı Osmanî Muâvenet-i Milliye Cemiyeti* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000).

question of 1909 had proved the weakness of Ottoman naval power. This propaganda was also reinforced by the influence of the naval armament race occurring at this time in Europe, especially between Britain and Germany.⁸³ Remarkable popular support for naval armament, which was rallied by voluntary associations in European countries such as Germany and Britain, also inspired the emergence of the Ottoman Navy League. The founders and active members of the Ottoman Navy League particularly admired and were heavily influenced by the German Navy League (*Flottenverein*), which constituted a genuine mass movement by its large membership, its strong organizational structure, and the size of its literary output and the range of its propaganda.⁸⁴

The major aim of the Ottoman Navy League was to collect donations (*iane*) from the public to contribute to the building of a new and strong navy. These donations were collected on both regular and irregular bases. The regular donation collection came from recorded members in the form of a monthly payment (usually at least 1 piastre/*kuruş*). Irregular donation collection involved large amounts of occasional cash contributions from high state officials, including the sultan himself, as symbolic gestures to set an example for other people to donate.⁸⁵ Moreover, the League also organized various occasional events such as lotteries and auctions, and sold souvenir objects to raise funds for the Ottoman navy. And, since the League

⁸³ For a summary of the Anglo-German battleship race, see Richard Hough, *The Great War at Sea, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 12-21.

⁸⁴ The German Navy League, which was founded on 30 April 1898, enlisted 86,675 members only in its first eighteen months, with this number reaching 331,493 in 1914. Its official publication, *Die Flotte* (The Navy) had a subscription order of 270-280,000 after 1900 and had 360,000 readers in 1913. See Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp. 102-366. Britain established its own Navy League in 1893, and it had 100,000 members in 1914. See Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 145.

⁸⁵ For example, Sultan Mehmed Reşad V, who was the legal protector (*hâmi*) of the Navy League, also donated his salary. “Donanma-yı Osmanî Muâvenet-i Milliye Cemiyeti Merkez-i Umumisinin 6 Temmuz 325’ten [19 Temmuz 1909] 30 Haziran 326 [13 Temmuz 1910] tarihine kadar 325 günlük icrâât ve muâmelâtını rapordur”, *Donanma*, no. 6 (August 1326/1910), p. 513.

obtained a fatwa from the *şeyhülislam* (the chief jurist consult) proclaiming that collecting donations for the navy was allowable according to the Islamic law, it also asked people to present their religious alms (*fitre* and *zekât*) to the League.⁸⁶ Furthermore, some public institutions also supported the Navy League in various forms. For example, the Naval Museum of Istanbul granted the fees of its entrance tickets to the League and the right to operate a ferry between the Eminönü and Galata ports was also given to the League; the Ottoman Bank, into which the League deposited all its cash, paid a higher interest rate to the League than the standard rate paid to its normal customers.⁸⁷

To organize these donation collection campaigns, an extensive associational structure was conceived. Branches were established in as many provincial units of the empire as possible, as well as in Istanbul, where the central office was located. The Navy League opened a total of 122 branches (29 of which were in provincial centers, the rest in sub-provinces and districts) within its first year. While the League did not record the number of its members for all branches, it had figures for the capital city Istanbul; the number for the end of June 1910 was given as having been around 36,000 members.⁸⁸

Membership in the Navy League was theoretically open to every Ottoman, but in practice it required approval on the part of potential members of the CUP's

⁸⁶ *Salname-i Servet-i Fünûn*, 1326/1910, p. 205.

⁸⁷ For various forms of donations, also see *Donanma-yı Osmani Muâvenet-i Milliye Cemiyeti'nin İkinci Sene-i Devriyesi için Heyet-i Umumiyyeye Takdim Kılınmak üzere 1326 senesi 6 Temmuz'undan [19 July 1910] 1327 senesi Haziran gâyesine [13 July 1911] kadar olan Muâmelât-ı Esasiyesini Havi Rapordur* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Hayriye, 1327/1911); Deniz Müzesi Komutanlığı Deniz Tarihi Arşivi, Mülgâ Bahriye Nezareti Bölümü, Tahrirat Kalemî, Defter no. 666, p. 89, 27 Temmuz 1326/9 August 1910; Deniz Müzesi Komutanlığı Deniz Tarihi Arşivi, Daireler Bölümü, Defter no. 57, p. 13, 6 Temmuz 1331/19 July 1915; Deniz Müzesi Komutanlığı Deniz Tarihi Arşivi, Mülgâ Bahriye Nezareti Bölümü, Tahrirat Kalemî, Defter no. 727, p. 47, 7 Ağustos 1329/20 August 1913.

⁸⁸ "Donanma-yı Osmanî Muâvenet-i Milliye Cemiyeti'nin 5 Ağustos 1325 [18 Ağustos 1909] tarihinden 30 Haziran sene 1326 [18 July 1910] tarihine kadar olan Ahvâl-i Maliyesini Mübeyyin Rapordur", *Donanma*, no. 6 (August 1326/1910), p. 492.

nationalist perspective in general and its naval armament policies in particular. While a considerable level of voluntary participation in the activities of the League was evident, the line between voluntarism and compulsion was sometimes blurred, as in many provincial areas administrative authorities expected their employees to join Navy League branches. The overwhelming majority of the members were educated, middle-class and mostly urban people. Their composition reflected the combination of voluntary and semi-official character of the association, which involved people from both civilian and governmental circles.⁸⁹ Besides the membership of local governmental employees, who were almost “officially” supposed to engage in the process, local branches also usually included notable people of the locality, such as merchants and other important figures. It is also noteworthy that in most of the branches there was at least one non-Muslim member, usually a merchant or professional. This suggests that provincial branches were conceived as a kind of micro-cosmos of the middle-class elements of the region to which they belonged.⁹⁰ It is important to note that the local membership structure of the Navy League, which combined governmental authority with local power networks, served to mediate between the center’s (namely pro-CUP) policies and local expectations. Local members also acted to propagate pro-CUP goals at the local level.

⁸⁹ For example, of the twenty-five members of the executive committee in 1910, six were state officials, three were army officers, one was parliamentary deputy; among the remaining were four physicians, seven merchants, one engineer, one lawyer, one university teacher and one journalist. See “Donanma-yı Osmanî Muâvenet-i Milliye Cemiyeti Merkez-i Umumisi Heyet-i İdare Azalarının Esamisi”, *Donanma*, no. 6 (August 1326/1910), p. 486.

⁹⁰ But this “imperial” aspect of the membership composition gradually disappeared and it assumed a more Muslim and nationalist identity as the Ottoman Empire went through a series of catastrophic wars; this situation became more noticeable in the aggressively nationalist environment towards and during the First World War. For example, while one of the four founding members was an Ottoman Greek, there was no non-Muslim member in the executive committee that was elected on 24 January 1914. See Beşikçi, “The Ottoman Navy League”, pp. 123, 135; Selahattin Özçelik, “Aydın Vilayeti Donanma Cemiyeti”, *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, vol. VI (1991), pp. 120-121.

A unique aspect of the Ottoman Navy League was that a comprehensive militaristic-patriotic propaganda program accompanied its major campaign of collecting donations for the navy. The journal of the League, *Donanma* (The Navy), not only played an important role in raising awareness among the Ottoman public for the need to have a powerful navy, but it also functioned as some sort of a “forum” for the greater patriotic cause of coping with the threat of the disintegration of the empire. Besides giving extensive coverage to propaganda that recurrently invited people to show their patriotism by donating to the Navy League, articles on various topics ranging from the naval armament race to Ottoman history, international relations, and literature were published. Written by quite a large number of writers, professional and amateur alike, the articles shared a nationalistic tendency and alarm towards the threat of the disintegration of the empire.⁹¹

This prolific propaganda helped to form a public opinion that was highly sensitive to the need to increase the naval power of its country in a social-Darwinian struggle to survive.⁹² The public increasingly associated its own wellbeing with the strength of the navy. This process produced a highly politicized popular sentiment in Muslim and Turkish elements of Ottoman society on the eve of the Great War—a sentiment that would potentially be mobilized for militaristic efforts. For example, the severe reaction among some segments of Ottoman society in the wake of British confiscation of the two Ottoman battleships on 2 August 1914 presented an

⁹¹ *Donanma* began to be published as a monthly journal in March 1910 and remained so until its forty-eighth issue in February 1914. The journal’s subtitle reads “illustrated, moral, literary, historical, scientific journal.” It was highly popular; its first and second issues, each of which was published in the amount of ten thousand copies, were sold quickly and extra five thousand copies for each of these issues were published. It became weekly as of 29 June 1914 and served as an influential propaganda journal during the First World War years. Its last issue, numbered one hundred and ninety one, appeared on 1 March 1919.

⁹² Social Darwinian ideas were popular among nationalist circles of the Young Turks. On this subject, see Atila Doğan, *Osmanlı Aydınları ve Sosyal Darwinizm* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2006).

opportunity for such popular mobilization. This event not only helped the CUP garner a significant amount of public support for signing a treaty of alliance with Germany and declaring general mobilization on 2 August 1914, but it also exerted an accelerating effect on the Ottoman decision to enter the First World War.

In the armament race at the beginning of the twentieth century, a battleship was not an ordinary weapon; it was regarded as a “savior.” The navy, the ultimate symbol of technological superiority at that time, determined who would triumph in the age of mechanized warfare, so much so that the Dreadnought, a single British battleship launched on 10 February 1906, dramatically set the standard for battleship construction after this date; “all the major powers (and most of their smaller imitators) now hastened to pour massive resources into the construction of ‘dreadnoughts.’”⁹³ The Ottomans were no less enthusiastic in this respect than their European counterparts. After the humiliating defeats at the hands of the Italians and Greeks in 1911 and 1912 respectively, the Ottomans began to dream of having at least a few of the most developed battleships of the era. The strengthening of the Greek navy during these years and the way Greek people, including the Ottoman Greeks, supported the Greek navy was particularly stimulating for the Ottomans.⁹⁴ Therefore, the high point of the campaign of the Ottoman Navy League was its significant contribution to the ordering of two dreadnoughts, the *Sultan Osman* and the *Reşadiye*, from Britain. The order for the battleships was contracted on 4 April

⁹³ Williamson A. Murray, “Towards World War, 1870-1914”, in Geoffrey Parker (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 258; Mehmet Beşikçi, “İktidarın Çelik Sembolleri: I. Dünya Savaşı’nda Donanma Sembolizmi ve Milliyetçi Propaganda”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 127 (July 2004), pp. 92-95.

⁹⁴ The Greek case of popular support for the navy, which culminated in the purchase of the *Averof* battleship, not only provided an example for the Ottomans to imitate and compete against, but also increased hostile sentiments among the Turkish nationalist circles in the Ottoman Empire towards the Ottoman Greeks, resulting in the call for boycott against Greek merchants in 1913 and 1914. See. Zafer Toprak, “Osmanlı Donanması, Averof Zırhlısı ve Ulusal Kimlik”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 113 (May 2003), pp. 10-19.

1911 between the Ottoman Ministry of the Navy and the Armstrong-Vickers Company of England, according to which the *Sultan Osman* would be ready in July 1914, while the *Reşadiye* would be completed in early 1915.⁹⁵

The Ottoman public impatiently waited for the delivery of the *Sultan Osman* throughout July 1914 and asked for explanations for the exact date of its coming, as the British company recurrently delayed its delivery.⁹⁶ But the delivery would never be made. As the July Crisis resulted in an imminent entry of Britain into war (which actually occurred on 4 August 1914), the British government confiscated the two Ottoman battleships in its dockyards on 2 August 1914 without return of payment.⁹⁷ Since Britain had not yet entered the war, the Ottoman government claimed that the British government's actions were illegal. However, the British announced in a memorandum dated 12 August 1914 that the act was not confiscation but only a preemptive measure as they had the right to detain the ships in its dockyards.⁹⁸

Whatever the legal aspect of the event was, it was a tremendous shock for the Ottomans. The Navy League stated that it “caused extreme grief and sadness for our association,”⁹⁹ and expressed that its psychological impact would make “all Muslims and Turks” act under the influence of “this shared feeling.”¹⁰⁰ The event had widespread repercussions in the Ottoman press as well. For example, Yunus

⁹⁵ Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 3/1, p. 71. For a recently published well-documented and balanced study on the story of these two battleships, see Serhat Güvenç, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na Giden Yolda Osmanlıların Drednot Düşleri* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009). Güvenç uses both Ottoman and British archival sources.

⁹⁶ See, for example, “Osman-ı Evvel ve Reşadiye”, *Donanma*, no. 50 (23 Haziran 1330/5 July 1914); “Osman-ı Evvel”, *Donanma*, no. 51 (20 Haziran 1330/19 July 1914).

⁹⁷ The payment for the *Sultan Osman* had been made entirely at this date. Güvenç, *Osmanlıların Drednot Düşleri*, p. 80.

⁹⁸ TNA:PRO FO 800/240, pp. 620-623.

⁹⁹ “Muhterem Millete”, *Donanma*, no. 55 (28 Temmuz 1339/10 August 1914), p. 98.

¹⁰⁰ “Yâd-ı Hazin”, *Donanma*, no. 57 (18 Ağustos 1330/31 August 1914), cover page.

Nadi, a leading CUP propagandist and famous columnist of the day, used the word “piracy” to describe the confiscation of the dreadnoughts.¹⁰¹ Ahmed Agayef [Ağaoğlu], a Turkish nationalist intellectual, expressed his condemnation of this act by stating that it exerted a heartrending impact on the Ottomans since they had regarded the battleships as significant factors that would help create a safer future.¹⁰² Another newspaper article described the event as an act of “injustice, unimaginable unfairness, and unforgettable harm.”¹⁰³

In addition to press reactions, there was also a significant expression of condemnation among the populace, especially from various people in the provinces, who expressed their grief and reprehension in telegrams sent to the British embassy in Istanbul.¹⁰⁴ Two such telegrams were actually sent via the pro-CUP newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, which along with other newspapers published them as a propaganda material.¹⁰⁵ The mediation *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, a pro-government newspaper suggests that governmental networks organized or facilitated sending telegrams to the British embassy. One of these two telegrams was sent from Rize, a sub-province of Trabzon, and was signed by seven local people. Containing statements both of anger and respect, the signatories implied that they spoke on behalf of a larger Islamic community in their locality.¹⁰⁶ The other telegram was sent from Atina (Pazar), a

¹⁰¹ *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 25 Temmuz 1330/7 August 1914.

¹⁰² Ahmed Agayef, “Müteessir Olmamak Kâbil midir?”, *Tercümân-ı Hakikat*, 26 Temmuz 1330/8 August 1914.

¹⁰³ “İngilizlerden Beklenilir mi idi?”, *İkdâm*, 27 Temmuz 1330/9 August 1914.

¹⁰⁴ Copies of these telegrams are available in the British National Archives. See, TNA:PRO FO 800/240, pp. 609-618. Also see, Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, “I. Dünya Savaşı Arefesinde İngiliz Hükûmetinin El Koyduğu Gemiler ve Türk Kamuoyu”, in *Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi Hâtıra Kitabı* (Istanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti Yayını, 1995), pp. 206-218.

¹⁰⁵ *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 8 Ağustos 1330/21 August 1914. See also, “Sultan Osman ve Reşadiye için İngiltere’nin Dersaadet Sefaretine Hitab”, *Tanin*, 12 Ağustos 1330/25 August 1914.

¹⁰⁶ “..We request that our battleships be delivered to us if you want to gain the friendship of Islam.” The telegram was signed by people by the names of Fahri, Hüseyin, Osman Zeki, Safvet, Hulûsi,

district of Rize. It was signed by the mayor Bahri, who made an explicit statement that he spoke on behalf of the fifty thousand strong Muslim population of the Atina district. Similar to the first telegram, he expressed reprehension and asked for the delivery of the battleships.

There were also various telegrams which were sent directly to the British embassy. Some of them were sent by individuals on their own behalf, such as Ahmed who was a merchant of dry goods, while others were sent by people speaking on behalf of an institution or a group of people, such as Galib from the Teacher's Training College (*Dârü'l-mu'allimîn*) or Müntakim who was the scribe of the Turkish Nail-Makers Society. The statements in these direct telegrams seem to be more direct and are often angrier. A letter sent by a woman named Behice, who described herself as "a mother of a soldier", is particularly interesting. She expressed her anger quite straightforwardly: "Your seizure of our battleships, which we purchased by working hard and making self-sacrifices really hurt us in this uneasy time...I hope God causes all your battleships to be crushed by the German navy, amen."¹⁰⁷

This event and the popular reactions that it caused exerted a significant effect on the public after the Ottoman state's declaration of general mobilization on 2 August 1914. As Feroz Ahmad says, the loss of the dreadnoughts was never forgotten by the Turkish public and it changed the course of events towards the First World War.¹⁰⁸ While the event certainly caused much sorrow among the public, the outcome was also something of a political gift to the CUP to be exploited as

Süleyman and Abdi. There is no clue about their professions or political connections. TNA:PRO FO 800/240, p. 617.

¹⁰⁷ TNA:PRO FO 800/240, p. 613.

¹⁰⁸ Feroz Ahmad, "İttihat ve Terakki'nin Dış Politikası (1908-1919)", in *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), p. 300.

propaganda.¹⁰⁹ Due to the reaction against the British in particular and the Entente powers in general, the alliance with Germany was easily legitimized to a great extent in the eyes of the public.¹¹⁰ The German battleship *Goeben*, together with its smaller partner *Breslau*, escaped from British battleships in the Mediterranean and took refuge in the Dardanelles on 10 August 1914. They eventually joined the Ottoman navy (with the Turkish names of *Yavuz* for *Goeben* and *Midilli* for *Breslau*) as part of the alliance deals between Germany and the Ottoman state and were welcomed enthusiastically by the Ottoman public.¹¹¹ At both the popular and official levels, they were regarded as a kind of compensation for the battleships confiscated by the British.¹¹² Their coming was announced as “glad news to the Ottomans” by the press.¹¹³ When they paraded in the presence of the Sultan down the Marmara Sea on 15 September 1914, hundreds of rowboats full of men and women came out to greet them. The journal *Donanma* gave extensive coverage to the event and published various photographs of the naval parade.¹¹⁴ The parade was also filmed by the Navy League, and it was announced that for those who had not been able to see the parade, the film would be shown in the Navy Theatre at Şehzadebaşı in Istanbul.¹¹⁵

The public mood that took shape after the confiscation of the battleships also served more general purposes regarding the mobilization order. It created a larger context of enthusiasm for revenge in which the mobilization order easily

¹⁰⁹ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Pocket Books, 2006), p. 105.

¹¹⁰ Yalman, *Turkey in the World War*, p. 69; Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın, *Siyasal Anılar* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1976), p. 215.

¹¹¹ On their escape and joining the Ottoman navy, see Stefanos Yerasimos, “Akdeniz’de On Gün”, in Stefanos Yerasimos (ed.), *İstanbul: 1914-1923*, trans. Cüneyt Akalın (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1997), pp. 41-61.

¹¹² Djemal [Cemal] Pasha, *Memories of a Turkish Statesman, 1913-1919* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1922), p. 120.

¹¹³ “Osmanlılara Müjde”, *İkdâm*, 29 Temmuz 1330/11 August 1914.

¹¹⁴ See *Donanma* 59 (8 Eylül 1330/16 September 1914).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, cover page.

resonated in the Ottoman public and the call to arms as of 2 August was widely propagated. The journal *Donanma*, for example, not only published writings which already embraced the idea of a great war as essential for the salvation of the empire, but the journal also served as some kind of a public wall on which propaganda posters for mobilization would be hung.¹¹⁶

Another voluntary and semi-official association that worked for patriotic mobilization in the post-Balkan defeat period was the National Defense League, which was established during the first Balkan War, on 1 February 1913.¹¹⁷ During the calamitous days of the war, which were characterized not only by news of defeat on the battlefield, but also by social disasters such as the influx of Muslim refugees into the empire and the poverty that accompanied them, the National Defense League was conceived as a public instrument that would work not only to provide contributions both to the troops on the battlefield and refugees coming into the empire, but also to raise popular support on the home front for the war effort.

While the National Defense League was similar to the Navy League in many ways (for example, its organizational structure with branches in provinces and membership profile), it was a more immediate product of war conditions and, therefore, had objectives addressing actual circumstances. Similar to an umbrella organization, it involved five sub-committees within itself, each of which was formed to deal with a major aim. Besides the executive committee which dealt with general administrative procedures, the donation collection (*iane*) committee worked to raise funds for the war effort or to support refugees, while the health committee tried provide medical support and acted as an auxiliary unit to the Ottoman Red

¹¹⁶ For some examples of such propaganda pictures published in the journal, see *Donanma*, 56 (4 Ağustos 1330/17 August 1914), pp. 124-125.

¹¹⁷ On the emergence, organization and activities of the National Defense League, see Nâzım H. Polat, *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1991).

Crescent Society (*Osmanlı Hilâl-i Ahmer Cemiyeti*). The volunteer recruitment committee was very important, as it was the first organized initiative which emerged in the public sphere to recruit men for the military. The effort of the National Defense League to gather volunteers for the armed forces also continued during the Great War (See Chapter 3). Finally, there was the committee for the enlightenment of public opinion (*tenvir-i efkâr*), which produced propaganda and agitation materials to mobilize popular sentiments to support the war effort. It included various important nationalistic literary figures of the day, such as Yusuf Akçura, Hüseyin Cahid and Ahmed Rasim.¹¹⁸

The semi-official character of the National Defense League was stronger and its organic ties with the CUP government were more visible. This was due both to the urgent needs that it had to address under war conditions and to the political climate of the period when it emerged. The year 1913 was a significant turning point in the political atmosphere of the post-1908 era. Politics increasingly became more authoritarian, as the CUP seized full control of the government through a coup in January 1913 and turned itself into a single-party state. After the Balkan defeat and loss of Albania, the Young Turk regime “began to view the ethnic Turks as the core group that should become the foundation of the state and assure its survival.”¹¹⁹ In fact, it was the CUP itself which formulated the idea to found a patriotic association that would work to gather support from all segments of society for the salvation of the empire. The CUP expressed this opinion in a declaration to the press on 31 January 1913. Underlining that “our fatherland is in danger” (*vatanımız tehlikede*), the declaration stated in a corporatist rhetoric that it was a duty (*vazife*) for all

¹¹⁸ Polat, *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, pp. 27-28.

¹¹⁹ Karpat, “Entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I”, p. 707.

Ottomans to forget every selfish feeling and to work together to save the fatherland from this common disaster.¹²⁰

The nationalist tendency of the association was also evident. In various places, such as in İzmir, the National Defense League worked in close collaboration with the Turkish Hearth Society (*Türk Ocağı*), a Turkist literary association established during the Balkan War and which actively worked to propagate Turkist ideas.¹²¹ However, having organic ties with the CUP did not mean that the National Defense League was a completely Unionist and Turkist unit from the beginning. Among the initial membership, there were various non-Muslim and non-Turkist figures. For example, the executive committee of the association included Diran Kelekyan, editor-in-chief of the daily *Sabah*, and Ohannes Vartkes (Serengülyan), a deputy of Erzurum in the Ottoman parliament.¹²² But this pluralistic structure was quite fragile, just like the plurality in the Ottoman political system of the period in general. As the political system became more authoritarian on the eve of the Great War and policies of nationalist exclusion more manifest during the war, that plurality almost entirely disappeared.¹²³

While the Ottoman state imposed heavy restrictions on the public after it declared general mobilization on 2 August 1914, the Navy and National leagues were hardly affected by these new measures. They were for all intents and purposes the

¹²⁰ “Beyanname”, *İkdam*, 18 Kânunısani 1328/31 January 1913.

¹²¹ Polat, *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, p. 6. On the Turkish Hearth Society, see Füsün Üstel, *İmparatorluktan Ulus-Develete Türk Milliyetçiliği: Türk Ocakları, 1912-1931* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1997).

¹²² Polat, *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, p. 28.

¹²³ This process is also represented by the fate of two Armenian figures mentioned above. In 1915, both Diran Kelekyan and Vartkes Serengülyan were arrested during the purge against Armenian political figures. Kelekyan was exiled from Istanbul to Çankırı and Vartkes Serengülyan was murdered, together with Krikor Zohrab (a deputy of Istanbul), on their way from Istanbul to the court martial in Diyarbakir by an armed band of the Special Organization (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*). See BOA, DH.ŞFR., 52/266, 23 Cemâziyelâhir 1333/8 May 1915; Rober Koptaş, “Meşrutiyet Döneminin Umud ve Umutsuzluk Sarkacında Ermeni Devrimci Partileri ve Krikor Zohrab”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 182 (February 2009), pp. 70-75.

sole dominant associations in the Ottoman public sphere on the eve of the Great War, and they practically faced no dissent throughout the war.¹²⁴ They not only served to throw other alternative forms of voluntary action out of the arena, but also acted in collaboration with the CUP government to regiment civil society.¹²⁵ The increasing authoritarianism of the CUP government after 1913 made these two associations the only available channels in the public sphere to absorb popular dynamics. But this absorption also involved the re-shaping of public opinion according to their political outlook.

According to some contemporary observers, the regimentation of Ottoman civil society not only by heavy governmental restrictions on any form of freedom, but also through the dominance of the pro-CUP semi-official voluntary associations in the public sphere accounted for the lack of anti-war opinions in Ottoman society. They were practically no public channel to express anti-war sentiments. In fact, as journalist Ahmed Emin Yalman has emphasized, there were actually many people who did not like the idea of entering another major war after the disaster of the Balkan War. But while they were opposed to the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war, “they were disorganized and silent: All the available organized channels in the country were in the hands of a minority which was composed of pro-war

¹²⁴ Polat, *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, p. 135.

¹²⁵ This closeness to the government and having its patronage sometimes provided these associations with a large power, which was practically official in practice, to carry out “not-quite-voluntary” donations collection methods, such as withholding certain amount of money from monthly salaries of the state employees. See, for example, ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1523, Dosya 44, Fihrist 1-1; DMA, Mülgâ Bahriye Nezareti Bölümü, Tahrirat Kalemi, Defter No. 687, pp. 22-29, 1329/1913; DMA, Mülgâ Bahriye Nezareti Bölümü, Tahrirat Kalemi, Defter No. 690, pp. 100-101, 1329/1913. Donation collection sometimes also became more directly “forced” during the war and caused inconvenience. For example, upon the complaints about cases of forced donation collection (*cebren iane toplama*) in some provinces, the Interior Ministry needed to warn provincial administrators to take necessary measures against such forced donation activities and to ensure that donations be collected only according the existing regulations. See, for example, BOA, DH.ŞFR., 39/174, 10 Cemâziyelevvel 1332/6 April 1914; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 46/19, 25 Şevval 1332/16 September 1914; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 67/253, 13 Zilkâde 1334/11 September 1916.

extremists.”¹²⁶ While pro-war voluntary associations served as social forums where people could utter their opinion as long as they supported the mobilization effort, they also acted as mechanisms to muffle the voices of people who would raise any kind of objection to the existing policies.

Many people in Ottoman society were disorganized and silent indeed. One of the main reasons for this silence, of course, was due to the existence of very strict censorship. With the declaration of mobilization came even heavier censorship which practically put every kind of communication under official, or more specifically, military control. And these measures remained in effect throughout the war. Postal and press censorship did not simply grow out of security concerns; they were conceived as a major tool of social control on both the home front and the battlefield. Censorship committees were established in Istanbul and the provinces, and they were to be composed primarily of military officers.¹²⁷ Every form of written correspondence sent through the post was subject to censorship; thus, all letters were to be sent in open envelopes.¹²⁸ This also applied to soldiers’ incoming and outgoing letters, which were censored by military authorities at headquarters.¹²⁹ No new newspapers and journals were allowed to emerge, and the existing ones were subject to daily censorship. In the case of disobedience, severe punishments applied and newspapers and journals could be permanently shut down.¹³⁰

The regimentation of society was augmented further by the establishment of martial law administration (*idare-i örfiye*) on the same day as the declaration of

¹²⁶ Ahmed Emin Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim*, vol. 1: 1888-1918 (Istanbul: Rey Yayınları, 1970), p. 219.

¹²⁷ *Sansür Talimatnamesi* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Askeriye, 1330/1914), pp. 2-3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10; BOA, DH.EUM.5.Şb., 3/4, 16 Zilhicce 1332/5 November 1914; “Mektuplar Açık Yollanacak”, *Tanin*, 23 Teşrinievvel 1330/5 November 1914.

¹²⁹ *Sansür Talimatnamesi*, p. 7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

mobilization.¹³¹ This application also involved the creation of the martial law courts (*divan-ı harb-i örfî*) everywhere in the empire, which replaced those administered by civilian officials in peacetime. The martial law administration and martial law courts were all under the authority of the War Ministry, and thus Enver Pasha.¹³² Under the martial law administration, the highest military authority of a provincial unit also became the ultimate authority of local administration.¹³³ This procedure not only increased the military authority's power to mobilize society for war, but also provided it with an almost unlimited right to control social matters. However, this was true at the theoretical level; in practice, its effectiveness depended on the ability of the same authority to penetrate every level of society. Nonetheless, the military had tremendous power because no formal popular initiative could raise its voice without the approval of the martial law administration. The powers of the martial law administrators included investigating the residences of any suspicious people day or night, confiscating arms and munitions owned by civilians, closing down newspapers which published "mind confusing" news (*zihinleri karıştıracı yayın*), and banning every kind of association (*her türlü cemiyetleri men etme*).¹³⁴ And, as can be expected, the martial law courts were extremely strict regarding problems directly related to the mobilization, such as draft-evading, desertions and disobedience to the war tax requirements.¹³⁵

¹³¹ BOA, DH.EUM.EMN., 90/10, 11 Ramazan 1332/3 August 1914; "Memâlik-i Osmaniyyede İdare-i Örfiye", *İkdâm*, 21 Temmuz 1330/3 August 1914.

¹³² Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 2, p. 763.

¹³³ In this chain of hierarchy, army corps commanders were the highest authority in their regions. Osman Köksal, *Tarihsel Süreci İçerisinde Bir Özel Yargı Organı Olarak Divan-ı Harb-i Örfiler*, (1877-1922) (Ph.d. dissertation, Ankara University, 1996), p. 34.

¹³⁴ Köksal, "Divan-ı Harb-i Örfiler", p. 33.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Attempts at militarist disciplining of society also involved various decisions that would affect civilians in their daily lives, albeit in a symbolic way. For example, civilians were obliged to pay attention and salute like a soldier when they saw a military unit parading in their locality with a banner. This decision was sent by the Interior Ministry in a circular to provincial units.¹³⁶

The Post-Balkan Defeat Trauma and the Discourse of Regeneration

It can be said that the Balkan War of 1912-13¹³⁷ constituted the first total war experience for the Ottomans in many respects. Some historians have described the Balkan War as the “rehearsal”¹³⁸ of or “prelude”¹³⁹ to the Great War. It was during this war that the Ottomans began to realize that the home front had become an integral part of modern warfare. The Balkan experience showed that a key aspect to sustaining the war effort involved getting continuous material and mental support from society for the military. Moreover, the war effort now required systematic propaganda in the public sphere to mobilize such support. Although the Ottomans were never successful at coping with hardships caused by the changing nature of

¹³⁶ BOA, DH.HMŞ., 22/10, 15 Rebiülâhir 1333/2 March 1914; BOA, DH.EUM.MTK., 80/8, 15 Rebiülâhir 1333/2 March 1915.

¹³⁷ The Balkan War was actually a two-phase war, and, therefore, sometimes is also mentioned in plural form as the Balkan Wars. The first phase started on 8 October 1912, in which the Ottoman state fought against a Balkan coalition consisting of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro. The main battles took place in the first phase and the Ottoman forces faced a heavy defeat; the first phase ended on 10 June 1913 by the signing of the London Treaty. The second, and minor, phase involved a conflict between Bulgaria and other Balkan states, which presented the Ottomans with an opportunity to regain Edirne in July 1913. On the general history of the Balkan War, see Aram Andonyan, *Balkan Savaşı*, trans. Zaven Biberyan, second edition (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 1999); *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, Balkan Harbi (1912-1913)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979); Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912-1913* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003); Leon Troçki [Trotsky], *Balkan Savaşları*, trans. Tansel Güney, (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1995).

¹³⁸ Zafer Toprak, “Cihan Harbi’nin Provası Balkan Harbi”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 104 (August 2002), pp. 44-51.

¹³⁹ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000).

warfare during the Balkan experience, they tried to mobilize society by resorting to certain novel methods. Ottoman society met with the phenomenon of public demonstration during the Balkan War. Demonstrations were held in Istanbul and provincial centers to mobilize popular support for the Ottoman war effort.¹⁴⁰ As has been mentioned above, semi-official associations such as the National Defense League not only carried out various popular mobilization activities in the public sphere, but also recruited volunteers for the armed forces on the battlefield.

But the most important effect of the Balkan experience on Ottoman society was its tragic consequences. Although Edirne was regained in the second phase of the war and this event was presented as if it was an important victory won by the CUP-led army,¹⁴¹ the Balkan War actually ended in a humiliating defeat for the Ottomans. It was a real trauma in various ways. Understanding this trauma is very important in order to understand the public mood in Ottoman society on the eve of the Great War. First of all, this defeat and the consequent loss of territories in the Balkan Peninsula,¹⁴² including the second most important city in the empire, Salonica, made the threat of dissolution deeply felt by the Ottomans. The idea that “The fatherland is in danger” became a widespread thought among the elite and non-elite alike. This point created a base line for any mobilization propaganda campaign on the eve of the Great War. Secondly, the military failure during the Balkan War, particularly the inability of the Ottoman military to carry out a successful manpower

¹⁴⁰ Zeki Arıkan, “Balkan Savaşı ve Kamuyoyu”, in *Dördüncü Askeri Tarih Semineri, Bildiriler* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1989), pp. 168-187; Andonyan, *Balkan Savaşı*, pp. 199-200.

¹⁴¹ “The Balkan Wars served to solidify the CUP’s hold on the government since it appeared to the public that the CUP was responsible for abrogating the London Treaty and for retaking Adrianople (Edirne) and Thrace. The leadership that would take the Ottoman Empire into the First World War was now established, with Sait Halim as grand vizier, Talat Pasha as the minister of the interior, Enver Pasha as the minister of war, and Cemal Pasha as the minister of marine.” Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 4.

¹⁴² After the Balkan War, the Ottoman state had lost 83 percent of its territories in Europe. This loss amounted to 32.7 percent of the total territories of the Ottoman Empire, while the loss of population was 20 percent of the total population. Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 19.

mobilization, urged the Ottomans to undertake a comprehensive reorganization (primarily in the system of conscription) after the defeat (See Chapter 3). This reorganization would increase the resilience of the Ottoman military effort during the Great War in terms of its manpower recruitment. Thirdly, the loss of territories in the Balkans created another deep human tragedy, when thousands of Muslim residents of these territories were forced by the invaders to migrate into the remaining part of the empire, mainly to Anatolia. The influx of these immigrants and refugees, who were called *muhacirs*, not only caused major changes in the demographic composition of Anatolia, but also led to severe poverty which accompanied these unfortunate people from their migration to resettlement.¹⁴³ Their misery on the roads was broadcast to a broader audience by photographs published in the press and caused sadness and anger among the Ottoman public.¹⁴⁴ This human tragedy created a deep feeling of injustice on the part of the Muslim Ottoman public, a feeling that easily resonated with the rising nationalism of the period. The feeling of injustice was easily converted into the sentiment of revenge in the nationalist discourse.

During the period of “armed neutrality” from August to November 1914, the post-Balkan trauma of defeat in the Ottoman public sphere was mobilized and elevated to a higher level that could be channeled into enthusiasm for the imminent war. Although the contemporary press, which was to a great extent aligned with the war party under severe censorship laws, always implied that popular enthusiasm emerged in a spontaneous way, this process of popular mobilization had an organized character. Semi-official patriotic associations such as the Navy League and the

¹⁴³ The waves of *muhacirs* from the Balkan territories actually continued through 1920's. Between 1912 and 1920, a total of 413,922 *muhacirs* were recorded. Justin MacCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995), p. 161.

¹⁴⁴ For a description of such a poverty scene of *muhacir* families at the Sirkeci Train Station in Istanbul, see Andonyan, *Balkan Savaşı*, p. 467. For another contemporary observation by a French journalist, see Stephane Lauzanne, *Balkan Acıları: Hastanın Başucunda Kırk Gün*, trans. Murat Çulcu (Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınları, 1990), pp. 62-63.

National Defense League were the leading actors of this organized mobilization effort. Public demonstrations that were held during this period reflected this organized attempt to channel popular reactions into war enthusiasm. Public meetings that took place on the occasion of the abrogation of the capitulations present a perfect example in this respect.

Committed to creating a Muslim-Turkish bourgeois class within the framework of “national economy” policies, the CUP government had always been against the economic and legal privileges, known as the capitulations, which had been granted to foreign merchants within the empire. But existing binding legal agreements and the pressure of the Great Powers had always inhibited such an action. The outbreak of the war in Europe provided an opportune situation for a move against the capitulations without the fear of intervention from the Powers, and the CUP government abrogated the capitulations on 9 September 1914.¹⁴⁵ In addition to extensive press coverage, local branches of semi-official associations also helped publicize the abolition of capitulations. For example, the Navy League circulated leaflets declaring the event as good news to the people.¹⁴⁶ When the news became publicized, it created an atmosphere of excitement among the Muslim and Turkish population, and was received with a particular enthusiasm by Muslim-Turkish trade corporations (*esnaf cemiyetleri*)¹⁴⁷ of various kinds and scales, which were favored

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed analysis of the process of the abrogation of the capitulations, see Mehmet Emin Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar* (Istanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 3: *İttihat ve Terakki: Bir Çağın, Bir Kuşağın, Bir Partinin Tarihi*, enlarged edition (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), p. 346. An interesting and ironic point in this respect was that the initial reaction of Germany, the main ally of the Ottoman Empire in the war, was no different than the other European powers and German ambassador in Istanbul, Wangenheim severely condemned the decision to abolish the capitulations. See Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar*, pp. 84-85. However, this reaction did not receive much coverage in the press.

¹⁴⁷ After the regulations for the trade corporations came into effect on 25 January 1910, totally fifty one different trade corporations were established in Istanbul through the First World War. For a list of these corporations, see Zafer Toprak, *İttihat - Terakki ve Devletçilik* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1995), document no. 11, pp. 186-187.

most by the national economy policies of the CUP government. Muslim-Turkish trade corporations, which had organic ties with the CUP government, constituted a major support group for the militaristic policies of the CUP government and always took part in public demonstrations held on the eve of the war either as organizers or spontaneous participants.

On the same day of the abrogation, the news immediately caused sporadic festive demonstrations in various suburbs of the capital Istanbul. Many shops and houses were decorated with flags and banners. Moreover, telegrams were sent from the provinces congratulating the government on its decision.¹⁴⁸

But larger and more organized demonstrations took place the next day, on 10 September 1914, both in Istanbul and provincial centers. These were organized festivities held to absorb popular enthusiasm into a political demonstration that would serve both to consolidate the regime and to make the public think that the war situation actually provided an opportunity for the survival and reinvigoration of the Ottomans.¹⁴⁹ The demonstration that was held at the Sultanahmed Square in Istanbul included the participation of thousands of people and was particularly spectacular.¹⁵⁰ From contemporary press accounts, it is clear that the organizing initiative involved CUP authorities, the Navy League and the National Defense League; Muslim-Turkish trade corporations also largely supported the organization. The associations

¹⁴⁸ Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar*, p. 77; Ahmad, "Ottoman Armed Neutrality", p. 127.

¹⁴⁹ This aspect was actually common to the other belligerent countries as well. "The central paradox of the Great War is that from the beginning, and probably even most strongly during the bleak periods when the belligerents were discouraged, when determination sagged –as it did everywhere after the two big battles of Verdun and the Somme of 1916- each side believed they were waging war because it would bring a new and radiant world in the future, a purified world rid of its central flaw: war. This belief predated the popularisation of President Woodrow Wilson's statement that it was a 'war to end all wars'." Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *1914-1918: Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (London: Profile Books, 2002), p. 159.

¹⁵⁰ While there is a tone of exaggeration about the size of the crowd, some newspapers mentioned that as many as 80,000 people participated in the demonstration. See, for example, "Miting Alanına Muvasalat", *İkdâm*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914.

not only acted as the main organizers of the demonstration and participated in it with their many associates, but they also provided musical bands that enthused participants with patriotic songs.¹⁵¹

Similar public demonstrations were also held in provincial centers, mostly by the initiative of provincial mayors, pro-CUP authorities and semi-official associations.¹⁵² Provincial demonstrations were particularly spectacular at least in some places, and they caught the attention of foreign observers. For example, the British embassy reported from Edirne on 11 September 1914 that demonstrations and celebrations took place in the city both in the day and at night. While it was evident that “prominent local members of the Union and Progress party” orchestrated them, the report still acknowledged that “there is a genuine feeling of enthusiasm here at the action of the Government, and it is recognized that a great effort is being made to recover for Turkey complete independence.”¹⁵³ On the other hand, another British embassy report, which described the situation in İzmir, stated that there was not much exaggerated demonstration on the part of the public.¹⁵⁴ But whatever the actual mood regarding the public reaction to the abolition of the capitulations, the Ottoman press invariably reported provincial meetings in an exaggerated way. For example, the demonstration that was held in the town center of Kütahya, a sub-province of Hüdavendigâr, was described as a huge event that was as large as the one that took place in Istanbul; it was reported that “fifty thousand Ottomans” participated in it.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ It seems that music was always a part of such patriotic demonstrations of the period and major associations such as the Navy League had permanent bands. “Miting Alanına Muvasalat”, *İkdâm*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914; Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁵² “Taşrada Tezahürat”, *İkdâm*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914; “Her Tarafta İstiklâl-i Millî Şenlikleri”, Tanin, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914.

¹⁵³ TNA:PRO FO 195-2460, Turkey-1914 on the Eve of the War, Adrianople, 11 September 1914.

¹⁵⁴ TNA:PRO FO 195-2460, Turkey-1914 on the Eve of the War, Smyrna, 11 September 1914.

¹⁵⁵ “Taşrada Tezahürat”, *İkdâm*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914. The total population of the entire sub-province of Kütahya was 145,443 in 1914. Given communications and transportation

The discourse that surrounded the abrogation of the capitulations and subsequent demonstrations described the event as the moment of “independence” (*istiklâl*).¹⁵⁶ As Hüseyin Cahid, a pro-CUP journalist, stated in his speech during the demonstration at Sultan Ahmed, “from now on the Ottomans became really sovereign and gained their independence.”¹⁵⁷ If the reaction to the confiscation of the Ottoman battleships by the British in early August were characterized by a sense of violation and anger, popular sentiments after the abrogation of the capitulations involved a certain amount of pride and hope. Describing the moment as the affirmation of the Ottomans’ will to survive, Hüseyin Cahid also proposed that the date of the abolition of the capitulations be regarded as a national festival (*‘id-i millî*) and be included among the official holidays of the empire.¹⁵⁸ It is understood from the reports in the newspapers that this proposal was already on the agenda of the CUP and, therefore, it was quickly accepted.¹⁵⁹ 9 September became a national holiday and was given the same status as 23 July, the day the constitution was restored in 1908.¹⁶⁰ The newspaper *Tanin* described the demonstrations as “national independence festivities.”¹⁶¹

facilities of the time, it is obviously not reasonable that almost one-third of the entire local population would join such a public meeting held in the town centre. For the population statistics, see Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 186-187.

¹⁵⁶ “İstiklâl Günü”, *Tanin*, 28 Ağustos 1330/10 September 1914.

¹⁵⁷ “Hüseyin Cahid’in İrad Ettiği Nutuk”, *İkdâm*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914.

¹⁵⁸ Hüseyin Cahid’in İrad Ettiği Nutuk”, *İkdâm*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914.

¹⁵⁹ “Kapitülasyonlara Dair”, *İkdâm*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914.

¹⁶⁰ Ahmad, “War and Society under the Young Turks, 1908-18”, p. 276.

¹⁶¹ “Her Tarafta İstiklâl-i Millî Şenlikleri”, *Tanin*, 30 Ağustos 1330/12 September 1914. The commemoration of national festivals, primarily the July 23 festival (*10 Temmuz ‘Id-i Millîsi*), had acquired special importance after the 1908 Revolution. For a study that approaches the issue of festival commemoration during the Second Constitutional Period as a new mechanism in the public sphere by which a connection could be forged between the daily concerns of social groups and the affairs of state authority, see Nadide Özge Serin, *Festivals of the ‘July 10’ in the Young Turk Era* (master’s thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2000). The Navy League and the National Defense League were key actors in organizing these festivals, and this role became even more apparent during the war years.

During the next few days, the Ottoman press invariably supported the action “with a unanimity never achieved either before or after” and described the event in assertive phrases such as “the beginning of a new life”, “the opening of a new chapter” and “the turning of a new page”; many people sincerely believed that Ottoman society, particularly its Muslim-Turkish elements, would now really advance and develop.¹⁶²

When the Ottomans finally entered the war on 29 October 1914 after they attacked the Russian ports on the Black Sea, the German general and reformer of the Ottoman army, Colmar von der Goltz sent a congratulatory telegram to Enver Pasha, in which he said, “Old Turkey now has the opportunity...in one fell swoop, to lift itself to the heights of its former glory. May she not miss this opportunity.”¹⁶³ The CUP government and pro-war Young Turks really did not want to miss this opportunity, since the war “held out the promise of regaining, if not ‘former glory’, as Goltz had put it, then at least the empire’s security and independence.”¹⁶⁴ For the CUP, the Great War was a “war of independence.”¹⁶⁵ It was from this elite perspective that popular sentiments were mobilized in an organized way. It was from this perspective that people were called to arms.

It can be argued that, with their active role in these events, these associations undertook the responsibility for converting local populations to the national cause.

¹⁶² Ahmad, “Ottoman Armed Neutrality”, p. 128-129; Shaw, *Ottoman Empire in World War I, vol. 1*, pp. 270-271.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Toprak, *İttihat-Terakki ve Devletçilik*, p. 2.

Demonstrations for the Declaration of Holy War

Public demonstration was a widely used tool to mobilize popular sentiments on the eve of the Great War. After the Ottoman state officially entered the war in the beginning of November¹⁶⁶ and proclaimed a holy war (*cihad*) on 11 November, further public demonstrations were held both in Istanbul and the provinces on the same and following few days. Compared to demonstrations on the occasion of the abolition of the capitulations, these were more empire-wide and more organized, as well as more official. The Ottoman government tried to combine the domestic mobilization attempt with a general Islamic call to war, which was issued to all Muslims worldwide by using a religious discourse presented within a pragmatic rhetoric of the Ottoman state.

Complying with historical religious procedures, the head of the Muslim ulema and highest religious authority in the empire, *Şeyhülislam* Ürgüplü Hayri Efendi declared holy war by issuing a religious decree (*fetva-yı şerife*). In fact, the Ottoman proclamation of holy war was a process that involved issuing three different sets of documents with specific purposes. The first one was the original religious decree itself aiming to address all the Muslims in the world, which actually consisted of five sub-decrees (in the format of questions and answers) in a single document.¹⁶⁷ Secondly, an imperial declaration, titled “To My Army and Navy”, was issued on 11

¹⁶⁶ The Ottoman state virtually started war against Russia when the Ottoman fleet attacked Russia’s Black Sea ports at the end of October 1914; the Entente powers all declared war against the Ottoman Empire within a week after this attack, Russia on 2 November, Britain and France on 5 November 1914.

¹⁶⁷ For the text of the decree, see the official journal of the office of the *şeyhülislam*, *Ceride-i İlmiye*, vol. 1, no. 7 (Muharrem 1333/November 1914), p. 433. It was also published in all major newspapers, such as *Tanin* and *İkdâm* on 15 November 1914, and also in various journals, including the journal of the Ottoman Navy League: see, *Donanma*, no. 69 (10 Kasım 1330/22 November 1914), cover page. For the text transcribed into modern Turkish, see Metin Hülâgü, Hülâgü, *Pan-İslamizm: Osmanlının Son Umudu* (Istanbul: Yitik Hazine Yayınları, 2006), pp. 33-34. For its English translation, see Appendix A.

November 1914, in which Sultan Mehmed Reşad V addressed the Ottoman troops directly and explained that it was their duty as Muslims to defend not only the country, but also the religion of Islam in the world.¹⁶⁸ Thirdly, another declaration was prepared by the High Religious Council (*Meclis-i Âli-i İlmî*) at the office of the *şeyhülislam*, which was issued by the signatures of the most prominent religious dignitaries, as well as Sultan Mehmed Reşad V in his capacity of the caliph of all Muslims. This last declaration was directed at all Muslims, and explained the contents of the fetva in clearer and detailed language, thus trying to justify further why all Muslims should join the war against the Entente powers.¹⁶⁹ All these documents were published in Arabic, Persian, Tatar, Urdu, as well as in Ottoman Turkish.

The first ceremony for the proclamation of holy war was a purely official one, which took place on 11 November with the participation of the sultan, the *şeyhülislam*, most government ministers and a delegation from the Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Mebusan*). The group gathered outside the chamber of the holy relics in the ancient Topkapı Palace, where the religious decree was read publicly. The sultan gave a short speech praising the Ottoman troops and expressing his confidence in their ultimate victory, which was followed by a praying of the whole group for blessings of God on the Ottoman war effort.¹⁷⁰

The proclamation of holy war to the general public was made through public demonstrations held on 14 November 1914. The one that took place in Istanbul was

¹⁶⁸ For the original text of the imperial declaration, see *Ceride-i İlmîye*, vol. 1, no. 7 (Muharrem 1333/November 1914), p. 434; also see *İkdâm*, 2 Teşrinisani 1330/15 November 1914. For the text in modern Turkish, see Hülâgü, *Pan-İslamizm*, pp. 35-36. For the text in English, see Appendix B.

¹⁶⁹ For the original text of the declaration, see *Ceride-i İlmîye*, vol. 1, no. 7 (Muharrem 1333/November 1914), p. 454. For the text in modern Turkish, see Hülâgü, *Pan-İslamizm*, pp. 37-42. Its English translation can be found in Yalman, *Turkey in the World War*, pp. 174-177.

¹⁷⁰ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 2, pp. 750-751.

held at the Fatih mosque. The press gave extensive coverage to the demonstration and described the event as a “magnificent ceremony.”¹⁷¹ The narratives of the demonstration implied that the meeting took place spontaneously, as if people all around the city were moved by their inner enthusiasm to participate in it. They also implied that it was like a festival, but one that belonged only to the Muslims.

Men, women, youth and elderly...people spilled out into the streets yesterday morning. All Muslim households, Muslim shops and national institutions were decorated with our glorious flag... Under the spiritual influence of the imperial decree, every Muslim was running towards Fatih. Avenues and streets had become like fountains of enthusiasm by noon. The intensity of the crowd increased as one got nearer to Fatih.¹⁷²

But a closer look at the descriptions of the event reveals that such spontaneity was actually a fiction. Spontaneity was certainly not entirely absent, but the demonstration was actually an organized event that was planned beforehand in detail by a pro-war party initiative. There was an organizing committee that undertook this process from its beginning to the end. It is no coincidence that the organizing committee of the demonstration reflected the very coalition that had taken shape on the eve of the war between the official authorities and certain civil society associations. The committee consisted of four people: Kemal Bey, a CUP delegate from Istanbul (also known as Kara Kemal, who later headed the Ministry of Supplies¹⁷³); İsmet Bey, president of the National Defense League; Yağcızade Şefik Bey, president of the Navy League; and Mustafa Şükrü Bey, the president of the

¹⁷¹ “Dünkü İhtifal-i Muhteşem”, *İkdâm*, 2 Teşrinisani 1330/15 November 1914.

¹⁷² “Dünkü İhtifal-i Muhteşem”, *İkdâm*, 2 Teşrinisani 1330/15 November 1914.

¹⁷³ Kara Kemal was an important figure in the CUP during the war. He was close to Talat Pasha and played a leading role in the CUP’s connection with civilian circles in society, especially with trade corporations. See “İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun Birinci Dünya Savaşı’ndaki Ekonomik Düzenlemeleri içinde İaşe Nezareti ve Kara Kemal Bey’in Yeri”, in İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Cumhuriyetin Harcı*, vol. 2: *Köktenci Modernitenin Ekonomik Politikasının Gelişimi* (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004), pp. 1-44.

Muslim Merchants' Association (*Müslüman Tüccar Cemiyeti*).¹⁷⁴ The organizing committee was almost a perfect combination of the pro-war political authority with its major allies in the realms of public sphere and economy.

A program was prepared by the organizing committee a day before the demonstration, and it was published in the major newspapers with an announcement inviting the public to join the meeting.¹⁷⁵ The program was in the form of a list describing not only the venue and timing of the meeting, but also its contents. The program also entailed a certain course of action that would lead the crowd in a politically desired way. For example, it described that after the reading of the holy war decrees by *Fetva Emini* (head of the fatwa office under the *şeyhülislam*) Ali Haydar Efendi to the public at the square of the Fatih mosque and the speeches following it, the crowd would march to the Porte, where a delegation representing all participants would express to the grand vizier that “the nation will always be in agreement with the government and be ready to offer sacrifice whenever needed.” Then, the crowd would stop by the chamber of the holy relics in the Topkapı Palace where they would show respect to the sultan. The sultan would be there at that moment visiting the holy mantle (*hırka-yı şerif*) of the Prophet Muhammad. After this religious moment, the march would again turn to more worldly matters, with the crowd then headed to the embassies of Ottoman allies Germany and Austria-Hungary, where Doctor Nazım, a leading figure of the CUP and the Special

¹⁷⁴ “Muazzam ve Muhteşem Bir İctima”, *İkdâm*, 1Teşrinisani 1330/14 November 1914; “Tezahürat-ı Milliye”, *Tanin*, 1Teşrinisani 1330/14 November 1914. The newspaper *İkdâm* mentions a fifth person in the organizing committee, who was İzzet Bey, a delegate from the Association of All Trade Corporations (*Umum Esnaf Cemiyetleri*).

¹⁷⁵ “Muazzam ve Muhteşem Bir İctima”, *İkdâm*, 1Teşrinisani 1330/14 November 1914; “Tezahürat-ı Milliye”, *Tanin*, 1Teşrinisani 1330/14 November 1914.

Organization, would present his appreciation.¹⁷⁶ The demonstration would end at this point, but the crowd would splinter off into smaller groups which would continue to perform via small meetings of enthusiasm in different parts of the city (*icra-yı surûr ve şadımani eyleyecektir*).

While the press narrated the demonstration in the form of a spontaneous popular event, the imposed enthusiasm that characterized it did not escape the notice of some contemporary observers, including various official figures. For example, Kâzım Karabekir, a staff officer who later commented on the reasons for the Ottoman entry into the war in the form of memoirs mixed with his personal political analyses, stated that when he got out of the War Ministry in Bayezid to watch the public meeting taking place in Fatih and its environs, he could not sense any genuine enthusiasm “coming from the heart.” He complained that he found the entire event organized as a mere formality (*usulen tertiplenmiş*), which even lacked a reasonably large crowd.¹⁷⁷ A similar observation was also made by Liman von Sanders, who said that the organizers even distributed small amounts of money (a few piasters for each person) to available people such as porters (*hamallar*) to make them join the demonstration.¹⁷⁸

Estimates on the number of participants vary from one source to another, from 5,000 people¹⁷⁹ to 50,000 participants.¹⁸⁰ But in any case, narratives of the event imply that it was actually more modest compared to the demonstrations held

¹⁷⁶ There was an apparent irony here and no one noted (at least publicly) the contradiction of presenting thanks to Christian powers on the occasion of declaring a holy war. This point actually clearly illustrates how the concept of holy war had easily been absorbed by the logic of total war.

¹⁷⁷ Kâzım Karabekir, *Birinci Cihan Harbine Nasıl Girdik?*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Emre Yayınları, 1994), p. 395.

¹⁷⁸ Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, second edition (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins Co. for the United States Naval Institute, 1928), p. 35.

¹⁷⁹ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 2, p. 757.

¹⁸⁰ Ziya Şakir [Soko], *Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare Ettik?* (Istanbul: Anadolu Türk Kitap Deposu, 1944), pp. 99-101.

for the abolition of the capitulations. The crowd included various units of the armed forces, political leaders, Muslim religious leaders and religious students. But more importantly, it is evident that many of the participants consisted of members of various Muslim trade corporations that were favored by the economic policies of the CUP government. Besides the groups of people who joined the meeting under the banners of the Navy League and the National Defense League,¹⁸¹ which had a more general and diverse membership composition, the newspapers mention a long list of large and small trade corporations that joined the meeting with their members. These included groups of butchers, bakers, grocers, clothiers, tailors, bargemen (*mavnacı*), carters, porters, et cetera.¹⁸² The porters were a particularly prominent group in such occasions.¹⁸³ The stagnation of foreign trade led to large scale unemployment, especially in the port cities of Istanbul and İzmir, and thousands of porters were laid off to be absorbed into the army after 2 August. They also acted “as Unionist militants” in the demonstrations held during the period of armed neutrality.¹⁸⁴

This militancy produced various acts of nationalist violence as sequels to the demonstration. Such acts of violence were yet another example of organized spontaneity. For example, when the officially declared program of the demonstration was completed and participants were advised to wander through the city in small groups showing their enthusiasm, a group of people attacked and destroyed the windows of the Tokathyan Hotel located at Beyoğlu, which was owned by an

¹⁸¹ Ziya Şakir mentions the prominent role played by the Navy League and its president, Yağcızade Şefik, a merchant and also an Istanbul deputy. According to his account, Yağcızade Şefik led and guided the crowd throughout the demonstration. See Ziya Şakir, *Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare Ettik?*, p. 101.

¹⁸² “Dünkü İhtifal-i Muhteşem”, *İkdâm*, 2 Teşrinisani 1330/15 November 1914.

¹⁸³ The Porters’ Trade Corporation (*Hamal Esnaf Cemiyeti*) was one of the largest of the Muslim trade corporations in Istanbul. It was established in 1910 with 1,828 founding members. Toprak, *İttihat-Terakki ve Devletçilik*, p. 186.

¹⁸⁴ Ahmad, “Ottoman Armed Neutrality”, p. 114.

Armenian of Russian nationality.¹⁸⁵ A more organized act of violence, which occurred in the form of a small demonstration, targeted Yeşilköy/Aya Stefanos. Here the nationalist crowd completely destroyed the Russian church that had been built there in 1878 to commemorate the Russian victory in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878.¹⁸⁶ So, the war started on the home front too.

The declaration of holy war was also announced to the public through demonstrations in provincial centers across the empire. In fact, the provinces were officially required to organize public demonstrations such as the one in Istanbul. The Interior Ministry ordered all provincial administrations to have the holy war decrees read and explained to the public by highest religious authorities in “extraordinarily special celebrations” (*merâsim-i mahsusa-yı fevkalade ile*) to be held at the congregational mosque of each town and village. The circular also requested that all available means should be used to make local men join these meetings.¹⁸⁷

As would be expected, news of these provincial demonstrations was reported in the press with exaggerated enthusiasm and public support was described as completely spontaneous. The papers reported that in almost every meeting people had promised the authorities that they were ready to perform any material and bodily contribution to the mobilization and that they were ready to make any kind of material and spiritual sacrifice that was needed for the war effort.¹⁸⁸ Some meetings, such as the one held in Tekfurdağı (Tekirdağ), also included remarkable participation

¹⁸⁵ Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, p. 35; Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), p. 117. As is expected, such news did not appear in the Ottoman press because of the censorship.

¹⁸⁶ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 2, p. 758.

¹⁸⁷ BOA, DH.SYS., 123-12/35, 24 Rebîulâhir 1333/10 March 1915, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸ “Cihad-ı Ekber Yolunda”, *İkdâm*, 6 Teşrinisani 1330/ 19 November 1914; “Cihad-ı Ekber Yolunda”, *İkdâm*, 7 Teşrinisani 1330/20 November 1914; “Cihad-ı Ekber Yolunda”, *İkdâm*, 9 Teşrinisani 1330/22 November 1914; “Cihad-ı Ekber Yolunda”, *İkdâm*, 10 Teşrinisani 1330/23 November 1914; “Tezahürat-ı Vatanperverane”, *İkdâm*, 10 Teşrinisani 1330/22 November 1914.

by women who, it was reported, promised to contribute to the war effort by voluntarily serving in the Ottoman Red Crescent.¹⁸⁹

Local administrative authorities also reported on provincial demonstrations in telegrams to the Interior Ministry. Such reports, which usually consisted of a one-paragraph description of the event, included exaggerated statements of enthusiasm similar to those seen in the press. However, the official and imposed character of provincial demonstrations is more easily detected in these official documents; their content was remarkably similar and included the reading of the holy war decrees to the public at the main mosque of the locality, followed by collective prayers for the victory of the Ottoman army and navy. Then, delegations from the crowd expressed their material and spiritual readiness to sacrifice for the holy war effort. Lastly, participants usually also marched to the main local administrative building and pronounced their loyalty to governmental authorities. Donations were also collected in some places for the war effort.¹⁹⁰

Local administrative and military personnel were invariably expected to join the meetings, along with local notables and religious authorities. As part of the official local protocol, religious leaders of local non-Muslim communities also took part in these meetings, at least in the part that involved visiting the local administrative authorities to express loyalty to the Ottoman state. Churches of the Ottoman Armenian and Greek communities in Bartın, a district of Bolu, even performed religious services and prayed for the victory of the Ottoman armed forces.¹⁹¹ But while non-Muslim religious leaders' participation in the meetings was mentioned, no significant meaning was attached to their involvement. And compared

¹⁸⁹ "Cihad-ı Ekber Yolunda", *İkdâm*, 9 Teşrinisani 1330/22 November 1914.

¹⁹⁰ See BOA, DH.SYS., 123-12/35, 24 Rebîulâhir 1333/10 March 1915, pp. 1-83.

¹⁹¹ BOA, DH.SYS., 123-12/35, 24 Rebîulâhir 1333/10 March 1915, pp. 7-9.

to the enthusiastic language typically employed to describe the events, non-Muslim religious leaders' participation was reported in a formal and neutral language.¹⁹²

Reports sent from provincial centers also reveal significant details about the organization of popular mobilization. It is evident that similar to the situation in Istanbul, demonstrations in many provincial centers were organized by administrative authorities in close cooperation with local branches of semi-official voluntary associations such as the Navy League and the National Defense League; the CUP government's main collaborators played an important role in organizing similar demonstrations in the public sphere of the provinces. It is important to note that some of the telegrams to the Interior Ministry reporting on the demonstrations were sent by the chiefs of the local branches of the Navy League or the National Defense League, who signed the telegrams on behalf of the local people. For example, a report sent from Hendek, a sub-district (*nahiye*) of İzmit, is quite representative in this sense. It was jointly signed by Ali, chief of the Hendek branch of the National Defense League and also mayor of the sub-district, Ömer Lütfü, chief of the local branch of the Navy League, and Ali Rıza, chief of the local branch of the Ottoman Red Crescent.¹⁹³ In the case of a report sent from Alaşehir, a district of Aydın, the chief of the local branch of the National Defense League, Ömer, signed the telegram along with mayor Nadir, *müftü* Veli and CUP secretary Mehmed Hulusi.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, in some places such as Balya, a sub-district of Karesi, the local building of the National Defense League was one of the main centers of the

¹⁹² For example, for the case of Aleppo, see "Tezahürat-ı Vatanperverane", *İkdâm*, 10 Teşrinisani 1330/23 November 1914.

¹⁹³ BOA, DH.SYS., 123-12/35, 24 Rebîulâhir 1333/10 March 1915, p. 21.

¹⁹⁴ BOA, DH.SYS., 123-12/35, 24 Rebîulâhir 1333/10 March 1915, p. 52.

demonstration, in front of which local people gathered and expressed enthusiasm for the holy war.¹⁹⁵

It can be argued that Ottoman authorities were willing to use demonstrations as a tool for popular mobilization because such demonstrations simultaneously served various purposes. Firstly, as a large public meeting that was theoretically open to every member of society, demonstrations offered a social milieu where the state authority could join with mediating associations and ordinary people under a common ideological umbrella. It was a theatrical stage on which many parties of society physically came together for a common purpose. In this sense, a war demonstration was almost a perfect public event in which an organized propaganda attempt could intertwine with spontaneous popular enthusiasm. Secondly, whereas the demonstrations that were held in the Ottoman public sphere on the eve and at the beginning of the war were actually quite planned and organized, they could still be seen and presented as a miniature representation of the whole Ottoman society. In this respect, social solidarity, commitment to a common goal and spontaneous popular enthusiasm were the main factors which official documents and newspaper accounts always underlined, as if these accounts reflected the actual mood of all of Ottoman society. The “leveling effect” of demonstrations was also important: coming together at a public meeting for a common goal gave the impression that class differences melted into air when patriotic issues were concerned. All these points were in themselves a major source of propaganda.

¹⁹⁵ BOA, DH.SYS., 123-12/35, 24 Rebiulâhir 1333/10 March 1915, p. 23.

The Call to Arms and Mobilizing Discourses

Although the post-Balkan defeat stimulated a desire for revenge among the Muslim Ottoman public¹⁹⁶ and created a mobilizing rhetoric that generally referred to the sorrows of the past, during the period armed neutrality popular mobilization efforts ironically became more forward-looking as the danger of joining the war became more imminent. The abolition of the capitulations constituted a major step in this process. This move implied that the war situation was actually not that bad for the Ottomans. Of course, the emphasis on revenge never disappeared in the rhetoric directed at potential draftees.¹⁹⁷ Revenge for previous defeats at the hands of the Russian, Bulgarian and Greek forces, or revenge narrated as a request by grandfathers or fathers from the young generation, was a recurrent theme in popular literature published for mobilization propaganda on the eve and during the Great War.¹⁹⁸ On the other hand, the sense of sorrow and revenge for the past gradually became mixed with the hope of liberation on the eve of the war. The war increasingly came to be regarded as a quest for independence and salvation for the Ottomans. It was a moment to be seized. During the period of armed neutrality, one of the points that the press repeatedly propagated was that Muslims should not lose this opportunity to be free.¹⁹⁹ It was an opportunity for regeneration as an

¹⁹⁶ Haluk Harun Duman, *Balkanlara Veda: Basın ve Edebiyatta Balkan Savaşı (1912-1913)* (Istanbul: Duyap, 2005), pp. 152-155.

¹⁹⁷ Köroğlu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity*, p. 49. Köroğlu claims that the agitation of revenge was an important theme of propaganda that facilitated the Ottoman public's acceptance of the entry into the Great War. Also see Köroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı*, p. 120.

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Ömer Seyfeddin, "Beyaz Lâle", *Donanma*, no. 53-62, (14 Temmuz 1330/27 July 1914 – 22 Eylül 1330/5 October 1914), published in a series; .E. T., "Mehmed Onbaşı", *Sabah*, 21 Ağustos 1331/3 September 1915; Enis Tahsin, "Son Tebessüm", *Sabah*, 8 Eylül 1331/21 September 1915; Ekrem Vecdet, "Senin İntikamın", *Harb Mecmuası*, vol. 2, no. 24 (Kanunievvel 1333/December 1917), pp. 381-384.

¹⁹⁹ Köroğlu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity*, p. 71.

independent nation.²⁰⁰ Perhaps this mood was best exemplified by Sultan Mehmed Reşad V's declaration to the Ottoman troops: "I feel convinced that from this struggle we shall emerge as an empire that made good the losses of the past and is once more glorious and powerful."²⁰¹

In fact, this future-oriented perspective and the sense of hope also characterized the discourse surrounding the call to arms after full mobilization was declared on 2 August and put into effect on 3 August 1914. The mobilization order requested all eligible men between the ages 20 and 45 to go to the nearest local recruitment office within three days to enlist for the armed forces.²⁰² While obeying the mobilization order was already compulsory and severe punishments were involved in cases of disobedience, the call to enlist was usually publicized within a discourse of a festival. Effective from 2 August, mobilization posters could be found on the walls of mosques and coffeehouses in provincial towns and villages.²⁰³ These posters featured the motto, "All Ottomans to Arms" (*Osmanlılar Silah Başına!*) which one editorial said, "[sounded] to Turks like a cheerful invitation to a wedding entertainment."²⁰⁴ In other words, compulsory draft was propagated within the rhetoric of voluntarism.

²⁰⁰ Turkish nationalist writer Ömer Seyfeddin's story about a middle-aged, solitary and secluded Istanbul man succinctly depicts this approach to the war as a moment of regeneration. The man in the story, who was extremely pessimist about the future of the country and frightened to become a colonial subject to the British and the French before war, suddenly starts an entirely new life with full of hope after the victory at the Dardanelles. See Ömer Seyfeddin, "Çanakkale'den Sonra", *Yeni Mecmua*, vol. 1, no. 6 (16 Ağustos 1333/16 August 1917), pp. 119-120.

²⁰¹ "Bu cihaddan mazisinin zararlarını telafi etmiş şanlı ve kavi bir devlet olarak çıkacağımıza eminim." "Beyanname-i Hümayun: 'Orduma, Donanmama'" (29 Teşrinievvel 1330/11 November 1914), republished in Hülâgü, *Pan-İslamizm*, pp. 35-36. Also see Appendix B.

²⁰² *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6 (1908-1920)*, p. 225; Shaw, *Ottoman Empire in World War I, vol. 1*, p. 137; "Seferberlik İlanı", *İkdâm*, 21 Temmuz 1330/3 August 1914.

²⁰³ For two examples of Ottoman mobilization posters, see Appendix D.6 and D.7.

²⁰⁴ "Osmanlılar Silah Başına!", *İkdâm*, 29 Temmuz 1330/11 August 1914.

Perhaps the major motive that was used to justify the call to arms was religious discourse. Islamic themes and symbols constituted a language of interaction which the CUP could draw on when dealing with the masses. Islamic discourse offered a cognitive framework, which was actually the only common ground where the elitist nationalist perspective of the urban Young Turks could meet rural Muslim masses; Islamic discourse in its popular form was the only available language by which the two parties could understand each other. It was also the only language that could be used for the mobilization of non-Turkish Muslim peoples of the empire, such as the Arabs and the Kurds.

The declaration of holy war was one method of instrumentalizing Islam as a tool of international propaganda to appeal to Muslims worldwide, and was an official state policy from the beginning of the war. This issue, which is outside the scope of this study, has been relatively well studied and well documented.²⁰⁵ There is a consensus among scholars that the Ottoman state's declaration of holy war in November 1914 was a political and pragmatic decision.²⁰⁶ While the Ottomans attempted to carry out propaganda and intelligence activities among Muslim peoples

²⁰⁵ See, for example, Hülagü, *Pan-İslamizm*; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 2, pp. 1148-1264; Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 93-126; Vahdet Keleşyılmaz, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsûsa'nın Hindistan Misyonu, 1914-1918* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1999).

²⁰⁶ Various signs which previously emerged among the Muslims in different parts of the world had created a great expectation in both Ottoman and German official circles that a call for holy war would trigger an extensive resistance among the world Muslims against the Entente powers. For example, the objection that was raised by the Muslims in Kazan to the Russian administration in 1905, boycott and armed resistance attempts that emerged among the Muslims in Trablusgarb against the Italian invading forces, various examples of solidarity with the Ottoman state that came from the Muslims in India fostered such a Pan-Islamic expectation. The German propaganda machine particularly took this seriously, perhaps even more than the Ottoman government, and advised and urged the Ottomans to promote their war effort as a holy war against the infidel. See Hülagü, *Pan-İslamizm*, p. 26. On the German role in the declaration of the holy war, see C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Holy War "Made in Germany"* (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1915) [For the Turkish translation of this pamphlet, see Mete Tunçay (ed.), *Cihat ve Tehcir: 1915-1916 Yazıları* (Istanbul: Afa Yayınları, 1991, pp. 18-55)]; Tilman Lüdke, *Jihad Made in Germany: Ottoman and German Propaganda and Intelligence Operations in the First World War* (Münster: Lit, 2005).

abroad, such as in India and Iran, historians also generally agree that the appeal of jihad to gain loyalty to the Ottoman war effort remained at a quite low level throughout the war and it “failed to override the loyalties of temporal rule.”²⁰⁷

Moreover, recent research has demonstrated that the Ottoman holy war propaganda and its secret service “not only lacked a unified and coherent policy, but also was in many respects a dysfunctional organization.”²⁰⁸

But the international aspect of the holy war propaganda and its ultimate failure should not overshadow the fact that the Ottoman mobilization effort also used Islamic discourses domestically. The CUP used Islamic themes and symbols to create a popular mobilizing discourse which would appeal to the domestic Muslim and Turkish-speaking population. Whether or not the pan-Islamic appeal exerted a considerable effect on domestic Muslim communities of the empire (such as the Arabs) is debatable, but it is obvious that Ottoman authorities used an Islamic language to mobilize the Anatolian Muslims, who constituted the backbone of the Ottoman army.

First of all, the Ottoman declaration of holy war had a domestic dimension which involved propaganda activities in Ottoman-Turkish. One of the aims of this

²⁰⁷ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Pocket Books, 2006), p. 98. In 1914, of 270 million Muslims in the world in 1914, only about 30 million were governed by other Muslims. Almost 100 million were British subjects; 20 million were under French rule, most of them in North and Equatorial Africa; and another 20 million were incorporated in Russia’s Asian empire. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁰⁸ Touraj Atabaki, “Going East: The Ottomans’ Secret Service Activities in Iran”, in Touraj Atabaki (ed.), *Iran and the First World War: Battleground of the Great Powers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 42. It is true that the Ottoman intelligence activities abroad were not successful in general, but this does not mean that they were totally ineffective. An exceptional case in this respect was the Singapore Mutiny in 1915, in the process of which the Ottomans tried to support the native Singaporean troops via the Ghadar Party in their uprising against the British. The effect of the Ottoman support was not overwhelming, but it was significantly symbolic and taken seriously by the British. See Sho Kuwajima, *The Mutiny in Singapore: War, Anti-War and the War for India’s Independence* (New Delhi: Rainbow Publishers, 2006), pp. 40-42, 51, 163. The activities of the Ottoman secret service organization (the Special Organization) will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3.

propaganda was to increase domestic support for the government's war effort.²⁰⁹

Pamphlets were published in Ottoman-Turkish, justifying the call to arms as required by the duty to wage jihad. Such pamphlets often tried to base the Ottoman declaration of holy war within a wider Islamic framework and justified it by mentioning relevant verses from the Quran and sayings (hadith) from the Prophet Mohammad. The pamphlets then described military service and joining the war as a binding religious duty (*farz-ı ayn*). Two such propaganda pamphlets were published and distributed by the National Defense League; their writers were also members of the League.²¹⁰ It is worth noting that one of these, titled *Cihad* (The Holy War), not only made the usual argument that joining the armed forces against the Christian allies was a binding religious duty, but it also offered an alternative for those who were not eligible for military service—they could contribute various services for the war effort on the home front.²¹¹ This alternative was actually quite in line with the logic of total war, which demanded as much contribution from any member of the population as possible for the war effort.²¹² Another pamphlet, which was anonymous and titled *Cihad-ı Mukaddes Farzdır* (The Holy War is a Binding

²⁰⁹ Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 187-188.

²¹⁰ Mehmed Esad, *Cihad-ı Ekber* (İzmir: Ahenk Matbaası, 1330/1914); İsmail Faik, *Cihad* (Istanbul: Koçunyan Matbaası, 1331/1915). The National Defense League also published the texts of the holy war and the other accompanying official declarations made in November 1914, and it distributed them free; the pamphlets were also distributed free. Polat, *Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, p. 157.

²¹¹ “Bütün Osmanlılara bu müttefiklerin mahv ve perişan edilmesi için ya silaha sarılıb bilfiil gazaya gitmek veyahud o suretle hizmet etmek farzdır.” *Cihad*, p. 1.

²¹² In fact, the Balkan War disaster had already taught the Ottomans that modern wars would have to be “total” and the home front would be as essential in supporting the war effort as the troops on the battlefield. From the early days of the mobilization onward, the National Defense League and others tried to explain the importance of the role that should have been played by civilians on the home front during the war, and urged the Ottoman public through newspapers and other written publications to support not only the troops on the battlefield but also their families left behind. See, for example, “Asker Aileleri Menfaatine”, *İkdâm*, 8 Ağustos 1330/21 August 1914; “Seferberlikde Ahalinin Vazifesi”, *İkdâm*, 10 Eylül 1330/23 September 1914; “Müdafaa-yı Milliye Cemiyeti”, *İkdâm*, 16 Eylül 1330/29 September 1914; “Müdafaa-i Milliye Faaliyeti”, *Tanin*, 7 Teşrinievvel 1330/20 October 1914; “Asker Aileleri Hakkında”, *Tanin*, 15 Teşrinievvel 1330/28 October 1914; “Müdafaa-i Milliye Ne Yapıyor?”, *İkdâm*, 20 Teşrinisani 1330/3 December 1914; “Vezaif-i Vataniyeye Davet”, *İkdâm*, 29 Mart 1331/11 April 1915.

Religious Duty) went one step further in this respect and claimed that when killing of the infidel was concerned, not only the battlefield but also the entire country would be a terrain of combat: “It is a binding religious duty to kill secretly or openly the infidels who reside wherever in your country as invaders.”²¹³

Secondly, in addition to the declaration of holy war, the popular usage of Islamic themes as a mobilizing discourse already constituted an important medium of interaction between the state and the domestic Muslim masses. Of course, such a popular Islamic discourse could often intertwine with the emphasis on holy war. But such a discourse also intertwined with nationalist tendencies of the CUP government.

Historians generally agree that the ideological disposition of the Ottoman state had already leaned towards Turkish nationalism after the Balkan War, and Şükrü Hanioglu convincingly argues that the roots of the CUP’s Turkism actually went back much earlier. The organization embraced Turkism long before the Balkan War and its imperial vision had always attributed dominance to the Turkish element. Even in employing the discourse of Ottomanism within the context of inter-ethnic alliances, the CUP sought “to sell Turkism as form of Ottomanism.”²¹⁴ There is no doubt that this nationalist disposition became increasingly pronounced during the Great War. However, what Hanioglu and other scholars have left unanswered is the question of how this nationalist ideology resonated with the masses. For example, Hanioglu tends to focus on an elitist understanding of the relationship between the state and society when he asserts that “the overwhelming majority of the Ottoman

²¹³ “*Her nerede olursa olsun müstevli sıfatıyla vatanında bulunan kâfirlerin gizli ve aşikâr surette katli farz-ı ayndır.*” *Cihad-ı Mukaddes Farzdır* (n.p., 1332/1916), p. 17.

²¹⁴ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Turkism and the Young Turks, 1889-1908”, in Hans-Lukas Kieser (ed.), *Turkey beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 15. Hanioglu’s this comment is actually based on his monumental in-depth research on the evolution of the CUP. See his *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

populace, caught up in their local identities and concerns, remained largely unmoved” by main ideological dispositions of the period.²¹⁵ The story was definitely much more complicated than this assertion suggests. Turkish nationalist discourse during the Great War always used a proto-nationalist²¹⁶ religious discourse in its attempt to mobilize the Muslim masses. And, a proto-nationalist Islamic discourse was the only discourse that could effectively be drawn on in mobilizing predominantly rural Ottoman Muslims. If a well-developed nationalist ideology theoretically flourishes during a process of industrialization that “engenders a mobile and culturally homogenous society”,²¹⁷ and if nationalist mobilization requires print capitalism to create an “imagined community”,²¹⁸ then only by employing a proto-nationalist religious discourse—i.e. Islam—could the Unionist version of Turkish nationalism mobilize the predominantly rural and illiterate Anatolian Muslim masses during the war.

As will be shown in the following chapters of this study, local identities and concerns did play an important role in shaping the attitude of local populations towards the state’s mobilization policies. But this study also aims to show that this attitude was never monolithic; it would be highly misleading to assume that Ottoman Muslims always looked at the war through their isolated and parochial windows. The potential of a proto-nationalist religious discourse to create a thread uniting local concerns along a common line should not be underestimated. Similarly, it should be

²¹⁵ Hanioglu, “Turkism and the Young Turks”, p. 4.

²¹⁶ I am using “proto-nationalism” in the sense Hobsbawm has used it: “In many parts of the world, states and national movements could mobilize certain variants of feelings of collective belonging which already existed and which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in with modern states and nations. I shall call these bonds ‘proto-national’.” See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 46 and the rest of chapter 2.

²¹⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 73.

²¹⁸ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

taken seriously that the use of Islamic themes for mobilizing purposes potentially contributed to the creation of a common world of meaning, into which local Muslim people could situate their relationship with the war effort and find an explanation for the sacrifices they were asked to make. Of course, it would be absurd to suggest that the illiterate peasant Ottoman man regarded the call for arms as part of a larger patriotic and nationalist duty; but it would be equally wrong to assume that the world of meaning for a simple Muslim peasant merely consisted of his local identity and concerns.²¹⁹ Though an imagined community in its well-developed sense was certainly lacking, the use of Islamic themes for mobilizing purposes exerted the effect of imagined community among Ottoman Muslims. It also helped to develop a sense of “the other” that is necessary for any nationalist ideology, and certainly served to foster the sentiments of hostility towards the enemy on the battlefield. It also served to foster hostility towards “the enemies within”, i.e. the non-Muslim Ottoman people who were reluctant to join the mobilization effort, and facilitated popular support for aggressive nationalist policies of the CUP government during the war against the Ottoman Armenians and Greeks.²²⁰

Popular uses of religion to help spread a war-oriented, belligerent mentality and attitude in everyday life was a widespread phenomenon in European countries during the war,²²¹ and the use of Islamic themes by the Ottoman state to justify joining the war was no different. First of all, the justification of military

²¹⁹ For a similar and interesting discussion in the case of the Russian mobilization in 1914, see Josh Sanborn, “The Mobilization of 1914 and the Question of the Russian Nation: A Reexamination”, *Slavic Review*, vol. 59, no. 2. (Summer, 2000), pp. 267-289.

²²⁰ For an example of using a popular Islamic language to mobilize the local Muslim population against the local Greek population in the Aegean region (an example mentioned by a former Ottoman Greek) see Dido Sotiriou, *Farewell to Anatolia*, trans. Fred A. Reed (Athens: Kedros Publishers, 1991), p. 80.

²²¹ Gangolf Hübinger, “Religion and War in Imperial Germany”, in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 128.

service as a religious duty and as an Islamic obligation had already been a recurrent theme in Muslim-Turkish culture that did not start with the First World War.

However, it was popularized in a more systematic way during the Great War. For example, a dramatic increase occurred during the war in the number of religious manuals/pamphlets, which were usually published under the title of “religion book for the soldier” (*askere din kitabı*). Written in a quite simple language, such pamphlets were directed at potential draftees and enlisted men, as well as at officers, explaining to them how and why military service was also a religious duty, why a good Muslim also needed to be a good soldier and vice versa.²²²

One of such religious manuals simply states that “only those who do not withhold from sacrificing their lives and souls for their fatherland could go to heaven.” It continues to explain that a Muslim man would be interrogated in the next life (*Ahiret*) about how well he performed his military service, just like he would be interrogated by about his performance of prayer and fast.²²³ Another one, which was written in an earlier phase of the war to justify military service and joining the holy war in religious terms, equates service for the fatherland to the true faith and claims that any Muslim who betrays his fatherland also betrays his religion.²²⁴ Another one emphasizes that “military service (and joining the holy war) is the sixth pillar of

²²² For an analysis of this popular literature from the late Ottoman period through republican Turkey, see İsmail Kara, “‘Askere Din Dersleri’: İyi Asker, İyi Müslüman Olur”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 166 (October 2007), pp. 48-53. Kara aptly argues that justification of military service in religious terms did not disappear during the republican era, though the army went through a process of secularization.

²²³ Üryanizade Ali Vahid, *Askerin İlmihali* (Istanbul: Ahmed İhsan ve Şürekası, 1333/1917), p. 13, 18. It seems that a comparative research on the uses of religions in belligerent countries (Muslim and Christian) to mobilize people during the Great War would reveal more similarities than expected: “Belligerent clergymen in the various countries assured their respective flocks that in fighting the enemy they were doing the Lord’s work, and that with His assistance victory could not be far off. The general idea of suffering and of Christian sacrifice in particular, provided a readily accessible means of encouraging recruitment, promoting steadfastness, and, eventually, reconciling the grieving survivors in the lines and behind them to the ceaseless carnage.” Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (eds.), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), p. xiii.

²²⁴ İzmirli İsmail Hakkı, *Gazilere Armağan* (Istanbul: n.p., 1331/1915), p. 43.

Islam” and if it was not carried out well, the other pillars would be incomplete too.²²⁵ Evading service or desertion were described in such manuals as one of the greatest sins that would be severely punished in the next life, and it was recurrently stressed that Muslims should go to war willingly and enthusiastically since this was among the practices (*sünnet*) of the Prophet Mohammad.²²⁶

The recurrent emphasis on martyrdom (*şehâdet*) presented death as a rare gift that only the privileged would receive. Dying in war was exalted in every speech, document and pamphlet aimed at mobilization; war was portrayed as an opportunity for a Muslim to find his way to heaven through martyrdom.²²⁷ The written and oral propaganda of the war years always emphasized the interconnectedness of the call to arms and martyrdom. The main monthly propaganda journal of the war years, *Harb Mecmuası* (The War Journal), had a permanent section, titled “the living dead” (*Yaşayan Ölüler*), which was devoted to the Ottoman soldiers who died on the battlefield.²²⁸ Religious memorial services (*mevlid*) that were devoted to those who died on the battlefield began to be performed in mosques from the early days of the Ottoman war effort.²²⁹ Monuments in honor of martyrs began, such as the one that was built at Kireçtepe on the Gallipoli

²²⁵ Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, *Askere Din Kitabı*, second edition (Istanbul: Ebüzziya Matbaası, 1945), p. 195.

²²⁶ Prophet Mohammad was mentioned in this discourse not only as a religious authority justifying military service by his sayings and doings, but also as a great warrior himself, as an exemplar for all Muslims. On this point, see Gottfried Hagen, “The Prophet Muhammad as an Exemplar in War - Ottoman Views on the Eve of World War I”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 22 (Spring 2000), pp. 145-172.

²²⁷ In Ottoman-Turkish military discourse, the definition of martyrdom is quite wide and ambiguous. Dying during one’s military service is usually sufficient for someone to be counted as a martyr. It is actually as much a cultural category as a religious one.

²²⁸ The section included photos, short biographies and dates of death of the dead soldiers (usually officers). As of the eleventh issue in July 1916 (Temmuz 1332), the title of the section was changed to “Our Blessed Martyrs” (*Mübarek Şehitlerimiz*), a title that had possibly more direct religious connotations.

²²⁹ See, for example, “Mevlid-i Nebevi Kıraatı”, *İkdâm*, 12 Teşrinisani 1330/25 November 1914. It is interesting to note that this *mevlid* (and many other similar ones) was organized by the National Defense League.

peninsula to honor the Ottoman soldiers who died during the battle of Kireçtepe in 15-16 August 1915, began to be erected as early as 1915.²³⁰ Martyrdom would not only secure a place for the dead in heaven, but also bring prestige in this world, at least posthumously.

All these themes and symbols that exalted martyrdom as the ultimate sacrifice emphasized that the honor gained through martyrdom was actually open to any Muslim as long as he was willing to sacrifice his life voluntarily for the war cause. There was no privileged status among people when voluntary death was concerned. Hence, the call-to-arms propaganda stressed that victory actually depended on the common soldier, and that a simple unknown peasant soldier could make a difference in the course of the war. Short stories about simple soldiers who performed heroic acts during the war came to prominence in the mobilization propaganda on the eve of and during the war. While such stories might have been based on some facts and real figures, their narratives also involved a mythical aspect and some exaggeration. Short stories and narratives about peasant soldier figures such as Sergeant İsmail from Bursa,²³¹ Corporal Nasuh from Eskişehir,²³² Sergeant Kadiroğlu Mehmed from Çivril,²³³ Sergeant Murad from Söğüt,²³⁴ Sergeant Tahir from Antep²³⁵ all recount extraordinary individual actions in combat. Common themes in such narratives include insistence by the soldier to continue fighting even when severely wounded, as well as volunteering for an almost impossible mission

²³⁰ Burhan Sayılır, *Çanakkale Savaşları ve Savaş Alanları Rehberi* (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2007), pp. 156-157.

²³¹ “Bir Kahraman Asker: İsmail Çavuş”, *Harb Mecmuası*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Kanunisanı 1331/January 1916), p. 54.

²³² “Nasuh Onbaşı”, *Harb Mecmuası*, vol. 1, no. 8 (Nisan 1332/April 1916), pp. 124-125.

²³³ “Kadir Oğlu Mehmed Çavuş”, *Harb Mecmuası*, vol. 1, no. 8 (Nisan 1332/April 1916), p. 126.

²³⁴ “Söğütlü Kahraman Topçu Tevfik Efendi ve Murad Çavuş”, *Harb Mecmuası*, vol. 1, no. 12 (Ağustos 1332/August 1916), p. 190.

²³⁵ “Antepli Tahir Çavuş”, *Harb Mecmuası*, vol. 2, no. 20 (Temmuz 1333/July 1917), pp. 317-320.

across enemy lines. In all cases, the heroic act of the individual soldier brought a great advantage for the Ottoman armed forces. While such stories were about individual soldiers with names, these names were actually quite generic sounding and represented the common Muslim-Anatolian soldier.²³⁶

But did the emphasis on martyrdom and heroism suffice to produce consent on the part of potential draftees? Were these themes enough to convince people that they were being called to die in a “just war”? Did a peasant soldier not need a more relevant reason that would help him relate going to die in war to his values in his daily life? Modern wars in the age of nationalism were usually justified on the grounds that they were waged to protect the fatherland. Was there such an understanding of fatherland for a peasant Ottoman? Where exactly was the fatherland to be protected? How could any propaganda discourse describe the Ottoman fatherland to the peasant soldier when it was difficult for the literate urban nationalist to define it as the borders of the empire continuously changed and its territories dwindled? Was there any chance that the pan-Turkist (Turanist) ambition to extend the empire towards Central Asian Turkic territories, an ideology which had followers in the CUP circles during the war,²³⁷ could appeal to the masses, while it could only too briefly convince even nationalist-minded intellectuals such as Şevket Süreyya Aydemir²³⁸ and officers such as Rahmi Apak,²³⁹ whose Turanist dreams were

²³⁶ This genre was also popular in fiction literature, the most prominent writer of which was Ömer Seyfeddin and his series of stories called “the heroes” (*kahramanlar*). As an example, see “Kaç Yerinden”, *Yeni Mecmua*, vol. 1, no. 9 (Eylül 1333/September 1917), pp.178-180.

²³⁷ On pan-Turkism, see Jacop M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

²³⁸ See Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Suyu Arayan Adam*, fifteenth edition (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2004).

²³⁹ Rahmi Apak, *Yetmişlik Bir Subayın Hatıraları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988), p. 95.

disenchanted facing actual conditions after joining the war?²⁴⁰ It is true that the emphasis on Islamic themes provided a common cognitive framework, but did not an enlisted man also need more this-worldly and immediate reasons to join the war?

In this sense, Ottoman mobilization propaganda also put special emphasis on the protection of the Ottomans' *namus*.²⁴¹ This emphasis implied that a nation's honor was represented by its women's chastity, and the Ottomans' enemies in the war not only wanted to attack the religion of Islam, but they also threatened Ottoman women's *namus*. Therefore, serving in the armed forces and fighting in the war would serve to protect everybody's honor. In this patriarchal-nationalist discourse, the fatherland was identified with one's family, or more specifically, with female members of one's family. The fatherland was a female relative of a potential draftee; every Ottoman man was supposed to protect his women, and in this way, his fatherland.²⁴² National defense was primarily understood as the defense of the women of the nation. The protection of the *namus* of one's wife, mother or sister was dependent on his willingness to join the war. In convincing young Muslim Ottomans that compulsory military service was necessary, this was one of the recurrent points:

²⁴⁰ It can be said that the extent of pan-Turkist ideology in Ottoman society was similar to the situation with pan-Slavism in Russia, where it "was the business of only a small segment of the Russian intelligentsia, and official propaganda was little developed and rather weak. Neither can be regarded as a genuine expression of popular patriotism, for both were directed at the population rather than developing within it." Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 3.

²⁴¹ It is difficult to translate *namus* into English. It is usually translated as "honor", especially when it is used in a more general sense. But it always has a gendered meaning in popular usage in Turkish culture, and ordinary people usually tend to understand from the word *namus* "a woman's virtue, chastity", even if it is not specifically used to refer to women.

²⁴² For an interesting example of identifying the fatherland with womanhood in the context of nationalist ideology in Egypt, see Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). For a similar example in the case of Iran, see Joanna de Groot, "'Brothers of the Iranian Race': Manhood, Nationhood, and Modernity in Iran, c.1870-1914", in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds.), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 137-156.

“If Ahmed and Mehmed evade war, then the enemy gets Ayşe and Fatma.”²⁴³ A common formulaic statement which was often used in both official documents and the press to describe fallen soldiers during the war was “becoming a martyr for the sake of religion, fatherland and *namus*.”²⁴⁴

In this discourse, being a soldier was considered equal to being the guardian of the *namus* of the nation. It was, in a sense, a rite of passage in a young boy’s life. Reaching military age also meant becoming a man who was able to protect the *namus* of all the women of the fatherland. This theme was also one of the frequent points that were emphasized in propaganda literature (especially as short stories) during the war. The mothers and other female loved ones of potential draftees were always depicted as encouraging the boys to join the war to protect their *namus*.²⁴⁵ In case of failing to carry out this task, it was again the same women who scolded and scorned the failed men.²⁴⁶ It was also a major theme of combat

²⁴³ “Ahmed Mehmed muharebeden kaçarsa Ayşeyi Fatmayı da düşman kapar”, Üryanizade Ali Vahid, *Askerin İlmihali*, p. 15. A similar kind of war motivation which stemmed from the fear of atrocities that would be inflicted upon one’s women and children by the enemy was also effective in Britain and Germany on the eve of the war. In the British case, the propaganda that the German atrocities in Belgium would one day come to the British soil urged many people to volunteer for the army. In the German case, it was the fear of Russian danger (“blood Tsar” and “Cossack hordes”) that frequently appeared in exaggerated atrocity stories for propaganda purposes. See Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 49-51. For a comparative analysis of the portrayal of the rape of women as a rape of *mothers* of the nation in Britain and France, also see Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 50-85.

²⁴⁴ “Din, vatan, namus uğrunda şehit...”, See, for example, BOA, DH.EUM.MTK., 79/34, 16 Safer 1333/3 January 1915; “Kurban Bayramı ve Harp”, *Türk Yurdu*, vol. 4, no. 119 (29 Eylül 1332/12 October 1916) [*Türk Yurdu*, transliterated new edition (Ankara: Tutibay Yayınları, 1998), vol. 5, p. 217].

²⁴⁵ See, for example, Salime Servet Seyfi, “Oğlumu Hududa Gönderdikten Sonra”, *Yeni Mecmua (Çanakkale Nüsha-i Fevkaladesi)* (Special Issue, Mart 1331/March 1915), pp. 103-104.

²⁴⁶ See, for example, Hasan DüNDAR, “Donmuş Kundak”, *Türk Yurdu*, vol. 7, no. 160 (15 Temmuz 1334/15 July 1918) [transliterated edition, vol. 7, pp. 249-250]. In this story, a mother, whose newborn baby was frozen in winter during the retreat from enemy invasion, shockingly threw the dead baby to the retreating soldiers as a sign of insult (*bir hakaret sillesi olarak*) for their inability to protect their families.

motivation on the battlefield.²⁴⁷ Therefore, military service was presented not only as a responsibility to one's religion and fatherland, but also to one's own family.

This familial pressure would exert a greater effect on potential draftees in the local context when the duty of military service also came under peer pressure. The Ottoman conscription system, like many other conscription systems, was based on recruiting eligible men as an age cohort. Therefore, in a village or provincial town context, getting enlisted was actually a collective experience which a man shared with his fellow friends. It must have been highly difficult for a young man in a village to imagine not getting enlisted when all the other men whom he had grown up with joined the colors. The mobilization procedure in 1914 also required all eligible men in a village to get ready at the same time, gathering at the village square and traveling as a group to the nearest town recruiting office under the leadership of the headman (*muhtar*) and prayer leader (*imam*) of the village.²⁴⁸ Evading such a ceremony would mean complete ostracism for an eligible man of the same age cohort in the same village. It involved both social and moral pressure. The Ottoman military did not resort to such methods as creating "pals" battalions, which involved constituting a military unit composed of men from the same locality. Such battalions were effectively used in the British army during the war.²⁴⁹ But peer pressure in the

²⁴⁷ For example, on the Dardanelles front, a division commander tried to motivate his soldiers for combat with the following words, which were quoted in the memoirs of a reserve officer served under his command: "Our mother and sisters sent us here so that we protect their *namus* and chastity; our duty is to destroy the enemy who would dare to threaten our *namus*" ("*Anamız, bacımız namus ve iffetlerini beklemek için bizi buraya yollamıştır, vazfemiz namusumuza el uzatacak düşmanları kahretmektir*"). See *Cepheden Cepheye, Esaretten Esarete: Ürgüplü Mustafa Fevzi Taşer'in Hatıraları*, edited by Eftal Şükrü Batmaz (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2000), p. 5.

²⁴⁸ For a literary account of such a scene of gathering and traveling of potential draftees from a village in Çorlu, see Aydemir, *Suyu Arayan Adam*, p. 63.

²⁴⁹ "Pals" battalions in Britain were locally-raised units of men who knew each other at work or in their communities. This method was effective in creating peer pressure and provoking sentiments of loyalty among potential draftees. By this method, British authorities exploited community ties both to make military service more desirable and peer pressure more intense. See Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 53; Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp. 30-33. But, while there were no such

local context, which was mixed with religious and familial expectations from military service, was most likely to play a similar mobilizing effect on potential draftees.

The main components of the mobilizing discourses regarding the call to arms were constituted by the propaganda which presented the entrance into the war as an opportunity for national regeneration, the popular Islamic language which emphasized the necessity to join the holy war and defined military service as a binding religious duty, the religious and cultural exaltation of death in combat as martyrdom, the heroism of the common soldier, and the need to protect the *namus* of the nation. These themes which further resonated with the potential draftees' world of meaning through familial and peer pressures contributed to the creation of a "war culture" in Ottoman society. War culture could be described as "the many varieties of representation through which people of a belligerent country "understood the war and their commitment to winning it."²⁵⁰ Such a war culture was significant, because the decision of an ordinary man to enlist for war and to continue to fight for years was neither merely a result of legal compulsion nor purely an outcome of a voluntary rational choice. Of course, compulsion and voluntarism played important roles at certain levels of shaping the attitude towards the mobilization, but even they were somehow embedded in war culture. In this sense, it can be asserted that the Ottoman soldier's consent, and also his resistance toward joining the war had an important cultural dimension as well.

thing as "pals" battalions in the Ottoman army, there were some volunteer units, such as the Osmancık Volunteer Battalion, which were constituted on the locality bases (See Chapter 3).

²⁵⁰ Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3, 98.

The Importance of Oral Propaganda

There is no doubt that propaganda in the form of the printed word came to possess a power in 1914 which it had never before.²⁵¹ The effect of the printed word had been considerably enhanced by the proliferation of schools, which increased the literacy of societies, and by infrastructural developments such as the advent of the railway, which facilitated the circulation of written material. The Great War was also a “war of words”: propaganda activities through the printed word acquired crucial importance and governments, especially those of Britain, France, Germany and the USA, felt the need to use all available resources at their disposal to mobilize public opinion by creating effective propaganda mechanisms.²⁵² One of the most striking features of the Great War was that, “alongside the mobilization of men, munitions, and labour, alongside war against civilians, came the mobilization of minds.”²⁵³ However, while written propaganda had become crucial for mobilizing the masses on the eve of and during the war, lacking necessary infrastructural developments for producing such written propaganda did not mean being completely unable to address and affect the masses. Oral methods of mass communication might have become outdated in the world of the printed word in 1914, but speeches, sermons, preaches, songs, and even parades and public festivals remained functional means by which words and ideas permeated the consciousness of the illiterate. In fact, it can be argued that they were effective not only on the illiterate, but on the entire society.

²⁵¹ Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 143.

²⁵² Köroğlu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity*, pp. 1-5.

²⁵³ J. M. Winter, “Propaganda and the Mobilization of Consent”, in Hew Strachan (ed.), *World War I: A History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 217-218.

Oral propaganda was very important in a country like the Ottoman Empire, where the levels of literacy and infrastructural development were quite low.²⁵⁴ It is true that because of such major insufficiencies, there never was a functional and effective written propaganda mechanism in the Ottoman Empire during the Great War. As Erol Koroğlu has argued in his study on the Ottoman literary propaganda activities during the war, the Ottoman written propaganda effort remained very poor compared to those of the British, French and Germans. Moreover, Koroğlu has even claimed that given the level of infrastructural development in the Ottoman Empire in the war years, the Ottoman propaganda effort was “destined for failure.”²⁵⁵ But, while I tend to agree with Koroğlu on the necessary relationship between the levels of literacy and infrastructural development and the effectiveness of a written propaganda mechanism, I take issue with his tendency to generalize the failure in literary propaganda in order to argue that the entire propaganda effort failed. In fact, without evaluating the role of oral propaganda in the Ottoman propaganda effort, such an argument cannot be convincingly made. Of course, it is quite difficult to conduct research and find adequate documents about oral propaganda activities, but there are many traces that allow us to suggest that the Ottoman propaganda effort involved a considerable oral dimension. It was a multi-party effort in the local context, which included such mediatory figures as members of semi-official patriotic associations, local prayer leaders (*imam*), and village and neighborhood headmen

²⁵⁴ While there is no accurate date on the literacy rate in the Ottoman Empire, it is estimated that it never exceeded 10 percent between the years 1914 and 1918. See Zürcher, “Little Mehmet in the Desert”, p. 230. And, as it can be expected, it must have been much lower among the rural population which constituted the main manpower of the military. The literacy rate was close to zero among the Ottoman troops. See *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi, vol. 1: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Siyasi ve Askeri Hazırlıkları ve Harbe Girişi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1970), p. 227. For a summary of the poor infrastructure in the Ottoman Empire on the eve and during the war, see Koroğlu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity*, pp. 17-23.

²⁵⁵ Koroğlu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity*, p. 5.

(*muhtar*). Propaganda *per se* is not the main concern of this study, but I want to draw attention to the importance of oral propaganda by mentioning some cases below.

For example, the Ottoman state propagated its declaration of general mobilization and the call to arms on 2 August 1914 by distributing published posters, which were hung on the walls of public places. However, using published posters including written statements and militaristic images was not the only method which Ottoman authorities used to call people to arms after 2 August.²⁵⁶ More “traditional” and oral methods were also widely used. In many places, the call to arms was announced by people wandering through streets shouting out the contents of the order in a simple musical rhythm accompanied by basic musical instruments such as the drum and clarion.²⁵⁷ Announcing the calls to arms via criers with drums had been a traditional method used in previous wars, such as in the Ottoman-Greek War of 1897 and the Balkan War.²⁵⁸ It seems that this time it was used in a more planned way. The regulations for mobilization which were issued by the War Ministry in 1914 not only described how to circulate mobilization posters and where to hang them, they also included specifications about the use of criers and drummers to announce the order orally.²⁵⁹ The oral method was employed in a more organized manner, usually using two-person teams with a drum and a clarion, instead of only one drummer.

²⁵⁶ In fact, posters of mobilization were a novelty for the Ottoman public in 1914, since this was the first time they were used. And some contemporary observers expressed that people initially found them “strange.” Ziya Şâkir, *1914-1918 Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare Ettik?*, p. 28.

²⁵⁷ The oral announcements usually included statements that a general mobilization was ordered, that all men between the ages 20 and 45 were required to show up at recruiting offices within a week, and that eligible men also needed to bring with them enough food that would last for a week. Fahri Çakır, *Elli Yıl Önce Anadolu ve Şark Cephesi Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Çınar Matbaası, 1967), p. 9; “Seferberlik İlanı”, *İkdâm*, 21 Temmuz 1330/3 August 1914. For an image of such an occasion, see Appendix D.3.

²⁵⁸ Ziya Şâkir, *Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare Ettik?*, p. 28.

²⁵⁹ *1330 [1914] Senesi Seferberlik Talimatnamesi*, ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1124, Dosya 3, Fihrist 3-4.

Using an oral and musical method to publicize the mobilization order not only helped circulate the news of the call to arms more effectively among a population with very low rates of literacy, it also turned the mobilization order into a spectacular event that would be remembered by all, from the educated man living in the capital to an illiterate peasant boy in a remote village.²⁶⁰ From now on, the call to arms and the fact that a great war was imminent were incontestable facts of daily life.

A combination of oral and musical propaganda is best exemplified by marches. As already mentioned above, bands and marches often accompanied the public demonstrations held on the eve of the Great War. Official music in a Western style had already become an important symbol of Ottoman modernization during the nineteenth century. Newly composed marches, such as the Hamidiye March (which was composed by Callisto Guatelli for Sultan Abdülhamid II), were primarily used on diplomatic occasions to emphasize a “symbolic equality” with Western powers.²⁶¹ But after 1908, such marches were also extensively used domestically; they became a tool of interaction by which the state addressed the public. For the call to arms on the eve of the war, the Ottomans had a specific march, which was composed by İsmail Hakkı Bey. It was called “the Patriotic March: Calling to Arms.”²⁶² However, the use of music for the call to arms was not confined to Western style marches. There were also songs which were composed in a more “local” cultural style and which had more “national” lyrics. One example was the nationalist poet Mehmed Emin

²⁶⁰ It is no coincidence that memoirs of soldiers about the war years usually vividly recall this detail. See, for example, Başkâtipzâde Ragıp Bey, *Tarih-i Hayatım: Tahsil-Harp-Esaret-Kurtuluş Anıları*, edited by M. Bülent Varlık (Ankara: Kebikeç Yayınları, 1996), p. 44; Şevket Rado (ed.), “Birinci Umumi Harpte ve Mütareke Günlerinde İstanbul, I”, *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası*, vol.1, no.1 (February 1971), pp. 5-10.

²⁶¹ See Selim Deringil, “19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Resmi Müzik”, *Defter*, no. 22 (Fall 1994), pp. 31-37.

²⁶² “*Marche Vatan (Askere Çağırır)*”; for an original record of this march, see “Osmanlı Marşları”, compiled by Muammer Karabey, compact disk, Kalan Müzik, 1999.

Yurdakul's poem, "A Voice from Anatolia or As We Go to War" (*Anadolu'dan Bir Ses veyahut Cenge Giderken*). While the poem had actually been written during the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897, it was set to music during the Great War in a popular song format and re-titled "The National Soldier's Song" (*Milli Asker Şarkısı*). It was often sung when draftees were departing their villages for military service.²⁶³

Oral propaganda and oral efforts at preparing society for war constituted an important part of the mobilization process on the eve of the Great War. Religious preachers and sermons were perhaps the most important part of this process. There had been a considerable expansion in the use of religious preachers and sermons for political purposes during the Second Constitutional Era. These were considered important instruments for propagating ideas in a society with low rates of literacy and the reception of media such as newspapers was far from satisfactory.²⁶⁴ The noon sermons during Friday prayers in mosques throughout the empire emphasized the duty of every Muslim to sacrifice everything he had to rescue Islam from the attacks of the imperialists; the sermons delivered by *imams* at Friday prayers were filled with holy war rhetoric.²⁶⁵

It seems that many such propaganda activities through mosques had an organized character. At least in Istanbul, the National Defense League organized many sermons for propaganda purposes at mosques on the eve of the war. These sermons were delivered in a series not only on Fridays but on other days of the week as well at major mosques in different neighborhoods of the city. Imams were

²⁶³ Köroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı*, p. 287. A stanza of the poem reads: "I am a Turk whose religion and race are supreme, / My bosom and essence are full of fire, / A man becomes a man when he is the servant of his fatherland, / A Turkish son never evades service, so I go!. ("Ben Bir Türk'üm denim, cinsim uludur, / Sinem, özüm ateş ile doludur, / İnsan olan vatanının kuludur, / Türk evladı evde durmaz; giderim!")

²⁶⁴ İsmail Kara, *İslâmcıların Siyasî Görüşleri, vol 1: Hilafet ve Meşrutiyet*, second edition (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2001), p. 85.

²⁶⁵ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I, vol. 2*, pp. 758, 1165.

specifically appointed to “preach, advise and encourage” (*vaaz, nasihat ve teşvikat*) attendees. Moreover, at least one day a week was reserved for women.²⁶⁶ The *imams* who were selected for this task were members of a committee of the ulema (*heyet-i ilmiye*) that was constituted within the office of the *şeyhülislam* specifically for the purpose of “ensuring that the preaching and advising that have already been carried out in the mosques are done more regularly, and to make sure that religious functionaries properly notify the people about their responsibility and religious duty under the present conditions, also explaining to them the reasons for this responsibility and duty.”²⁶⁷ Such sermons were periodically repeated.²⁶⁸

The National Defense League also organized *mevlids* at major mosques. Invitations to such religious services were publicized in newspapers. Their purpose was usually described as “praying for the permanent victory and success of our army and navy.”²⁶⁹ Similar religious services were also organized at mosques in provinces as well.²⁷⁰

Verbal communication was used for propaganda outside the mosque too. “Conferences” were organized by pro-CUP associations during the armed neutrality period in different parts of the country. Members of the CUP, parliamentary delegates and leading members of the semi-official associations, such as Yağcızade

²⁶⁶ “Vaaz ve Nasihat”, *İkdâm*, 11 Eylül 1330/24 September 1914.

²⁶⁷ “Cevâmi-i şerîfede icra edilmekte olan vaaz ve nasihatlerin temin-i intizamı ve halkın ahval-i hazıraya karşı mükellef olduğu ahkâm ve vezâif-i diniyenin ulema-yı keram tarafından layıkıyla tebliğ ve tefhimi esbabını tezekkür etmek.” “Cuma Günkü Vaazlar”, *İkdâm*, 15 Kanunisanı 1330/28 January 1915.

²⁶⁸ Also see “Cuma Günkü Vaazlar”, *İkdâm*, 21 Kanunisanı 1330/3 February 1915; “Cuma Günkü Vaazlar”, *İkdâm*, 4 Şubat 1330/17 February 1915.

²⁶⁹ “Ordu ve donanmamızın tevali-i nusret ve muvaffakiyeti için dualar edilerek...”, “Ayasofya’da Mevlid-i Nebevi”, *İkdâm*, 1 Teşrinisanı 1330/14 November 1914. For similar *mevlids* which were organized by the National Defense League, see “Mevlid-i Nebevi Kıraatı”, *İkdâm*, 11 Teşrinisanı 1330/24 November 1914; “Mevlid-i Nebevi Kıraatı”, *İkdâm*, 12 Teşrinisanı 1330/25 November 1914; “Mevlid-i Nebevi Kıraatı”, *İkdâm*, 4 Şubat 1330/17 February 1915

²⁷⁰ “Cihad-ı Ekber Yolunda”, *İkdâm*, 10 Teşrinisanı 1330/23 November 1914.

Şefik Bey, president of the Navy League joined these public conferences as speakers. A contemporary observer has described the goal of such conferences in his memoirs as “to prepare the nation and public opinion for war.”²⁷¹

Lastly, the Ottoman elite, who were aware of the difficulty of realizing written propaganda activities in a practically illiterate society, also resorted to alternative methods in order to overcome this difficulty. One such method involved requesting literate people to explain the contents and message of the written material to illiterate people. Propaganda pamphlets of the war years usually included statements of such requests on their front or back cover. For example, on the back cover of the pamphlet *Cihad-ı Mukaddes Farzdir*, “May those who have learned about the contents of this communiqué convey it to those who have not” was written.²⁷² Similarly, the pamphlet *Cihad-ı Ekber*, which was published by the National Defense League, included a statement on its cover that read “May every Muslim read and have this read”, but also a more detailed statement on the second page under the heading “A Big Request.” The statement is cited in full below:

A Big Request:

Dear respectful brother!
Do not tear this book after you read it; give it to another fellow Muslim and also explain its meaning to your friends.
Dear village teacher, you hard-working educator!
Read this book in the village coffeehouse and also explain its meaning.
Dear father!
Read this book to your family, your children and your relatives. Do not forget that it is your duty to pursue the National Defense League.²⁷³

Lastly, a few words should also be said about local traditional rituals which were performed at the village or small town level on the occasion of sending soldiers

²⁷¹ Ali İhsan Sâbis, *Harb Hatıralarım: Birinci Dünya Harbi*, vol. 1, (Istanbul: Nehir Yayınları, 1990), p. 201.

²⁷² *Cihad-ı Mukaddes Farzdir*, back cover.

²⁷³ Mehmed Esad, *Cihad-ı Ekber*, front cover, p. 1

off to military service. The Anatolian Muslim population had lived through a long history of military service, in the course of which such rituals evolved into almost established traditions in Anatolian Muslim villages and small towns. They became a major part of Anatolian folklore. While they differed from one locality to the other in certain respects, their general structure was quite similar and usually included simple events such as departing soldiers visiting the elders of the locality, communal praying for the departing soldiers, gatherings in front of departing soldiers' houses to perform some musical entertainment, or soldiers leaving the village in a procession.²⁷⁴ Such rituals certainly already existed before the Great War.²⁷⁵ But given the extent of the mobilization and duration of the war, their function became more relevant to publicize the call to arms and to make military service under war conditions more easily acceptable.

Such rituals apparently produced a “cultural pressure” on the local young boys who reached the age of military service, as they turned the simple and seemingly individual event of going to do one’s military service into a collective local ceremony in which every member of a particular locality could participate. And this pressure facilitated the recruitment of potential draftees. Such rituals turned enlistment into a social behavior which was expected from the whole local community—reaching the age of military service and enlistment was no longer a private matter in this context. At a village or a small town level, such information was actually “public”; everybody expected potential draftees to “do the right thing.”

²⁷⁴ Almost all modern folkloric studies on Anatolian folklore at the provincial level devote a remarkable space to such rituals, though they usually deal with them as if they were all the same in every historical period and they do not explore how they evolved historically. For two such studies, see Erman Artun, *Adana Halk Kültürü Araştırmaları* (Adana: Adana Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayınları, 2000), pp. 84-99; Hülya Taş, *Bursa Folkloru: Bursa İli Gelenek ve Göreneklere Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma* (Bursa: Gaye Kitabevi, 2002), pp. 113-128.

²⁷⁵ And they definitely continued to exist after that. Even in today’s Turkey, ceremonies of sending off soldiers are quite popular, even in metropolitan urban settings, though their form changed and they have acquired many new elements in time.

That is, to undertake his military service like those in his cohort and all the males of that particular locality. In this local cultural setting, completing one's military service was regarded a major rite of passage for a young man. When this cultural pressure combined with the peer pressure at the local level, the decision to go to do one's military service became more "natural." Even before the legal and bureaucratic compulsion mechanisms, this cultural pressure made the potential draftee aware that there were no alternatives to completing his military service when the time came. Any thoughts about resisting the war were made practically impossible due to the pervasiveness of such rituals.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that attempts at mobilizing Ottoman public opinion for war were part of an organized process. This process had a background dating back to the Balkan War and even earlier, but it was also reshaped within the immediate conditions on the eve and at the outbreak of the Great War. This organized process also intertwined with the spontaneous enthusiastic sentiments of the people, which it molded to be absorbed by the mobilization effort. In this process, voluntary but semi-official associations such as the Navy League and the National Defense League, which were not only patronized by the CUP but also worked within the orbit of its policies, constituted a mediating role in the public sphere, where nationalist and militarist policies met with social actors. Equally importantly, they also served to obstruct the holding of any anti-war initiative in the public sphere by their increasing dominance which, with the patronage of the CUP government and strict social regimenting regulations such as censorship, marginalized and muffled alternative and

dissenting voices. It can be said that the enthusiasm for the call to arms in Ottoman society was far from being entirely spontaneous and widespread, but the result of an organized action by both the CUP government and pro-CUP, mostly middle-class and urban, social groups. This did not mean, however, that there were no traces of spontaneity in this process. In fact, the Balkan defeat trauma and the discourse of revenge had created fertile ground for radicalized popular sentiments that were ready to be harvested for popular mobilization. And, the abolition of capitulations during the armed neutrality period added a future-oriented aspect to these sentiments. But it was an organized collaboration between the government and the public sphere which tried to channel these sentiments into war mobilization. It has been shown that demonstration was a form of social action which was often resorted to as a tool of social mobilization and war propaganda. The demonstrations that were held both when the capitulations were abolished and when the holy war was announced provided perfect miniature representations for the desired popular mobilization, in which people and the state were met by the mediator associations for a common goal. This chapter has also argued that oral propaganda methods were widely used in this process and they contributed to other methods of mobilization in preparing society for war.

But could the fact that there was no organized voice against the war in the public sphere be really taken as evidence to argue that all Ottomans enthusiastically supported the decision? Though this chapter did not try to answer this question directly, the above discussion includes enough points which imply that no such generalizations could be made. When the mobilization called all eligible Ottomans to military service, did they willingly enlist? How did the call continue throughout the war? Did conscription procedures face any resistance from people during the war?

Could the discourse of regeneration at the outbreak of the war always justify the call to arms during the war? How did the Ottomans respond to this call when the war became prolonged and increasingly wearisome? How did the state respond when it faced resistance from its people to the call to arms? The following chapters of this dissertation will seek answers to such questions and show that the call to arms would involve a constant effort to convince people and to cope with resistance coming from them.

CHAPTER 3

CONSCRIPTION UNDER TOTAL WAR CONDITIONS

The French Revolution's *levée en masse* was enacted by the Convention on 23 August 1793 to confront the threats of a multi-front war with foreign powers and of rebellions at home by summoning all able-bodied men to defend the "nation". The levy was regarded as an action that would put into practice Rousseau's prescription in the Social Contract that "every citizen should be a soldier by duty, not by trade."²⁷⁶ The mass levy ushered in a new system of universal male conscription by creating the image of an entire nation its arms. Whereas the French revolutionary mass levy was an *ad hoc* measure, conscription acquired a systematic form in the age of Napoleon.²⁷⁷ But it was the mid-nineteenth century Prussian model which gave the system a more established obligatory character and formed a military structure drafting large numbers of men in an efficient way.²⁷⁸ Conscription not only increased the efficiency of armies but perhaps more importantly, formed new relations between state and society. It signalled an intrusion of the state into people's lives and created an area of contention between the state and society. Conscription can also be depicted as a battleground between "individual and local communities on the one hand and a distant impersonal state on the other."²⁷⁹ While the universality and citizenship-based nature of conscription was sometimes abandoned for less

²⁷⁶ Isser Woloch, *The New Regime: Transformation of the French Civic Order, 1789-1820s* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), p. 382.

²⁷⁷ Isser Woloch, "Napoleonic Conscription: State Power and Civil Society", *Past and Present*, no. 111 (1986), pp. 110-122.

²⁷⁸ On the reorganization of the conscription system in Prussia especially after the defeat of the Prussian army at Jena in 1806, see Thomas Hippler, *Citizens, Soldiers and National Armies: Military Service in France and Germany, 1789-1830* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 163-189.

²⁷⁹ Woloch, *The New Regime*, p. 380; Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. viii.

egalitarian models such as lotteries, substitutions and replacements, and the burden was frequently shifted to the lower classes and the peasantry, military service in nineteenth-century Europe was envisioned as a way of creating a new form of loyalty towards the state, as a form of nationalist socialization, and a new system of drill and training to ensure military efficiency.²⁸⁰ As such, universal conscription as both a means of creating an efficient military power and nationalist socialization occupied a primary place in all modernization projects in the nineteenth century, from Russia to Japan, and to the Ottoman Empire.

On the eve of the Great War, all the major belligerent powers had conscription systems, except for Britain, which switched from a volunteer system to an obligatory draft in 1916. The war experience re-shaped all existing conscription systems in one way or another. This chapter will focus on the Ottoman experience with conscription during the Great War. Although Ottoman conscription was inspired by European models and had started with the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century, it had a unique history largely determined by its own internal dynamics and problems. As will be discussed below, due to deep-seated infrastructural problems, the Ottomans always had to amalgamate old imperial ways of recruitment with modern conscription methods. This problem continued during the Great War, although the state became increasingly capable of merging old ways with the new in an efficient way and some problems became less challenging as a result of modernization efforts.

²⁸⁰ Lars Mjose and Stephen Van Holde, "Killing for the State, Dying for the Nation: An Introductory Essay on the Life Cycle of Conscription into Europe's Armed Forces", in Lars Mjose and Stephen Van Holde (eds), *The Comparative Study of Conscription in the Armed Forces* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2002), pp. 9, 51.

Moreover, while the Ottoman elite were aware of the universal conscription system's potential in contributing to the creation of an "Ottoman nation" out of a multi-religious and multi-ethnic population, the Ottoman conscription system had always remained predominantly a Muslim institution in practice. The state's distrust towards non-Muslim elements and the latter's reluctance to recruitment had given a discriminatory character to the Ottoman conscription system. This aspect continued and, in fact, intensified toward an increasingly aggressive Turkish nationalist form during the war. This occurred despite the CUP government's pragmatic efforts to join all elements of Ottoman society in the mobilization effort.

This chapter will also argue that Ottoman conscription practice during the war formed a new relationship between the state and society. State power permeated into deeper and uncharted levels of society due to the creation of new institutions and methods at the local level. But in this process of penetration, the state also encountered more directly and frequently the responses, demands and resistance of people, which in turn played an important role in re-shaping the Ottoman mobilization experience.

The Uneasy Evolution of the Ottoman Conscription System

The principle of universal male conscription was one of the major goals of the Tanzimat reforms which aimed to create an Ottoman citizenry. However, the implementation of conscription had been never complete and it was never used successfully as an instrument of Ottoman nation-building.²⁸¹ This incompleteness

²⁸¹ The history of the Ottoman conscription system in the pre-Great War era has been relatively better studied. However, the available studies either focus almost entirely on the pre-Great War era, or pay only cursory attention to the Great War period. See, for example, Hakan Erdem, "Recruitment for the 'Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad' in the Arab Provinces, 1826-1828", in Israel Gershoni, Hakan

had to do with two major problems. The first one was infrastructural: the system of universal conscription required a reliable census to determine where the potential manpower could be found. Such a demographic mechanism then necessitated a sizeable growth in the state bureaucracy, which would include an efficient recruitment organization, economic power to supply provisions to conscripts, and security forces and efficient sanctions to combat draft evading and desertion. Furthermore, recruits from the countryside had to be educated and trained.²⁸² Nineteenth-century Ottoman modernization achieved progress in these respects, but never to the extent that would bring about a remarkable success.

Secondly, whereas the universality of conscription was accepted in principle, the non-Muslim Ottomans practically remained outside of the actual system. The Reform Decree (*Islahat Fermanı*) of 1856 extended the obligation of military service to non-Muslims but allowed for exemption upon payment of an exemption fee (*bedel-i nakdî*). Buying exemptions in this way “became the norm for non-Muslims, and the fee replaced the *cizye*, the tax that the *şeriat* required of non-Muslims.”²⁸³ Therefore, non-Muslims avoided military service in practice until 1909.²⁸⁴ In fact,

Erdem and Ursula Woköck (eds.), *Histories of the Middle East: New Directions* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 189-206; Faruk Aydın, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Tanzimat'tan Sonra Askere Alma Kanunları, (1839-1914)*, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1994); Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Sürecinde Türkiye: Askerlik* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2008); Tobias Heinzelmann, *Cihaddan Vatan Savunmasına: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Genel Askerlik Yükümlülüğü, 1826-1856*, trans. Türkis Noyan (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2009); Ufuk Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni* (Istanbul: Simurg, 2000); Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, “Inclusion and Exclusion: Conscription in the Ottoman Empire”, *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2007), pp. 264-286; Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918”.

²⁸² Jan Lucassen and Erik Jan Zürcher, “Introduction: Conscription and Resistance. The Historical Context”, in Zürcher (ed.), *Arming the State*, p. 10.

²⁸³ Carter V. Findley, “Tanzimat”, in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Vol. 4: Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 19.

²⁸⁴ This does not mean that there were no non-Muslims in the Ottoman army before this date. There were non-Muslim Ottoman soldiers before, but they were almost entirely medical officers, who were mostly Armenians and Greeks holding the ranks of lieutenant and captain. Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918”, p. 89.

even some of the most important Tanzimat reformer statesmen tended to show disinclination towards drafting the non-Muslim Ottomans for active service. For example, the approach of Ahmed Cevdet Paşa (1822-1895), an important statesman, historian and jurist who had occupied important bureaucratic positions during the Tanzimat era, is quite representative in this sense. At a governmental commission gathered after the Crimean War to discuss the need to extend the Ottoman conscription system to more elements in the empire, he stated that recruiting non-Muslims for active military service would actually produce more problems than it would solve. He argued that because of the idea of “fatherland” (*vatan*) had not been developed, Islam was the main motive for mobilization in the Ottoman army. The pasha stressed that mixing different religions in the army would make it difficult to establish a solid base for the morale of troops. He also pointed to more practical problems that would emerge in the case of drafting different religious elements, such as the difficulty in providing enough religious facilities within the military for men of all religions to perform their religious services. But more importantly, although he did not express it overtly, we can sense a certain uneasiness and disturbance regarding his views of who should have the dominant status in the armed forces. As the pasha put it, “Could a Private Hasan obey a Captain Hristo whose order would send him to death in combat?”²⁸⁵

Moreover, universality did not mean that all able-bodied Muslim males of military age would be obliged to serve in the military as there was an extensive system of exemptions for Muslim Ottomans as well. Until more restrictive regulations were put into effect in 1909, 1914 and during the Great War, many

²⁸⁵ “*Nefer Hasan kendüsünü ölüme sevk edecek yüzbaşı Hristo'ya bir dar vakitte itaat eyliyecek mi?*” Quoted in Suavi Aydın, “Toplumun Militarizasyonu: Zorunlu Askerlik Sisteminin ve Ulusal Orduların Yurttaş Yaratma Sürecindeki Rolü”, in Ö. Heval Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci (eds.), *Çarklardaki Kum: Vicdani Red* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), p. 29.

people in the empire had the right to be exempt from military service. These included members of the ulema, medrese students, residents of Istanbul and the Hijaz province, high and even middle-ranking bureaucrats, and males who were the only breadwinners (*muin*) of their families. The system of exemptions through legal rights or exemption fee meant that the obligation of military service was never extended equally to all Ottoman subjects. Consequently, contrary to the early expectation that the universal conscription system would contribute to Ottoman equality and unity, the Ottoman army practically “remained an army of Anatolian Muslim peasants, in a sense foreshadowing the establishment of a Turkish nation-state in Anatolia after World War I.”²⁸⁶

In fact, a move to make the conscription system more extensive in practice came as late as 1909. The 1908 Revolution and the subsequent restoration of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 ushered in an era of re-thinking of constitutional rights and obligations, including conscription, on a wider basis. Discussions of the conscription system’s alleged function of uniting different peoples and increasing loyalty to the existing state were resumed. For example, the pro-CUP editor of the daily *Tanin*, Hüseyin Cahid, wrote on 23 June 1909 that the most effective means for amalgamating peoples of different races, religions and sects living in the Ottoman Empire was “comradeship in arms” (*silah arkadaşlığı*).²⁸⁷ New regulations began to take effect a year after the revolution. On 7 August 1909, the exemption fee practice was abolished and military service was made compulsory for all Ottoman subjects.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918”, p. 91.

²⁸⁷ *Tanin*, 10 Haziran 1325/23 June 1909, cited in Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, p. 128.

²⁸⁸ “Anasır-ı Gayrimüslimenin Kuraları Hakkında Kanun”, 25 Temmuz 1325/7 August 1909, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 1, p. 420.

In October 1909, the conscription of all eligible male Ottomans regardless of religion was ordered for the first time.²⁸⁹

At this time, the aura of the “equality” principle of the 1908 Revolution had not disappeared just yet. Therefore, the extension of military service to non-Muslim groups of the empire received a certain amount of approval, if not an enthusiastic embrace, from the representatives of non-Muslim communities. This approval also contained an expectation for the promotion of their status in Ottoman society. For example, Ohannes Vartkes (Serengülyan), an Armenian member of the Ottoman Parliament from Erzurum, said: “No Ottoman has the right to be exempted from military service... I ask for the recruitment of Muslims and non-Muslims alike... Military service is an obligation of honor.”²⁹⁰ Another influential Armenian political figure, Krikor Zohrab, a deputy of Istanbul, considered the equal military service obligation as an important step towards the creation of a solid Ottoman citizenship and described it as “a matter of brotherhood.”²⁹¹ Similarly, the Grand Rabbi of the Jewish community, Haim Nahum Efendi, who had had political ties with the Young Turks since the preparation for the revolution, openly supported the idea of obligatory military service for Ottoman Jews and worked to convince his congregation in this respect.²⁹² However, while non-Muslim Ottoman representatives accepted the idea in principle, they also requested that Ottoman authorities execute various reorganizations in the military to make life easier for prospective non-Muslim enlisted men. For example, the religious authorities of the Ottoman Greek and Armenian communities demanded that soldiers of their communities serve in

²⁸⁹ Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918”, p. 89.

²⁹⁰ Quoted in Hacısalihoğlu, “Inclusion and Exclusion”, p. 278-279.

²⁹¹ Koptaş, “Meşrutiyet Döneminin Umut ve Umutsuzluk Sarkacında Ermeni Devrimci Partileri ve Krikor Zohrab”, pp. 73-74.

²⁹² Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 153-154.

separate and ethnically and religiously uniform units which would be commanded by Christian officers.²⁹³ They also demanded that Christian priests should be introduced into the army to perform religious services for Christian units, that conversion should be forbidden during military service, and that special places for religious duties should be offered to Christian soldiers in their barracks.²⁹⁴

On the other hand, an equally important aspect was that the effort to make the military service obligation more extensive was not confined to the non-Muslim communities. As has been mentioned above, the Ottoman conscription system had always included a long list of exemptions for Muslims as well. The 1909 regulations also included measures to remove, or at least to restrict, certain exemptions for Muslims, which were regarded as unnecessary and unfair. And important steps were taken in this direction. For instance, one of the first things to be reconsidered was the exemption status of the medrese students. Attending a medrese had become a common and easy legal way to escape conscription, and had been extensively abused for this purpose. It was decided in 1909 that students in the medreses who had not passed their exams in time were no longer exempted from military service.²⁹⁵ The inhabitants of Istanbul also lost their exemption status. Moreover, the new military service law of 1909 also extended the conscription to the residents of the provinces of Hijaz, Yemen, Tripolitania (Trabulusgarp), Scutari (İşkodra), Hawran (a sub-

²⁹³ Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918", p. 89.

²⁹⁴ Hacısalihoglu, "Inclusion and Exclusion", p. 280; Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, pp. 142-143.

²⁹⁵ Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918", p. 89. This was, in fact, a measure that had been planned in 1892 by Adbülhamid II, but neglected for some pragmatic political reasons. See, Amit Bein, "Politics, Military Conscription, and Religious Education in the Late Ottoman Empire", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006), pp. 283-301.

province of Syria) and Basra, which previously had remained outside the conscription system due to their autonomous status.²⁹⁶

However, although the new military service law of 1909 aimed to be more extensive and inclusive, it could neither overcome deep-seated setbacks in practice, nor produce a standardized set of regulations based on an efficient recruitment organization within the military. First of all, an all-embracing system of modern conscription was doomed to remain a utopia in certain regions of the empire, where the state suffered from major infrastructural problems in establishing its power and fulfilling basic functions such as demographic control that was necessary to implement a workable recruitment system. Therefore, though it was declared that they would be included in the system, this declaration only remained on paper, and the state was never able to realize the conscription process in such “distant” provinces as the Hijaz, Yemen and Tripolitania, where its ability to penetrate society was at a very low level. The Ottoman state would have to suspend the military service obligation in these provinces from the beginning. Instead of insisting on applying the standard procedure, the state chose to announce that the residents of these provinces would be welcomed if they wanted to join the army as “volunteers”, for which local administrators were urged to encourage people in their localities.²⁹⁷

Secondly, although Ottoman authorities declared their commitment to remove the exemption fee practice, and the law of 1909 abolished it on paper, it actually remained in use. As authorities sometimes confessed outright, the state would never dare to abolish it entirely. Ottoman authorities seem to have been content with making only some modifications in the application of the exemption fee law, since the money that they collected from the exemption fee served to compensate for the

²⁹⁶ Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, p. 136.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

recurrent budget deficits and financial burdens. Therefore, as regards the exemption fee issue, some sort of “dual practice” appeared after 1909.²⁹⁸ While it was not as common as it had been before, avoiding military service by paying a certain amount of money continued to be an alternative, especially for economically better-off strata of society.

Moreover, although the effort to extend the conscription to all Ottomans was presented as a move to realize the idea of Ottoman equality, the non-Muslim men of military age never accepted it with enthusiasm, despite official approval of it by their representatives. On the contrary, a remarkable resistance to the obligatory military service on the part of Ottoman non-Muslims appeared in various ways. Draft-evasion and desertion began to be a common problem (See Chapter 6). New ways of avoidance were also invented. For example, since the existence of the Capitulations offered many legal exemptions for foreign citizens residing in the Ottoman Empire, acquiring citizenship of a foreign country became a pseudo-legal tactic of escaping military service. For this purpose, many Ottoman Greeks got Greek citizenship and many Armenians acquired a Russian passport. Moreover, travelling to a foreign country to stay long enough to evade military service was also another tactic frequently used by the non-Muslim Ottomans to avoid service. The USA and Egypt were the favorite destinations for those who chose this option.²⁹⁹

Of course, there were non-Muslim Ottomans drafted in the Ottoman army for active service after 1909. Not all non-Muslims showed resistance to the new law, and the available ways to avoid the military service were actually only open to economically well-off people, who had enough money to pay the exemption fee or

²⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 129-132.

²⁹⁹ Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918”, p. 89; Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, pp. 145-146.

network relations in foreign countries which would help them travel there to evade service. There was no other legal way than to obey the obligation for those who did not have these. The Ottoman army included non-Muslim Ottomans during the Balkan War of 1912-13. But some problems persisted. For example, the above-mentioned demands of non-Muslims to have religious facilities or to form religiously-ethnically homogenous units within the army were never adequately met. Secondly, their physical and mental training period before being sent to the front during the Balkan War was usually not sufficient. Therefore, reluctance and disappointment of the non-Muslim Ottoman soldiers during the Balkan War were what struck outside observers first.³⁰⁰

In fact, reluctance was observed as a general problem characterizing the whole Ottoman army in the Balkan War, and it was attributed by official circles to the lack of a systematic propaganda emphasizing the necessity to fight in the war.³⁰¹ Nor was resistance to conscription a problem unique to non-Muslims after the 1909 regulations. Similar forms of resistance and discontent also appeared on the part of the Muslim Ottomans who lost their exemption status. For example, the decision to draft those medrese students who failed to pass their exams in time made many people, not just the medrese students, quite unhappy, because there had been many fake medrese students, among them were even illiterate peasants, who had abused this way to avoid military service.³⁰² Moreover, the move to draft men from the

³⁰⁰ Troçki [Trotsky], *Balkan Savaşları*, pp. 190, 232-233.

³⁰¹ *Balkan Harbi (1912-1913), vol. 1: Harbin Sebepleri, Askeri Hazırlıklar ve Osmanlı Devletinin Harbe Girişi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1970), p. 79.

³⁰² Zürcher, *Turkey*, p. 98. On this problem, a contemporary observer recorded: "A great panic emerged among those who evaded military service through a *medrese* connection. This *medrese* issue had been so much abused that even illiterate people, particularly peasants could escape from military service by becoming fake *medrese* students in an illegal way. The decision to abolish this exemption affected these people most." Halil Ataman, *Esaret Yılları*, ed. by Ferhat Ecer (Istanbul: Kardeşler Matbaası, 1990), p. 19.

regions which had previously remained outside the recruitment system caused the emergence of acts of resistance in those regions. For example, after the 1909 regulations, the Ottoman state had to deal with occasional rebellions against the draft, which came from various sections of the Laz and the Kurds in Anatolia, and the Arabs in Arab provinces.³⁰³ Similar acts of resistance, mostly in the forms of draft-evasion and desertion, sometimes also appeared on the part of the Anatolian Muslim-Turkish population, the backbone of the Ottoman army. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, such forms of resistance constituted a serious problem during the Great War.

Finally, despite the attempts at reforming it with new legal regulations after 1909, the execution of the Ottoman conscription system in practice greatly failed at the mobilization during the Balkan War. Because of both infrastructural insufficiencies and lack of legal standardization, the mobilization performance of the Ottoman army had never been able to reach a satisfactory level. The failed mobilization on the home front significantly contributed to the humiliating defeat of the Ottoman army on the battlefield. A large literature consisting of usually short treatises emerged just after the defeat to make a general assessment of the situation and to understand what went wrong. In such treatises, various contemporary Ottoman observers ranging from high and middle-ranking officers to middle-class Young Turk intellectuals insistently emphasized that insufficient and poorly planned recruitment had been among the major factors that brought about the defeat.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, pp. 166-170.

³⁰⁴ See, for example, Major Asım [Gündüz], *Balkan Harbinde Neden Münhezim Olduk?* (Istanbul: Kitabhane-i İslam ve Askeri, 1329/1913); Tüccarzade İbrahim Hilmi, *Balkan Harbi'nde Askeri Mağlubiyetlerimizin Esbâbı* (Istanbul: Kitabhane-i İslam ve Askeri, 1329/1913); Selânikli Bahri, *Balkan Harbi'nde Garb Ordusu* (Istanbul: Çiftçi Kitabhanesi, 1331/1915).

Reforms after the Balkan Defeat

First of all, it was the Ottoman military itself which really needed to make a general evaluation about its own performance after the Balkan defeat. The humiliating defeat led Ottoman authorities to conclude that there was the necessity of bringing in “a new spirit and enthusiasm” to the army, for which an overall reform and reorganization in the army was needed.³⁰⁵ Reforming the army was a primary agenda of the CUP government which established a one-party rule after taking over the administration by a coup (*Babiâli Baskını*) on 23 January 1913. The coup not only initiated a new period during which radical military reforms were expedited, but was also seen as “a prologue establishing the military as the political ruling group. In this capacity the officers were actively engaged in making major policy decisions and in cooperating, but on their own terms, with the politicians.”³⁰⁶ General Mahmud Şevket Pasha was appointed as the grand vizier and the minister of war on the same date. After less than a month, the Regulation for the General Organization of the Military (*Teşkilat-ı Umumiye-i Askeriye Nizamnamesi*) was issued on 14 February 1913 to execute organizational reforms concerning the army.³⁰⁷ Mahmud Şevket Pasha’s assassination on 11 June 1913 did not stop the reforms, which continued during the war ministry of Ahmed İzzet Pasha. But a major overhaul began to take place when Enver Pasha replaced Ahmed İzzet Pasha as the minister of war on 3 January 1914.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6 (1908-1920), p. 192.

³⁰⁶ M. Naim Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military and Ottoman Collapse* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 286.

³⁰⁷ For the complete text of the regulation, see *Osmanlı Ordu Teşkilatı* (Ankara: Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, 1999), pp. 147-161.

³⁰⁸ Enver remained at this post through the end of the war, until 14 October 1918. In his capacity during this period he also served as the acting commanding general of the Ottoman army (the titular commander in chief was the sultan) and as the chief of the General Staff. Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, pp. 4-5.

This process also included a foreign contribution, when the Ottoman state signed a contract with the German military on 14 December 1913, after which the German Military Mission, under the leadership of Liman von Sanders, came to the Ottoman Empire to help reform the armed forces.³⁰⁹ The German Military Mission not only provided help for the reorganization of the army, but also offered useful advice to revise the recruitment system and the mobilization plans according to the Prussian-German experience.³¹⁰ That the Mission was expected to help improve the Ottoman conscription system was already agreed in the contract signed with the German military.³¹¹ The German contribution to the revision and execution of the Ottoman mobilization plans also continued after the secret treaty of alliance signed between the Ottoman and German states on 2 August 1914, and also after the Ottoman entry into the war on the German side.³¹² German Colonel Fritz Bronsart von Schellendorf, who was the Second Assistant Chief of the Ottoman General Staff and worked in close collaboration with Enver Pasha, played an active role in re-shaping the Ottoman mobilization scheme by bringing advice from the German model.³¹³ As a result, it can be argued that the Ottoman conscription system during the Great War was influenced by the Prussian-German conscription experience,

³⁰⁹ Similar agreements were also made with other European countries in the same period. The Ottomans invited a British mission to help reform the navy and a French mission to improve the gendarmerie. But the British and French missions left the country when the Great War began. See *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, vol. 1, pp. 179-180.

³¹⁰ For a post-war account the German Military Mission by a German officer-historian who also served in the mission, see Carl Mühlman, *İmparatorluğun Sonu, 1914: Osmanlı Savaşa Neden ve Nasıl Girdi? (Die Berufung der deutschen Militärmission nach der Türkei 1913, das deutsch-türkische Bündnis 1914 und der Eintritt der Türkei in den Weltkrieg)*, trans. Kadir Kon (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2009), pp. 13-55.

³¹¹ “Alman Islâh Heyeti Sözleşmesi”, in *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, Vol. 1, Appendix 11, pp. 275-278; Jehuda L. Wallach, *Bir Askeri Yardımın Anatomisi: Türkiye’de Prusya-Alman Askeri Heyetleri, 1835-1919*, trans. Fahri Çeliker (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1977), p. 115; Mühlman, 1914, p. 158.

³¹² Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Pocket Books, 2006), p. 104.

³¹³ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 135.

while in practice it continued to work relying on its own past experience and current dynamics.

One of the first moves which were executed by the War Minister Enver Pasha targeted the high-ranking officer corps. About 1,300 elderly high-ranking officers were involuntarily retired from the army, whose performance during the Balkan War had been greatly questioned. They were regarded as unqualified for high command posts and an obstruction to the modernization effort. They were replaced by younger and pro-CUP officers.³¹⁴ But the main effort concentrated on reorganizing the inner structure and revising the deployment of the army. In this respect, the Ottoman army was reconstituted by forming 13 corps' zones and 2 independent divisions' zones. While some modifications and additions would be made in wartime, this new structure made up the main framework of the Ottoman armed forces during the Great War.³¹⁵ The army and corps structure of the Ottoman military was as follows when the Ottoman state entered the Great War:

The details of the restructuring process of the Ottoman army are out of the scope of this chapter. To sum up, it can be said that the main aim of the process was to create a highly efficient army structure, which could easily and rapidly be put into a wartime situation when needed. And it was expected that wartime preparation could be done not by forming entirely new divisions, but only by reinforcing the available ones with additional troops.³¹⁶ What rather concerns us here regarding the subject matter of this chapter is that the new structuring of the army was closely and

³¹⁴ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6*, p. 220; Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, p. 340; Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 9.

³¹⁵ Kaymakam Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı: İlanından beri mükellefiyeti askeriye ile alakadar neşr edilen kavanini ve bunların izahatını havi, her mükellefe ve mükelleflerle alakadar olanlara vaziyet-i askeriyelerini tayin için lazım bir kitabdır* (Istanbul: Kitabhane-i İslam ve Askeri, 1331/1915), p. 12.

³¹⁶ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6*, pp. 220-221.

significantly depended on the recruitment system for its vitality, and required a large number of additional troops within a short period of time. In other words, in order for the new army structure to be efficient, there needed to be an efficient conscription system.

Table 1
Disposition of the Ottoman Armed Forces, November 1914³¹⁷

<i>armies and regions</i>	<i>corps and zones</i>
<p>First Army in Thrace</p> <p>Second Army in Thrace (previously in Syria)</p> <p>Third Army in the Caucasus/Eastern Anatolia</p> <p>Fourth Army in Syria</p> <p>The Iraq Area Command in Mesopotamia</p> <p>independent units in Arabia and Yemen</p> <p>Fortified Area Command in İzmir</p>	<p>I Corps (Istanbul) II Corps (Edirne) III Corps (Tekirdağ/Gallipoli) IV Corps (Bandırma/İzmir) 1st Cavalry Brigade (Edirne) V Corps (İzmit/Ankara) VI Corps (Aleppo, then to Çatalca)</p> <p>IX Corps (Erzurum) X Corps (Samsun/Sivas) XI Corps (Hasankale/Mamuretülaziz) XIII Corps (newly formed, moving to Third Army) Reserve Cavalry Divisions (4) Van Gendarmerie Division VIII Corps (Damascus/Jerusalem) XII Corps (Aleppo/Homs)</p> <p>38th Division</p> <p>VII Corps (Yemen) 21st Independent Divison (Hijaz) 22nd Independent Division (Asir)</p>

³¹⁷ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Vol. 1*, pp. 233-234; Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 43.

The new structure required about 500,000 troops in total, while the number of the available troops in the army was approximately 295,000 in 1913.³¹⁸ In fact, this number in 1913 had further decreased to as low as around 200,000 due to discharges after the Balkan War.³¹⁹ According to the calculations made in summer 1914, a total of 477,868 drafted men and 12,469 officers were needed to bring the army to full wartime situation.³²⁰ This remarkable and sudden increase could be made possible by an efficient and extensive recruitment system which would work effectively under actual mobilization conditions. For this, the existing conscription system, which had been characterized by many setbacks from the beginning and turned out unsatisfactory during the Balkan War, needed to be revised and reformed. Moreover, a revision in the conscription system was needed also because the manpower pool of the empire was considerably reshaped after the Balkan War. In addition to about 340,000 casualties³²¹ and loss of territories in the Balkans, the immigration of around 400,000 Muslim refugees³²² from the lost territories into the empire also changed the demographic composition from which the military was to be fed.

Under these circumstances, a new law for military service was prepared and it was issued on 12 May 1914.³²³ Considered in its entirety, the new law aimed to make radical changes in three major matters, which, it had been observed by authorities and observers, had exerted deteriorating effects on the Ottoman military performance

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 199.

³¹⁹ Larcher, *La Guerre Turque dans la Guerre Mondiale*, p. 66.

³²⁰ Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 7.

³²¹ Erickson estimates that the number of total Ottoman casualties during the Balkan Wars was about 340,000, of which 50,000 were killed in action, 75,000 died of disease, 100,000 were wounded, and 115,000 were prisoners of war. See Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, p. 329.

³²² MacCarthy, *Death and Exile*, p. 161.

³²³ “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati” (The Temporary Law for Military Service), 29 Nisan 1330/12 May 1914, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 6, pp. 662-704.

in previous mobilization experiences.³²⁴ First of all, by preparing a new law for conscription, the main concern of Ottoman authorities was to have an efficient recruitment mechanism which would hasten a possible future mobilization and would easily meet its demands in the course of it. Moreover, the new law emphasized the importance of the training of drafted men in modern warfare as much as their number. So, the point was not only to draft as many men as possible in case of need, but also to provide drafted men with necessary training in a defined period of time. This also involved a reorganization of the units which were particularly designed for training.

Secondly, the new law aimed to tackle the problem of exemptions. The Ottoman conscription system had been characterized by a long list of exemptions from its beginning. The 1909 regulations tried to make a revision in this respect, but they were not so successful in practice. The new law of 1914 targeted to minimize exemptions, allowing only for really necessary ones. The law also aimed to make the military service obligation more extensive to draft more segments of society for active service, including the non-Muslim Ottomans. While a discourse of Ottoman equality, which emphasized the need “to oblige equally everybody to defend the fatherland”,³²⁵ accompanied this objective, the real aim was more pragmatic: getting the maximum number of draftees from the population for the military. In accord with the aim to extend the obligation, there was also the intention to abolish, or at least to restrict, the exemption fee application.

Thirdly, the reorganization of the Ottoman army also created a need for additional officers especially for middle and low ranking command posts. It was also

³²⁴ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, pp. 6-7. Also see Tarık Tevfik (ed.), *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanunu* (Istanbul: İkbal Kitabhanesi, 1330/1914).

³²⁵ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 6.

estimated that this need would further increase in a prospective mobilization. To compensate for this need, the new law tried to improve the recruitment of reserve officers, which involved drafting the graduates of higher education institutions.

The possibility of a general mobilization became reality only about three months after the announcement of the law, and it was at that point that the actual process of testing began for the above-mentioned objectives. Contrary to the general expectation for a short war at the beginning, this process would actually last four long and wearisome years. As will be revealed below, the objectives formulated in 1914 were never achieved entirely during the war, just like the evolution of the conscription system since the Tanzimat could never be completed. However, this did not mean that the Ottoman mobilization effort in the Great War entirely failed, like it did greatly during the Balkan War. The Great War constituted a process of reshaping for the Ottoman conscription practice. It was a process during which the objectives that were formulated at the beginning had to be redefined and revised according to the actual war conditions and the responses coming from people. While some objectives needed to be reshaped during the war, some had to be given up and some entirely new ones emerged. It was a reshaping process also for the mediating institutions which executed the conscription at the social level. Although the law for military service itself also needed to be revised several times with various amendments as the need for manpower increased during the war, it still remained in effect throughout the war without major changes.³²⁶

³²⁶ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 236.

Conscription after the Declaration of Mobilization

The Ottoman general mobilization was declared on 2 August 1914 and the next day, 3 August was declared the start of mobilization. The military order for mobilization required that all corps prepare for war.³²⁷ When the mobilization was declared, the men born in 1891, 1892 and 1893 were already under arms. Other than these, the mobilization program also required drafting those born in the years from 1875 through 1890, namely the active reserve (*ih̄tiyat*)³²⁸ men aged from 24 to 40. Then the men born in the years from 1868 through 1874, namely the territorial reserve (*m̄üstahfiz*), men aged from 40 to 45, were also called up for service. In other words, when the mobilization was declared, the eligible men aged from 20 to 45 were required to join the armed forces.³²⁹ But this initial age requirements for draft became insufficient to fill in the gaps in manpower in military units as the war continued and new arrangements were made in the following years. For example, the minimum age for draft was decreased to as low as 18 on 29 April 1915.³³⁰ Then the maximum age for recruitment was increased to as high as 50 on 20 March 1916.³³¹

Moreover, according to the regulation issued by the War Ministry about the

³²⁷ The mobilization order did not apply to the 7th Independent Corps in Arabia, the 21st Division in Asir and the 22nd Division in the Hijaz, where there was no established system of conscription. *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 225.

³²⁸ According to the law for military service of 1914, there were 3 three terms of service for a draftee: beginning with the conscription, the first 2 years were for active army service (*nizam*); then 16 years were for active reserve service (*ih̄tiyat*); and, finally, 7 more years for territorial reserve service (*m̄üstahfiz*). The total period of service was 25 years. 2 year active army service was actually for the infantry; it varied for the gendarmerie and the navy; it was 3 years for the former, 5 years for the latter. However, according to the Article 6 of the law, active army services in all military classes could be extended in wartime, which actually happened during the Great War. “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatı”, p. 663.

³²⁹ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 288; “45 Yaşına Kadar Olanların Hizmet-i Askeriye İle Mükellefiyetleri Hakkında Kanun-ı Muvakkat”, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 6, p. 913.

³³⁰ “16 Cemaziyelahir 1332 Tarihli Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatının 2, 3, 4, 5. Maddelerine Muaddel Kanun-ı Muvakkat”, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 7, p. 589.

³³¹ “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriyenin 50 Yaşına kadar Temdidi ve Teferruatı hakkında Kanun”, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 8, p. 730.

implementation of the law for military service, the duration of military service could also be extended in the case of a mobilization until a special order was issued to determine when it would end.³³² In practice this meant that enlisted men would have to serve till the end of the war.³³³

The Ottoman General Staff believed that the empire had the potential to mobilize about two million men available for service. This was about 10 percent of its general population that was close to 23 million on the eve of the war.³³⁴ According to an estimate, each age cohort consisted of about ninety thousand men. The General Staff also calculated that about one million men were easily available for immediate recruitment in case of urgent need, and the mobile field army would have an effective strength of 460,000 drafted men and 14,500 officers. Additionally, there would be about 42,000 thousand men in mobile gendarmerie units. In total, the Ottoman Empire planned to prepare about 500,000 men in mobile operational units, and the remainder of mobilized troops would serve in fortress garrisons, coastal defenses and to support the lines of communications and transportations.³³⁵

It is interesting that the initial stage of the Ottoman mobilization program, from the start on 3 August to the expected date of completion of getting ready for war on 25 September 1914, performed well in terms of gathering men. Due to the memory of catastrophic failure of the mobilization during the Balkan War and the fact that the post-Balkan War military reforms were quite fresh and untested, there

³³² BOA, MV., 196/116, 9 Rebiulâhir 1333/24 February 1915.

³³³ BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M., 15/24, 14 Şa'ban 1332/8 July 1914.

³³⁴ Of these 23 million, around 17 million lived within the borders of present-day Turkey, more than 3 million in Syria and Palestine including Lebanon and Jordan, and about 2.5 million in present-day Iraq. Additionally, about 5.5 million lived in Yemen and Hijaz. See Pamuk, "The Ottoman Economy in World War I", p. 112. On the Ottoman population in 1914, also see Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, pp. 170-190; Vedat Eldem, *Harp ve Mütareke Yıllarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Ekonomisi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1994), p. 4.

³³⁵ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, Vol. 1, p. 182; Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 7.

were actually serious doubts that the Ottomans would be successful in another large-scale mobilization for war. Therefore, expectations were not so high. But the numbers of recruited men passed all expectations soon after mobilization was declared.³³⁶ This situation even drew the attention of foreign observers, as in the case of a British consulate report from Edirne to Ambassador Louis Mallet in Istanbul on 12 September 1914, which stated that the mobilization effort in the province had been carried out “more rapidly and smoothly than was the case on the last occasion”, namely during the Balkan War.³³⁷ Another British consulate report, sent from Tarabya (a Bosphorous neighborhood having where several European states’ consulates had summer residences) on 13 August 1914, caught the same remarkable human dimension of the mobilization effort, but made a more careful and realistic observation about its lack of completeness in other respects: “although the existing Turkish army is said to be ‘mobilised’ this only applies to numbers of men and should not be accepted in the sense of the complete mobilisation of a European army. For, horses, equipment, supplies and stores of all sorts are lacking, not to speak of the insufficiency of artillery.”³³⁸

The response to the call to arms was obviously much better than it had been during the Balkan War. But it was not standard geographically. It was better in western and central Anatolia and not so good in eastern Anatolia and the Arab provinces. The units in Yemen and Hijaz (almost entire Arabia) were never mobilized, and the need for drafted men of XI, XII and XIII corps, which were

³³⁶ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 288; *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi*, vol 1, p. 226; *Ordre de Bataille of the Turkish Army*, corrected to August 16, 1915, Fifth Edition, Prepared at the Intelligence Department, General Staff, Cairo (Cairo: Government Press, 1915), p. 120; Baron Kress von Kressenstein, *Türklerle Beraber Süveyş Kanalına*, trans. Mazhar Besim Özalpsan (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1943), p. 13; “Hükümet-i Osmaniye'nin Seferberliği”, *İkdâm*, 14 Ağustos 1330/27 August 1914; “Seferberlik Esnasında”, *Tanin*, 24 Eylül 1330/7 October 1914.

³³⁷ TNA:PRO FO 195-2456 (1914, Turkey, Pre-War).

³³⁸ TNA:PRO FO 195-2459 (1914, Turkey, Pre-War).

stationed respectively in Mamuretülaziz (eastern Anatolia), Mosul and Baghdad, could not be fulfilled entirely due to the high amount of draft evasion and desertion.³³⁹

While the availability of abundant drafted men initially caused much contentment among Ottoman authorities and even the Sultan Mehmed Reşad V expressed gratitude on this “ardor and patriotism” coming from his people,³⁴⁰ it must actually also be considered as a sign of weakness in the Ottoman mobilization. The existing Ottoman military structure was not ready to absorb too many drafted men, as their number quickly exceeded the available capacity. Other than the problem of employing them in regular units which were already full, more serious problems arose, such as supplying them with enough food and clothes and providing them with necessary military equipment. The difficulty in finding and also distributing enough supplies and logistics was a major and persistent problem of the Ottoman military throughout the war, and except for temporary mitigations, Ottoman authorities could never find a functional solution to it. The Ottoman army was not doing well in terms of military material either, and it also suffered terribly from poor service support.³⁴¹ Receiving masses of drafted men within a short period of time caused an enormous problem of supplies in the Ottoman army.³⁴² This shows that the level of Ottoman preparedness and readiness for such a major mobilization was far from being

³³⁹ *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi*, vol 1, p. 182.

³⁴⁰ “İrade-i Seniye Suretidir”, *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 88 (August 1989), document no. 2124, pp. 3-4.

³⁴¹ The Ottoman army’s supplies and logistics problem during the First World War is still not a well-studied subject, despite its importance in understanding the Ottoman mobilization experience. This study will touch upon this problem from time to time, but its in-depth examination and grasping its details are outside the scope of my research. For a detailed account of the Ottoman army’s logistics from an official military point of view written by the Turkish General Staff, see *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 10: *Birinci Dünya Harbi, İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*. For a comprehensive study on this issue in the context of the Caucasus front, see Ögün, *Kafkas Cephesi'nin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*.

³⁴² *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, vol 1, p. 226;

satisfactory. Statistical records and calculations of the military were quite poor and even basic data were lacking, such as total number of men potentially available for draft, estimated number of those who actually answered the call for service, exact numbers of men the military units would require, and how much supplies would be needed for incoming drafted men.³⁴³

To cope with the military's inability to absorb large numbers of newly drafted men, Ottoman authorities resorted to two measures. Firstly, they formed depot battalions (*depo taburları*) to accommodate surplus drafted men, usually the ones over the age of 30.³⁴⁴ The depot battalions would also serve as reinforcement units to supply regular units with men (and also animals) in case of a need, where drafted men could be trained and kept ready for active service on the battlefield.³⁴⁵ The depot battalions remained in use throughout the war. But even this measure did not suffice to overcome the problem entirely. Therefore, as a second measure, older ones (mostly the ones who were over the age of 38 and untrained) among the surplus mobilized men were allowed by an imperial decree to return home on condition that they needed to be ready to rejoin the army at twenty-four hours' notice in case of a need.³⁴⁶

Dealing with the problem of providing supplies for the newly enlisted men also involved a practical solution at the initial stage, though it was quite temporary and actually put the burden on the enlisted man himself. The mobilization order required that when departing for his military service, each drafted man needed to

³⁴³ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6*, p. 289; Sâbis, *Harb Hatıralarım*, vol. 1, pp. 159-160.

³⁴⁴ Larcher, *La Guerre Turque dans la Guerre Mondiale*, p. 66.

³⁴⁵ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6*, p. 289; Sâbis, *Harb Hatıralarım*, vol. 1, p. 160; *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, vol 1*, p. 224.

³⁴⁶ "İrade-i Seniye Suretidir", *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 88 (August 1989), document no. 2124, pp. 3-4.

bring with himself basic food such as bread, dried food stuff and sugar, which would be enough to feed him for five days.³⁴⁷ Five days was an estimated period at the end of which an enlisted man would have arrived at his destined unit and begun to get daily ration from the army. The enlisted men were also required to bring their own uniforms (at least appropriate clothes that could serve the function of uniforms) and good shoes.³⁴⁸ Evidently, local recruiting offices were not able to provide any supplies for newly enlisted men. The obligation of bringing enough food for five days was actually taken quite seriously by authorities and emphasized in every announcement of the mobilization order. Failing to do so would not only make a newly enlisted man suffer from hunger during his transfer to his unit, but also subject him to punishment.³⁴⁹

When we look at the numbers of recruited men throughout the war, it becomes clearer that while the recruitment performance of the Ottoman Empire could be regarded as not so bad at the initial stage, that performance could not be kept stable as the war became prolonged. The number of troops in the Ottoman army was 726,692 around the time when mobilization was declared (it was around 295,000 in 1913), and it reached as many as 780,282 men by 25 September 1914. There were also about 100,000 drafted men in the non-combatant hard work units called the labor battalions (*amele taburları*), and additionally there were about 50,000 men in

³⁴⁷ 1330 [1914] *Senesi Seferberlik Talimatnamesi*.

³⁴⁸ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 160. The absence of military uniforms and lack of standard clothing of Ottoman can be seen in photos of new Ottoman conscripts in the war years. For several examples of such photos, see *The Times History of the War*, vol. 3 (London: The Times Printing House Square, 1915), pp. 47, 50, 79. This important detail is usually missed in almost all recent Turkish movies about the First World War, which portray Ottoman troops in standard and clean military uniforms from the first day they join the service. However, according to a report sent from the 17th Division commander in the Third Army Zone, more than half of the troops were still wearing civilian clothes even as late as mid-1915. See *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi*, vol.1: *Kafkas Cephesi, 3ncü Ordu Harekatı* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), Appendix 1.

³⁴⁹ "Seferberlik İlanı", *İkdâm*, 21 Temmuz 1330/3 August 1914.

the depot battalions.³⁵⁰ According to the Ottoman official counts, which are usually in the form of rounded numbers and reasonable estimates rather than being precise numbers, the total number of drafted men cumulatively increased to 1,478,176 by March 1915, and reached 1,943,720 by 14 July 1915. By March 1916 it increased to 2,493,000 and by March 1917 to 2,855,000.³⁵¹ In terms of individual yearly figures, the Ottoman General Staff's estimate of two million potential men had always remained a distant possibility, while their more practical calculation of one million men easily available for mobilization was more or less realized. But the latter could be achieved only in 1915; the recruitment performance of the Ottoman Empire steadily declined during the rest of the war and the Ottoman military had difficulty in keeping up with the attrition of men. At the Mudros Armistice on 30 October 1918, which ended the war for the Ottomans, the total number of men under arms in the Ottoman armed forces was about 560,000.³⁵²

While the estimate of total number of recruited men which the Ottomans mobilized during the entire period of war varies from one source to another,³⁵³ the most recent one given by Edward Erickson, who has reached it after a comprehensive research on the available sources and by cross-examining the existing statistical data, is 2,873,000 (See Table 2). But Erickson's estimate still does not present the whole picture, since it does not include the "volunteers" (including the

³⁵⁰ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 290; *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 10, p. 102; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 148.

³⁵¹ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 10, pp. 164-165; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 148.

³⁵² Larcher, *La Guerre Turque dans la Guerre Mondiale*, p. 602. Erickson gives a remarkably higher number for the total number of enlisted men left at the signing of the Mudros Armistice, which is 1,095,000 (*Ordered to Die*, p. 243). But his figure is probably the total number of all men who were theoretically under arms at this date. Namely, his figure also includes the deserters and missing.

³⁵³ For example, Ahmed Emin Yalman claimed that 2,998,321 men were enrolled in the army during the four years of war according to official figures. See Yalman, *Turkey in the World War*, p. 252. A French officer-scholar M. Larcher, who also based his research on the official Ottoman data published in 1919 by the government, gave a figure of 2,850,000 men mobilized during the war. See Larcher, *La Guerre Turque dans la Guerre Mondiale*, p. 602.

Kurdish and Bedouin cavalry volunteers) who joined the Ottoman army during the war, whose total numbers, despite the lack of precise data on them, must have revolved around 80,000-100,000 (See Chapter 4). So, the rounded grand total of men who joined the colors during the war can be said to have been around 3,000,000.³⁵⁴

Table 2
Total Men Mobilized in the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918 ³⁵⁵

Army	2,608,000
Gendarmerie	250,000
Navy	15,000
<i>Total</i>	2,873,000

The total number of men that the Ottoman Empire mobilized was close to 13 percent of its total population during the Great War. In fact, as it can be seen in Table 3, this was not considerably lower than the same ratio in other major European countries. It can be argued that the Ottomans did not do much worse than the other European powers during the war in terms of mobilizing men. Their situation can even seem a “success”, considering the poor performance of the Ottoman mobilization effort during the Balkan War.

³⁵⁴ It should also be added that there were totally about 25,000 German military personnel serving in the Ottoman armed forces during the four years of the war. See Wallach, *Bir Askeri Yardımın Anatomisi*, p. 248.

³⁵⁵ Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 243.

Table 3
Populations and Total Numbers of Men Mobilized
in Major European Countries, 1914-1918³⁵⁶

<i>country</i>	<i>population</i>	<i>number of men mobilized</i>	<i>percentage</i>
Ottoman Empire	23,000,000	2,873,000	12.4
Germany	66,853,000	13,250,000	19.8
Austria-Hungary	51,390,000	7,800,000	15.1
France	39,600,000	8,410,000	21.2
Italy	35,845,000	5,615,000	15.6
Russia (-1917)	160,700,000	13,700,000	8.5

However, general statistical figures should not overshadow the fact that the Ottoman effort to mobilize men for war suffered some serious inner problems and insufficiencies. First of all, there was a remarkable lack of standardization with regard to the application of the conscription. Some regions continued to remain outside of the Ottoman conscription system even when the system was reformed and reorganized in 1914. There were no recruiting offices in the zones of VII Corps in Yemen and in the zones of the 21st Independent Division in the Hijaz and the 22nd Independent Division in Asir. Their need for drafted men would be provided by other corps, mostly by the ones located in Anatolia. As mentioned above, VII Corps and the 21st and 22nd divisions were also excluded from the mobilization when it began on 2 August 1914. The inability of the Ottoman state to penetrate these regions and to form a modern demographic mechanism to get use of their human resources made the Ottoman conscription system dysfunctional both theoretically and practically in these regions from the beginning. In other words, the Arab-populated regions of the

³⁵⁶ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 29, 15th edition, 1991, p. 987; Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 195; Sâbis, *Harb Hatıralarım*, vol. 1, pp. 69-70; Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 243.

empire excluding Syria and Iraq were never integrated into the Ottoman conscription system. But this did not mean that the conscription system functioned smoothly in all of the other regions where the state announced that it had formed recruiting offices. For example, although the Kurdish-populated regions (mostly southeastern Anatolia and northern Iraq) were declared to have been within the conscription system, recruitment hardly worked in those areas where tribal structures were dominant and the state's demographic control mechanism was poor. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, facing desperate infrastructural problems in those regions, the Ottoman state, instead of insisting on modern recruitment method on an individual basis, applied old imperial strategies such as offering concessions to tribal chiefs in the form of political status or money to get use of their manpower as voluntary tribal units similar to those formed in the era of Abdülhamid II.

On the other hand, it should also be noted here that the Ottoman state's preferences of exclusion and inclusion regarding the conscription did not always depend only on its infrastructural capabilities. Political considerations also played a role in shaping the state's preferences in this respect. For example, the Ottoman state's conscription policies in the Transjordan region (in the province of Syria) during the war excluded the districts of Salt and Karak (Ma'an) from conscription while it included only the district of 'Ajlun, regardless of their level of infrastructural development. The reason behind this arrangement was the state's hesitation based on its memory of the extensive popular resistance to the Ottoman rule (especially its tax policies) in Karak in 1910 and insistence on conscription would stir up new popular reactions which would be uncontrollable in wartime. Instead, the Ottoman state subjected these districts to economic mobilization rather than military service, and tried to get use of their labor force, economy and agricultural products for its war

effort.³⁵⁷ Moreover, the mere existence of a relatively developed demographic mechanism also did not guarantee a successful recruitment. The reluctance of a politically motivated local population towards conscription could also make quite difficult for the state to carry out an effective mobilization.³⁵⁸

As can be seen in Table 4, the time that elapsed for the Ottoman armed forces to get ready for war after the declaration of mobilization generally exceeded the planned timetable. Except for IV Corps, all corps needed more days than planned to complete their preparations. Some needed remarkably more time than others, as in the cases of I Corps based in Istanbul and II Corps based in Edirne, though these regions were relatively more developed in terms of infrastructural power of the state. This shows that the existence of a power mechanism did not guarantee the implementation of mobilization in a desired period. It should also be reminded that the process of preparation also required making available military equipment, transportation vehicles, animals and other necessary supplies, as well as drafting men; therefore, the delays were also related to these factors. Regarding military equipment at the beginning of the war, the Ottoman armed forces were short of rifles, machine guns, field guns, and depended mainly on the German and Austrian deliveries to fill these gaps.³⁵⁹ And, despite the enactment of the law for the imposition of war taxes (*tekâlif-i harbiye*) on 27 June 1914, which included severe measures to confiscate all necessary means, vehicles and supplies in the hands of

³⁵⁷ On the Ottoman policies in the Transjordan region during the Great War, see Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 218-240.

³⁵⁸ Such was the case, for example, in the Hebron district in Palestine during the war. See Byron D. Cannon, "Local Demographic Patterns and Ottoman Military Conscription: A Preliminary Survey of the Hebron District in Palestine, 1914-1917", in Reeva S. Simon (ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa: Essays in Honor of J. C. Hurewitz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 43-70.

³⁵⁹ At the beginning of the war, the Ottoman armed forces were in need of 200 machine guns, more than 500 field guns, and about 200,000 Mauser guns to complete their full preparation. See *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol.10, p. 103; *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, vol. 1, pp. 190-191.

civilians at prices determined by the state, meeting such needs remained as a major challenge for Ottoman authorities throughout the war.³⁶⁰ During the war years, the

Table 4
Days Planned to Get Ottoman Corps Ready for War Compared to
Days Required by the Mobilization Plan³⁶¹

<i>Corps and Regional Base of Recruitment</i>	<i>Days Planned</i>	<i>Actual Days to Mobilize</i>
I Corps (Istanbul)	19	64
II Corps (Edirne)	15	40
III Corps (Tekirdağ, Gallipoli)	22	22
IV Corps (Balıkesir, İzmir)	27	27
V Corps (Ankara)	20	36
VI Corps (Aleppo)	Not available	Not available
VII Corps (Yemen)	Not available	Not available
VIII Corps (Damascus, Jerusalem)	26	36
IX Corps (Erzurum)	33	55
X Corps (Sivas, Samsun)	29	42
XI Corps (Hasankale, Mamuretülaziz)	30	42
XII Corps (Mosul)	23	31
XIII Corps (Baghdad)	Not available	Not available

Ottoman state constantly needed to struggle with this issue by passing new laws, introducing new institutions, and also dealing with the resistance coming from civilians whose possessions were confiscated.³⁶² It was a major issue where the state,

³⁶⁰ “Tekâlif-i Harbiyenin Sûret-i Tarhı Hakkında Kanun”, 14 Temmuz 1330/27 June 1914, *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 6, pp. 1011-1012; Ögün, *Kafkas Cephesi'nin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*, p. 37.

³⁶¹ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, vol. 1, p. 231; Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 41.

³⁶² Since the Ottoman state was not able to establish a well-developed organizational structure for the application of war tax imposition at the beginning of the war, lack of standardization from one region to another and arbitrary decisions of local authorities also increased the discontent of people. An effective control mechanism was also lacking, and this led to the problem of widespread black-market and speculation abuses in times of scarcity of goods, against which the state needed to take measures time and time again during the war, such as by establishing the Commission for the Prevention of Speculation (*Men-i İhtikâr Komisyonu*) in 1917. See Eldem, *Harp ve Mütareke Yıllarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Ekonomisi*, pp. 72-75. For a summary of the problems that emerged at the social level during the implementation of war tax impositions, see Cezmi Tezcan, *Tekalif-i Harbiye ve*

politics and society intertwined; and the implementation process was undertaken by a joint effort of the CUP government, the military and local administrators.³⁶³

Implementing Conscription at the Local Level

The basic institutional units of the Ottoman conscription system at local levels were recruiting offices (*ahz-ı asker şubeleri*). The basic function of recruiting offices was to carry out the recruitment procedures in their localities, and their origin went as far back as the emergence of a modern conscription system in the Ottoman Empire. However, they were greatly reorganized and their powers at the local level were increased with the coming of the new law for military service of 12 May 1914.³⁶⁴ And, more importantly, they went through a process of reshaping throughout the war years in response to the actual war conditions. Their function and efficiency intensified during the war, evolving into a social control mechanism. In fact, during the Great War, they were the most visible and efficient state organization, where the people encountered the state directly, by which the state tried to permeate deeper in to the society. In a sense, they functioned as manifestations of state power at the local level.

The post-Balkan defeat military reforms also affected the recruiting offices. They were reorganized and their procedures were revised by the Regulation for the General Organization of the Military of 1913.³⁶⁵ As a first step, the organized reserve

Tekalif-i Milliye Örneklerinde Savaş Dönemleri Mâli Politikaları (Ph.d. dissertation, Ankara University, 2005), pp. 62-80.

³⁶³ Toprak, *İttihad - Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, pp. 103, 110, 150.

³⁶⁴ BOA, DH.İD., 219/2, 25 Şevval 1332/16 September 1914.

³⁶⁵ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6 (1908-1920)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1971), pp. 199-224.

units system (*redif*), which had been established in the mid-nineteenth century based on the German model of *Landwehr* as a regional reserve force, was abolished, since it had become dysfunctional in time and an obstruction to creating an efficient mobile army.³⁶⁶ It was replaced by regular army units which would remain in active use in peacetime also.³⁶⁷ But a more important step concerned the recruitment itself: the previous method of drafting men on a countrywide basis (*usul-u millî*) was replaced by the new method of drafting men on a regional basis (*usul-u muntıkavî*).³⁶⁸ That is to say, instead of regarding the whole country as a single manpower pool providing drafted men for all the corps, the country was now divided into separate manpower pools according to the corps' zones. In the new method, each recruitment region would provide drafted men only for the corps located in that particular region. The method of drafting men on a countrywide basis had suffered significant failure during the Balkan War.³⁶⁹

The major reason for this change of method was to find practical solutions to infrastructural insufficiencies of the Ottoman state. It was hoped that recruitment on a regional basis, namely dealing with mobilizing men within separate specified zones, would diminish the setbacks caused by infrastructural problems such as lack of countrywide working demographic records, control mechanisms, an efficient

³⁶⁶ On the *redif* system, see Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Döneminde Anadolu Kentlerinin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991), pp. 61, 316; Musa Çadırcı, "Redif Askeri Teşkilatı", in Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Sürecinde Türkiye: Askerlik*, pp. 41-63.

³⁶⁷ "...with only forty percent of their active wartime strength, which were supplemented with reservists and regular army soldiers and officers who were called into service for maneuvers and wartime mobilization." "Under the new Ottoman system, many men remained as reserves, but they were called up as individuals, not as members of organized reserve units, and were entered into vacancies in the regular active army units when these were built up to full wartime strength in times of mobilization and war". Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 116.

³⁶⁸ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, pp. 11-12; *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 287-288.

³⁶⁹ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 8.

system of transportation and communications.³⁷⁰ The regional method of recruitment would not only make the conscription procedures easier in peacetime, but it would also expedite the mobilization of a particular army corps by supplying it with drafted men from its own region.³⁷¹ In fact, the new method of regional recruitment seems to have been really effective, considering the initial performance of the Ottoman mobilization in August 1914. But, though it remained as the desired method during the war and contributed to the mobility of the armed forces, various changes took place as the war progressed. The regional base did not remain unchanged under actual war conditions, and drafted men were sent as individuals or in levies to whatever units needed them the most.³⁷²

Secondly, the reorganization of recruiting offices was based on the corps structure of the Ottoman army. Each recruitment zone was put under the control of the army corps located in that particular zone. Each army corps was divided into divisional recruiting office sectors according to the number of divisions which that particular corps had. Then, each divisional recruiting office sector was divided into recruiting offices (recruiting office branches), which were the actual units that executed the conscription at local levels. They were established mainly in districts.³⁷³ So, the country was divided into 12 recruiting office zones (*ahz-ı asker dairesi*), the

³⁷⁰ Although Abdülhamid II gave importance to building railways and telegraph lines, and the CUP government tried to continue this attempt, the Ottoman transportation and communication network remained poor in the war. The total area of the empire was about 2 million square kilometers, but it had only less than 6,000 kilometers of railway length. Eastern Anatolia did not have any railway lines, though it was an important war zone. Moreover, the railways did not yet link Anatolia to Syria and Mesopotamia in 1914. Tunnels in the Tauris Mountains in southern Anatolia could be completed only in 1917. The existing roads were poor too, and the transport was usually done by drought animals. For example, the duration of walking of the 37th Division from Baghdad to Erzurum lasted for 65 days. The network of telegraph lines was relatively better, but it was still limited in terms of having a modern communication system. Pamuk, "The Ottoman Economy in World War I", pp. 115-116; Mahmut Boğuşlu, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Savaşları* (Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınları, 1990), p. 44.

³⁷¹ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 13.

³⁷² Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 9.

³⁷³ "Article 10, "Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati", p. 663.

zones into 35 divisional recruiting office sectors (*ahz-ı asker kalemi*), and the sectors into 362 recruiting office branches (*ahz-ı asker şubesi*).³⁷⁴ The density of the organizational structure of recruiting offices gives the impression that their distribution not only occurred in parallel with the Ottoman local administration system, but their existence also represented a dual local authority network with civilian administration.³⁷⁵

The declaration of mobilization on 2 August 1914 ascribed a critical role and significant amount of authority to the recruiting offices. They were the main units which were supposed to manage the human dimension of mobilization during the war. A recruiting office was a military institution in its structure, but in its actual working it also amalgamated civilian and religious authorities and notables in its locality. The actual conscription procedure in a local unit (usually a district) was carried out not by the recruiting office branch alone, but under the supervision of a conscription council (*ahz-ı asker meclisi*) which was formed by the initiative of the recruiting office. According to the law for military service, the conscription council in a locality normally consisted of the most important civil official of that local unit (who acted as the chairman of the council), the chief of the recruiting office branch, the local Muslim mufti along with the heads of non-Muslim communities of the locality. The council also included the finance officer, and two members from among those elected to the municipal council (*belediye meclisi*) and the administrative council (*idare meclisi*). The local census official was also required to be present

³⁷⁴ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6, p. 210; Behic, Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 13. But, as has been mentioned before, the VII Corps in Yemen, and the divisions in the Hijaz and Asir, where there was no infrastructural base for conscription, were not included into this reorganization.

³⁷⁵ For the complete list of recruiting offices in the Ottoman Empire in the Great War, see Appendix C.

when his opinion was needed concerning the procedure.³⁷⁶ The conscription council was to oversee the presence of all males of military age in its locality, their medical examination, and the assignment of draftees to the army, navy and gendarmerie. Decisions such as who was medically unfit for military service, who was fit for armed and who was for unarmed service, and who was assigned to which military category were to be made by the conscription council.

While the recruiting office fulfilled permanent procedures of the conscription system and represented the military authority in its locality, the completion of the actual draft process was executed by the conscription council. In this way, the recruitment process included all authorities and important personages (military, civilian, religious, notable) in a particular locality. It can be argued that this “collectivity” of authorities in a local setting served to increase the legitimation of the conscription system. By involving all key military, civilian and religious figures, which were obeyed and respected in a particular locality, this process also functioned to make military service more unquestionable in the eye of the public. It can also be asserted that the inclusion of local religious representatives made the legal compulsion aspect of the process smoother and contributed to the justification of military service in religious terms.

During the war years, recruiting offices practically became the major authority at local levels controlling social life. They not only supervised the calling up process, but also acted as a law enforcement unit in collaboration with the gendarmerie to pursuit and capture draft-evaders and deserters. All drafted men who returned to their hometowns on leave of absence needed to regularly report to their recruiting offices. But perhaps more importantly, under war conditions, the recruiting

³⁷⁶ Article 23, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, p. 666; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 159.

offices were also assigned tasks concerning other aspects of life. For example, as the increasing lack of manpower affected agriculture negatively during the war, heads of recruiting offices were also held responsible, in collaboration with civil officials, for mobilizing the available undrafted people in their localities, who were capable of working to cultivate the fields of those who were under arms.³⁷⁷

Moreover, the recruiting offices also kept detailed demographic records of potential draftees in their localities during the war. Such records included more information than the religion or age of potential draftees. The available evidence published by the Turkish General Staff's official war history suggests that they also categorized people according to their ethnic origins. For example, the data provided by the recruiting offices throughout the empire on 14 April 1915 about the potential draftees who were born in the years from 1890 to 1893 (1306-1309) divided them into two categories as "Turks" and "non-Turks" (*Türk ve Türk olmayan*). As given in Table 5, the data showed the numbers of Turks and non-Turks potential draftees according to the six army corps' zones.

Table 5
Numbers of Turkish and non-Turkish Potential Draftees (born in 1890-1893)
on 14 April 1915³⁷⁸

<i>Corps' zones</i>	<i>Turks</i>	<i>non-Turks</i>
I Corps (Istanbul)	7,542	855
II Corps (Edirne)	205	243
III Corps (Tekirdağ/Gallipoli)	2,662	1,170
IV Corps (Balıkesir/İzmir)	5,838	1,106
V Corps (Ankara)	3,000	-
VI Corps (Aleppo)	7,821	1,164

³⁷⁷ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Vol. 1*, p. 193.

³⁷⁸ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 10*, p. 207.

This example suggests that demographic records that were kept by the recruiting offices also had an ethnic perspective. In fact, this situation was in line with the CUP government's general demographic policies during the Great War. As Fuat Dündar has argued, the CUP government became increasingly Turkist/nationalist during the war and wanted to know the population not only on the basis of religion, which the Ottoman demographic registers had traditionally already recorded, but also on the basis of ethnicity. These ethnically categorized demographic records served to guide the CUP government's policies of Turkification and Islamization of Anatolia ("an ethnicity engineering", in Dündar's words), which resorted to various methods such as forced migration, deportation and organized violence through armed bands against non-Muslim and non-Turkish communities, culminating in the deportation and destruction of the Anatolian Armenians in 1915.³⁷⁹

However, ethnic categorization of potential draftees might also have been done to serve a more practical purpose, though it was still related to the general nationalist mentality of the period which was characterized by an increasing distrust towards non-Turkish elements of the empire. It has been frequently observed that even in the age of establishing a modern universal conscription, the backbone of the Ottoman army always constituted of the Anatolian Muslim peasants, and mostly of the Turkish elements.³⁸⁰ This situation continued to be so in the Great War, though the recruitment effort tried to get use of all elements in the empire from a pragmatic perspective. But, as will be discussed in more detail below, the distrust factor produced a dual category of military service in the Ottoman conscription system as

³⁷⁹ Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi*, pp. 150-173.

³⁸⁰ Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, pp. xv-xvi; Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918", p. 91. Hakan Erdem argues that the "domination" of the Turkish element in the Ottoman central army began during the military reforms of Mahmud II, and this element was preferred as the most trusted in the attempt to make the state more centralized and to subject, for example, "peripheral" Arab provinces to the centralization process. See Erdem, "Recruitment for the 'Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad'".

“armed service” and “unarmed service”. While the former was filled by trusted elements (the Turks and most Muslims) in the empire, distrusted elements were assigned to the latter, which mainly did manual and construction work. Religiously and ethnically categorized demographic records must also have helped to make this discrimination.

The *Muhtar*

On the other hand, the execution of mobilization also depended on the key role of another civilian administrator at the village and neighborhood level. The conscription regulations that were put into effect in 1914 and during the war also increased the functions and authority of the village/neighborhood headmen (*muhtar*) in war conditions. The *muhtar* was the manifestation of state authority in the smallest local unit.³⁸¹ The recruiting offices carried out recruitment procedures at the district level, but it was the *muhtar* who actually supervised the recording and gathering of men called up for service. He was the authority who was responsible for demographic control in his village or neighborhood, and for providing basic needed data for the recruiting office branch. The *muhtar* was also responsible for ensuring that the men in his village or neighborhood, who were called up for service, comply with this call and go to the recruiting office for the enlistment process. Moreover, the *muhtar* was the authority from which documents of witness (*şehadetname*) were needed to be taken for those who were liable for conscription but requested exemption because of injuries or illnesses; it was only by having such documents that these people could be

³⁸¹ Despite the key administrative role the *muhtar* had played at the local level, there is still no detailed and in-depth study on the subject. For a historical survey of the evolution of the *muhtar* institution after the Tanzimat, see Musa Çadırcı, “Türkiye’de Muhtarlık Teşkilatının Kurulması Üzerine Bir Deneme”, *Bellekten*, vol. 34, no. 135 (1970), pp. 409-420; Musa Çadırcı, “Türkiye’de Muhtarlık Kurumunun Tarihi Gelişimi”, *TODAİE Çağdaş Yerel Yönetimler*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1993), pp. 3-11.

excused from appearing before the conscription council.³⁸² The function of the *muhtar* represented the blurring of the line between the civilian and military authorities when mobilization was concerned.

The *muhtar* was supposed to be the “gaze” of the state in the smallest administrative unit. For example, according to the Article 100 of the law for military service, every village or neighborhood *muhtar* was held responsible for providing information to the recruiting office about strangers coming to his village or neighborhood.³⁸³ The war tax impositions (*tekâlif-i harbiye*) procedure was also depended on the key function of the *muhtar* at the village level. Orders for requisitioning emanated from the local military commander and on down through the chain of command to district governors (*kaymakams*) and *muhtars*, who did the actual collecting.³⁸⁴

The Problem of Equality

The efforts that were made in 1914 to minimize exemptions and to extend the military service obligation to all elements of Ottoman society were interpreted by both contemporary observers and some recent historians as an effort to put the principle of Ottoman equality into practice, to realize the idea of Ottomanism. Some even claimed that these efforts finally actualized the Ottoman Constitution of 1876,³⁸⁵ of which the Article 17 had stipulated that all Ottomans, regardless of religion and sect, were equal in terms of legal rights and obligations before the

³⁸² Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 160.

³⁸³ Article 100, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, p. 693.

³⁸⁴ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 288.

³⁸⁵ For example, see *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 232.

law.³⁸⁶ However, such a perspective of equality could not be found in the law for military service of 1914, nor in the mobilization regulations and practice. It is hard to see such a language of equality, let alone the practice, even in propaganda discourses accompanying the mobilization. Regarding the inclusion and treatment of different religious and ethnic elements of the empire into the conscription system, the CUP's perspective and practice were discriminatory from the beginning, though the intensity of this discrimination was more cautious and ambiguous in 1914 and increased as the war progressed. That perspective was never based on equality and always characterized by deep distrust. What it was based on was rather an understanding of Ottoman unity which was built upon pragmatism. A pragmatic Ottoman perspective of unity should not be confused with an understanding of constitutional Ottoman equality. The latter was lacking in the war years and increasingly replaced by a nationalist imperial vision which tended to give priority and dominance to the Turkish-Muslim factor. Of course, the CUP's mobilization effort wished to include and get use of all elements of the empire. But this wish also tended to thwart as much as possible any political expectations and demands of dialogue with the state, which would emerge on the part of the same elements in return for their participation in the mobilization effort. Service of even the most distrusted elements could be accepted by the CUP government as long as that service was used in the way defined by the CUP government itself and as long as it did not produce any political expectations on the part of the providers. The CUP's perspective of mobilization desired to see a population the members of which would act as fellow players of the empire when they were needed to contribute to the

³⁸⁶ “*Osmanlıların kâffesi huzur-u kanunda ahval-i diniye ve mezhebiyeden maada memleketin hukuk ve vezâifinde mütesavidir.*” Suna Kili and A. Şeref Gözübüyük (eds.), *Türk Anayasa Metinleri: Sened-i İttifak'tan Günümüze*, revised third edition (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2006), p. 38.

mobilization effort, but would at the same time unquestionably accept to be the part of the same mobilization process under the dominance of the CUP government's monist-nationalist power.

Inclusion and Exclusion

First of all, it should be said that some elements were regarded as more unwelcome than others regarding recruitment. By a decision of the Council of Ministers on 23 December 1914, the Yezidis, an ethnically Kurdish and religiously heterodox community living in northern Iraq and southeastern Anatolia, were entirely removed from the military service obligation. The decision declared that it would be “harmful to conscript the Yezidis in the Ottoman army” (“*Yezidilerin ordu-yu hümayuna alınmalarının mahzurlu olacağı*”), and required every eligible Yezidi men to pay a certain amount of money instead of fulfilling military service. And this payment was defined not as an exemption fee (*bedel-i nakdî*), but as a “war donation” (*iane-i harbiye*), because only those who were legally obliged to serve in the military were entitled to pay the exemption fee.³⁸⁷

In fact, the Ottoman state attempted to include the Yezidis into the conscription system several times in previous periods, but each time the Yezidis showed deep reluctance, justifying their resistance on religious grounds. While the Yezidis never considered themselves as Muslim, the Ottoman state always tried to impose a Muslim identity upon them, regarded them only a deviant community whose false belief needed to be corrected. Therefore the state never recognized them as a separate *millet*, or religious community or even as a sect; they had been denied various exemptions from military service such as paying tax exemption, which were

³⁸⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 48/158, 8 Safer 1333/26 December 1914; Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi, vol. 3, part I*, p. 435; Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, pp. 168-169.

officially granted to non-Muslim communities in the empire.³⁸⁸ A major attempt to bring the Yezidis into obligatory military service was made in 1872 when Midhat Paşa was the governor of Baghdad, but the Yezidis objected to this decision by preparing a petition, which was signed by their religious leaders, claiming that military service was against their religious faith. In fact, underneath this religious faith excuse was the fear that if they were conscripted they thought they would get converted in the army, and lose their distinct and relatively autonomous lifestyle vis-à-vis the centralist state power.³⁸⁹ Their exemption from military service was again lifted in 1885 and another major attempt to draft them in the military came in 1891. This attempt was part of the Hamidian state's effort to integrate the Yezidis into the mainstream population and expose them to "the Ottomanized Şariat", which involved converting them to Hanefi Islam.³⁹⁰ However, this and similar attempts of the state in later years also faced the same kind of reluctance from the leaders of the Yezidis.³⁹¹

This traditional reluctance on the part of the Yezidis seems to have turned into a deep distrust on the part of the CUP government at the beginning of the Great War. As a result, this ethnic-religious community of the empire was entirely discarded from the Ottoman conscription system. However, it should also be noted that the practice apparently was not as strict as this decision implies. In a telegram from the Interior Ministry to the province of Mosul on 13 February 1915 about the implementation of the decision that excluded the Yezidis from the mobilization, it

³⁸⁸ Edip Gölbaşı, *The Yezidis and the Ottoman State: Modern Power, Military Conscription, and Conversion Policies, 1830-1909* (master's thesis, Bogazici University, 2008), p. 3. The writer estimates that (p. 36) the total population of the Yezidis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century varied between 55,000 and 65,000. This estimate can be inflated, since there were also nomadic Yezidi groups.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

³⁹⁰ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 68-70.

³⁹¹ John S. Guest, *The Yezidis: A Study in Survival* (London and New York: KPI, 1987), pp. 117, 126-127, 133; Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p. 70.

was said in a pragmatic tone that the complete exclusion of the Yezidis from the mobilization would constitute a bad example for the other ethnic-religious groups (*bu muamele akvâm-ı saire nezdinde su’-i misal teşkil edeceğinden*). Therefore, it was proposed in the telegram that instead of a complete exclusion, the war donation option should have only been given to those Yezidis who were older than the active service age, namely to those who were within the reserve categories. While the telegram did not describe exactly what procedure would be applied to those within the military age of active service, it practically left the door open to their recruitment in case of a need.³⁹²

It is interesting that, whatever the actual practice had been regarding the recruitment of the Yezidis, the articulation of the problem was far from being a discourse of equality. The decision of their exclusion was never questioned from a perspective that approached it as potentially discriminatory in terms of Ottoman equality, but only on the ground that it would provoke undesirable demands or actions on the part of other ethnic-religious groups in the empire.

In fact, while the decision to exclude the Yezidis from the mobilization can appear to have been an isolated case which had no permanent legal regulation and was carried out by an *ad hoc* verdict, it is still hard to say that the Ottoman legal perspective regarding conscription was based on the idea of equality. The Temporary Law for Military Service, which was issued on 12 May 1914 with a general aim to overcome the incomplete character of all conscription laws passed before and to make military service compulsory for all Ottoman subjects, contained certain ambiguities that could in practice easily be interpreted in a discriminatory way. Article 34 of the law divided active military service into two categories, “armed

³⁹² BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/262, 28 Rabiülevvel 1333/13 February 1915.

service” (*silahlı hizmet*) and “unarmed service” (*silahsız hizmet*). In other words, while some drafted men would be regarded as “normal” soldiers who were able to bear arms, others would be denied arms and instead employed in units which would mostly fulfill manual works behind the front lines. However, while this division might seem to be a standard procedure that any army could have, the Ottoman conscription law almost deliberately left two points ambiguous: first, it did not specify exactly who would be registered in the armed category and who in the unarmed. No clear criteria were stated in this regard. The law was much more specific on the procedures concerning medically unfit men who had physical problems or illnesses that could prevent them from carrying out active service. If a man of military age had a temporary disability or illness, which was to be decided after an examination by the conscription council, he could be given one year postponement, at the end of which he would again need to show up at his recruiting office. If he had a permanent disability or physical problem that would make him entirely unable to carry out his service, he would be discarded as unfit for duty by the same examination procedure (articles 34, 48). But no such clear procedures were defined for the unarmed service category. There are some implications in explanatory texts about the law that the division might have essentially been based on physical condition of a drafted man, such as having a minor bodily problem which would prevent him from fulfilling active military service on the battlefield but did not hinder him doing manual jobs. There are also some implications that the assignment to unarmed service could be done according to the profession and artisanal skills of enlisted men, such as medical personnel could be assigned to medical corps and the literate could be assigned to scribal posts in military units.³⁹³

³⁹³ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 52, 188.

But these were the implications mentioned in commentaries and not in the law itself. Second, the law did not specify either what exactly unarmed service would be about. In practice, it became synonymous with hard labor works and, more specifically, with the labor battalions. It is interesting that even descriptive booklets, which were published in the first year of the war to provide clear explanations for all eligible about the requirements of the Temporary Law for Military Service and mobilization procedures, did not clear these ambiguities.³⁹⁴

The Labor Battalions

Forming labor-based military units was not an entirely new phenomenon in the Ottoman army. There were similar battalions called “the Service Battalions” (*Hizmet Taburları*) which had been formed during the Balkan War.³⁹⁵ Nor was it unique to the Ottoman army. A large number of recruits from India were assigned to the labor and porter corps used in Iraq by the British army in its invasion of the region in the Great War. These labor units, which were pejoratively called “coolie” corps, also included prisoners.³⁹⁶ The British and the French also formed labor corps by using Chinese laborers, thinking that if Chinese laborers were employed on the docks and construction projects, this would free more European males for active combat. Started even before China joined the Allies in April 1917, a considerable number of Chinese laborers, 54,000 by late 1917 and 96,000 by late 1918, were hired mostly from the Shandong province on a “voluntary” basis with a daily payment. Gathered

³⁹⁴ See, for example, the above-cited works, Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*; Tarık Tevfik, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanunu*.

³⁹⁵ Zekeriya Özdemir, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Amele Taburları* (master's thesis, Gazi Üniversitesi, 1994), p. 32.

³⁹⁶ See Radhika Singha, “Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq: The Jail Porter and Labor Corps, 1916-1920”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 49, no. 2 (April 2007), pp. 412-445.

at the processing plant near the British naval base of Weihaiwei, which was sarcastically called the “sausage machine” by the British, the Chinese volunteers were put through a strict medical examination during which they were sprayed from head to foot with disinfectant and issued with dog tags with serial numbers. Many Chinese, who were driven by poverty and political uncertainty, joined these corps and were sent to northern France to work in harsh conditions.³⁹⁷

Originally labor units in the Ottoman army were manned mainly by men too old or young to serve in the army, by wounded or injured soldiers who became unfit for combatant posts on the battlefield, and by older drafted men who were assigned to active reserve or territorial reserve units.³⁹⁸ But during the Great War, the labor battalions were manned overwhelmingly by non-Muslim Ottoman enlisted men, who were regarded as “untrustworthy” to bear arms, regardless of their ages or physical conditions. By a deliberate decision of Ottoman military authorities, non-Muslim drafted men were mostly assigned to the “unarmed service” category, even if they were bodily fit for the armed service category. Those who were registered in the unarmed category were almost entirely employed in the labor battalions. This was so even before the Ottomans formally entered the war. In other words, distrust and consequent discrimination towards non-Muslims did not emerge during the war; it was already existent at the beginning. In an order of the War Ministry issued on 3 August 1914, it was explicitly stated that “the labor battalions were to be consisted as much as possible of non-Muslims”.³⁹⁹ Similarly, in a telegram that was sent from the Interior Ministry to the provincial units on 11 August 1914, the decision of the War Ministry about assigning non-Muslim enlisted men to manual works for road

³⁹⁷ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), pp. 290-291.

³⁹⁸ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 341.

³⁹⁹ “Amele Taburlarının mümkün mertebe, en çok gayrimüslerinden teşkil edileceği...”, cited in Özdemir, “Amele Taburları”, p. 31.

construction was reminded and then local administrators were requested to decide in coordination with local military commanders about on which roads these men would be put to work.⁴⁰⁰

The fact that the tendency to disarm non-Muslim drafted men and put them in the labor battalions even before the Ottoman Empire entered the war can also be seen in foreign consulate reports. For example, a British consulate report from Erzurum on 14 October 1914 said that “in the last two or three weeks many Armenian soldiers” in the region had been “permanently disarmed and put to spade work”.⁴⁰¹ On the other hand, the wave of non-Muslim enlisted men to the labor battalions was enlarged at certain moments during the war. For example, after the defeat in Sarikamış on the Caucasus front, where Ottoman authorities claimed that the Armenians were in collaboration with the Russians, the acting commander in chief Enver Pasha issued an order to all military units on 25 February 1915, instructing that “Armenians shall strictly not be employed in mobile armies, in mobile and stationary gendarmeries, or in any armed service.”⁴⁰² Many Armenian recruits in the Ottoman army were assigned to the labor battalions after this order. However, as in the case of many orders given and decisions made by Ottoman authorities during the war, the application of this order was characterized by incompleteness and exceptions; its implementation was not standard. Not only after this order, but also after the Armenian population was deported from Anatolia and exposed to mass killings, there were still Armenian soldiers serving with arms in various places. For example, there were Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army fighting with arms on

⁴⁰⁰ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 43/214, 28 Temmuz 1330/11 August 1914.

⁴⁰¹ TNA:PRO FO 195-2460 (1914, Turkey on the Eve of the War).

⁴⁰² Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (Nicosia: Rustem, 2001), p. 206.

the Sinai-Palestine front as late as spring 1916.⁴⁰³ In fact, it can be argued that whereas the existence of such exceptions implies the limits of the Ottoman power in executing its decisions, it might actually also be desired by the same power since it was congruent with Ottoman pragmatism during the war. If some elements of an ethnic-religious group could provide contribution for the Ottoman mobilization effort in the way defined by the Ottoman state, Ottoman authorities did not hesitate to utilize it even when they expressed open aggression towards that group in general. For example, since the Ottoman army suffered from insufficient medical personnel, no non-Muslim military doctors were assigned to the labor battalions; they were always kept in regular units.⁴⁰⁴ While their personnel were overwhelmingly non-Muslim, many labor battalions themselves did not have military doctors.⁴⁰⁵

Not all non-Muslims in the labor battalions were Ottoman Greek and Armenian; there were also non-Muslims from smaller communities, such as the Assyrians (*Süryani*), though they were much fewer.⁴⁰⁶ Nor did the labor battalions include only non-Muslims. Muslim recruits were also employed in them. But these Muslim enlisted men were usually the ones who were too old or regarded as not entirely fit physically or useful for armed service. The labor battalions also included Muslims released from prisons to contribute to the mobilization effort.⁴⁰⁷ Moreover, the deserters who were caught could also be assigned to the labor battalions as some sort of punishment.

⁴⁰³ Zürcher, “Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Amele Taburları”, p. 211.

⁴⁰⁴ Cengiz Mutlu, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Amele Taburları, 1914-1918* (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2007), p. 159.

⁴⁰⁵ Özdemir, “Amele Taburları”, pp. 120-121, 132, 135.

⁴⁰⁶ Özdemir, “Amele Taburları”, p. 56.

⁴⁰⁷ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I, vol. 1*, p. 341.

The average age of Muslim men in the labor battalions was usually much higher than that of non-Muslims.⁴⁰⁸ The labor battalions were usually commanded by retired army officers who were re-employed because of war or by conscripted reserve officers (both were, of course, Muslims). Terms of service were not limited during the war, but drafted men were generally kept in the labor battalions for a minimum of three years.⁴⁰⁹ The main tasks which were fulfilled by the labor battalions during the war consisted mainly of working in the construction and maintenance of roads and railroads, in the construction of fortified posts, helping transportation of men and material to the fronts and helping carry out agricultural works.⁴¹⁰

Separate labor battalions were organized in each army districts of the empire and they were usually given the names of the locality where they were organized. But they were not static units and they could be transferred to any region of the empire whenever they were needed.⁴¹¹ There were 90 labor battalions at the time of mobilization was declared and each battalion was planned to include around 1,200 men. Totally, there were approximately 100,000 men employed in them in 1914.⁴¹² There are no precise data available about the total number of men employed in the labor battalions during the four years of the war. However, while the recruitment went much slower after the initial stage of the mobilization and the battalions suffered from man shortages during the war,⁴¹³ it can be estimated that the total

⁴⁰⁸ Özdemir, "Amele Taburları", p. 32, 92.

⁴⁰⁹ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 342.

⁴¹⁰ Özdemir, "Amele Taburları", p. 32.

⁴¹¹ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 345; Özdemir, "Amele Taburları", p. 31.

⁴¹² Özdemir, "Amele Taburları", p. 21-22, 33.

⁴¹³ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 345.

number kept revolving around or even could exceed 100,000, considering the fact that the War Ministry decided to form 50 more labor battalions in 1915.⁴¹⁴

Table 6
The Labor Battalions of the First Army (26 July 1915-28 August 1915)⁴¹⁵

Name	Locality	Muslims	Greeks	Jews	Armenian	Total
<i>in European part</i>						
1 st Lüleburgaz Labor Battalion	Lüleburgaz	181	2586	263	143	3173
1 st Çorlu Labor Battalion	Ayazma	80	890	9	43	1022
3 rd Çorlu Labor Battalion	Çorlu	681	1986	111	306	3084
Bolu Labor Battalion	Bahçeköy	182	198	2	872	1254
Makriköy Labor Battalion	-	525	1683	250	1652	4220
Makriköy Labor Battalion	Zincirlikuyu	216	482	18	345	1061
Pınarhisar Labor Detachment	Pınarhisar	8	535	13	7	563
Demirköy Labor Detachment	Demirköy	-	227	24	9	260
Demirköy Labor Detachment	Demirköy	-	160	-	-	160
<i>in Asian part</i>						
1 st Adapazarı Labor Battalion	İzmit	128	481	8	782	1399
2 nd Adapazarı Labor Battalion	İzmit	100	395	7	331	833
Sarıyer Labor Battalion	İzmit (Solaklar)	298	99	-	198	595
Makriköy Labor Battalion	İzmit	500	500	-	400	1400
İzmit Labor Battalion	İzmit	79	472	8	722	1281
3 rd Adapazarı Labor Battalion	Sapanca	149	274	7	277	707
Balâ Labor Battalion	Samanderesi	1064	611	121	631	2427
Sülle Labor Battalion	Doğançay	200	350	-	600	1150
Karamürsel Labor Battalion	Değirmendere	220	-	430	-	650
Karamürsel Labor Battalion	Adapazarı	200	-	400	-	600

Table 6 gives a general idea about the composition of the labor battalions.

According to such factors as locality, availability of men or requirement of the work, the total number of men and the ratios of different ethnic/religious groups in a

⁴¹⁴ Özdemir, “Amele Taburları”, p. 63.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 48-49 (some calculation mistakes in the original source have been corrected).

particular labor battalion could be much higher or lower. But one constant characteristic of all of them throughout the empire was that the total number of non-Muslims employed in a labor battalion was always much higher than that of Muslims.⁴¹⁶

The labor battalions in the Ottoman army were characterized by notoriously poor living and working conditions. One of the major problems which the labor battalions suffered from throughout the war was poor accommodation, supplies and equipment.⁴¹⁷ For example, the Venezuelan soldier Rafael de Nogales, who served in the Ottoman army during the Great War as a soldier of fortune, reported in his memoirs that during a visit with an Ottoman officer-inspector to the road construction in Islahiye (a district of Adana) which was carried out by three or four labor battalions composing almost wholly Armenians and Ottoman Greeks in September 1915, he observed that many soldier-laborers severely suffered from and died of famine while their Ottoman officers stole the rations and salary allocated for them.⁴¹⁸ While poor food and clothing were actually a general problem in the Ottoman army on almost all fronts and constituted one of the main problems for desertions (see Chapter 6), they were much worse in the labor battalions. Moreover, the treatment of soldier-laborers in the labor battalions was generally bad. Such notorious aspects of the labor battalions, which became known from the experiences of early draftees and were circulated among communities from mouth to mouth,⁴¹⁹ intimidated potential draftees and created an extra motive among reluctant non-

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 49-55.

⁴¹⁷ Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2005), p. 229; Özdemir, "Amele Taburları", p. 127.

⁴¹⁸ Rafael de Nogales, *Four Years beneath the Crescent*, trans. Muna Lee (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1926), pp. 176-177.

⁴¹⁹ Sotiriou, *Farewell to Anatolia*, pp. 70-71.

Muslims for evading military service.⁴²⁰ Because of such problems, desertions from the labor battalions were frequent,⁴²¹ and though non-Muslims constituted the majority, Turkish soldiers-laborers also deserted.⁴²² Cases of desertions sometimes took a violent form and constituted a kind of minor rebellion in a battalion, as in the case of the labor battalion of Urfa, where Armenian soldiers-laborers attacked the battalion's captain and several other Muslim soldiers with pickaxes and shovels at the moment of their desertion.⁴²³

But a more disputed claim regarding the labor battalions has been that they became the killing grounds for the Armenian drafted men after the decision to deport the Armenian population from Anatolia in 1915. For example, Vahakn Dadrian has mentioned the case that about two thousand Armenian soldiers, who were assigned to labor battalion duties, were “trapped and slaughtered on their way to a new assignment on the Baghdad Railroad”, and Vehib Pasha, the commander of the Third Army, launched an investigation about these killings, which led to a court-martial and some executions.⁴²⁴ And, some contemporary missionary observers claimed that some labor battalions which consisted of Armenians were exposed to mass killings organized mostly by local gendarmes, as in the case of two battalions working in the Urfa region, where Jakob Künzler, a Swiss missionary, met with two Armenian survivors from the labor battalions, who recounted such massacres.⁴²⁵ While not all

⁴²⁰ For example, this point is wittily explained in the memoirs of an Ottoman Greek. See Haris Spataris, “*Biz İstanbullular Böyleyiz*”: *Fener'den Anılar, 1906-1922*, trans. İro Kaplangı (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2004), p. 147.

⁴²¹ BOA, DH.EUM.6.ŞB., 44/32, 7 Şa'ban 1333/20 June 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.KLU., 6/39, 23 Safer 1333/10 January 1915; Mutlu, *Amele Taburları*, pp. 133-134.

⁴²² Özdemir, “Amele Taburları”, p. 96.

⁴²³ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 55-A/11, 21 Şevval 1333/1 September 1915.

⁴²⁴ Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997), p. 325.

⁴²⁵ Jacob Künzler, *In the Land of Blood and Tears: Experiences in Mesopotamia during the World War (1914-1918)* (Arlington, Mass.: Armenian Cultural Foundation, 2007), pp. 16-20.

labor battalions were ethnically or religiously homogenous (as seen in Table 6), it seems that Armenians were overrepresented in casualties.⁴²⁶

As the manpower that was needed in economy also eroded due to several factors on the home front such as lengthened recruitment, deaths because of disease and forced migrations, the practice of forming labor units gradually acquired a social character as well. During the war years, the agricultural sector as the main food source needed to be kept running to feed not only society in general, but perhaps primarily the troops in particular. The endurance of the Ottoman army on the battlefield also depended on this. Therefore, the CUP government decided to apply militaristic procedures in agriculture. For example, the Interior Ministry demanded that certain number of men be sent from the labor battalions to work in the fields in nearby villages in their regions, where there were not enough number of male to work in agriculture.⁴²⁷

The militaristic procedures in agriculture included civilians too. Even from the very beginning of the war onwards, the central authority tried to engage all village people over the age of 14, men and women alike, in agricultural work.⁴²⁸ All men who were outside the military service obligation for any reason, and together with men also all women who were healthy enough for manual jobs were required to

⁴²⁶ As the facts and details about the labor battalions in the Ottoman Empire during the Great War get enriched with the emergence of new studies on this largely understudied subject, such disputes will surely be based on a more solid documentary base. This process also requires an increase of liberty in using the military archives in Turkey. The majority of the documents about the labor battalions are contained in (and “controlled” by) the archives of the Turkish General Staff (ATASE). So far the only study that has been made on the Ottoman labor battalions by using documents from these archives is a master’s thesis written by Zekeriya Özdemir in 1994, which has been cited above. The master’s thesis is written from a nationalist perspective, and though it contains valuable materials, it is not an in-depth analysis. To conduct research in the archives of the Turkish General Staff, a scholar needs to get permission, for which he or she is required to submit several application forms, including an abstract and purpose of his or her research. It seems that no permissions to study on the subject of labor battalions have been given since 1994.

⁴²⁷ BOA, DH.İUM., E-18/16, 5 Şevval 1334/5 August 1916.

⁴²⁸ BOA, DH.EUM.MTK., 54/26, 6 Zilhicce 1332/26 October 1914.

work in the fields of their own villages or surrounding regions where labor force was needed. For example, this method was widely resorted to in the Third Army zone, which covered northeastern Anatolia and the eastern Black Sea region.⁴²⁹ The village council in each village, which was headed by the *muhtar*, but also consisted of the *imam* and the teacher of the village, was required to supervise the process of mobilizing the available workforce over the age of 14 for agricultural work.⁴³⁰ The village councils were also entitled to demand gendarme forces to coerce those village people who were reluctant and resistant to participate in such tasks.⁴³¹ This agricultural work imposition acquired a legal character with the issue of temporary and ratified laws in 1916 and 1917.⁴³²

Besides a general tendency to push as much workforce as available on the home front to work in agriculture where needed, this process also involved forming more specific work units, again on the military model, such as “agricultural labor battalions”. These battalions could function like “mobile” farmer units which could be transferred to nearby farms where there was urgent need for a workforce. Since majority of the male population fit for work was already subject to conscription, women usually constituted the main human source of such civilian labor units.⁴³³ For example, in the hinterland of the Fourth Army in Syria, “Women Labor Battalions” were formed under the leadership of the commander Cemal Pasha, which were

⁴²⁹ Ögün, *Kafkas Cephesinin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*, p. 88.

⁴³⁰ Toprak, *İttihad - Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, pp. 83-87. There are examples that this labor mobilization applied compulsive measures towards both men and women. See, for example, Işık Ögütçü (ed.), *Orhan Kemal'in Babası Abdülkadir Kemali Bey'in Anıları*, second edition (İstanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2009), pp. 195-196.

⁴³¹ Ögün, *Kafkas Cephesinin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*, p. 92.

⁴³² “Mükellefiyet-i Ziraiye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, 5 Eylül 1332/18 September 1916, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 8, p. 1297; “Mükellefiyet-i Ziraiye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin Tatbikatı Hakkında Nizamname”, 5 Eylül 1332/18 September 1916, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 8, pp. 1298-1302; “Mükellefiyet-i Ziraiye Kanunu (tasdikan)”, 3 Nisan 1333/3 April 1917, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 8, pp. 596-597.

⁴³³ For the correspondence and the regulations issued about forming women labor battalions, see Özdemir, “Amele Taburları”, pp. 70-76.

transferred to Çukurova (Cilicia) to work in the fields which were emptied of a workforce especially when the Armenian population of the region was subjected to forced migration in 1915.⁴³⁴ The state also tried to engage Ottoman Muslim women in urban centers in industrial workforce. In Istanbul, the Woman Workers' Brigade was established in 1917 by the Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women, which was itself was formed in 1916 under the patronage of Enver Pasha and his wife Naciye Hanım to provide employment for Muslim women in need. But the practice of women workers' brigades was short-lived and rather functioned as a place for employment for several hundred poor Muslim women who were in need of money, food and shelter instead of being a major contribution to workforce in urban areas.⁴³⁵

Sometimes labor units were manned by convicts as a form of alternative punishment, in which way their labor would be more useful than locking them away. For example, in the Third Army zone of the Caucasus Front in 1915, about 3,000 captured draft evaders and deserters were ordered by the army command to be sent to the provinces of Diyarbekir and Mamuretülaziz to work in agriculture and transportation.⁴³⁶ Another common way of compensating agricultural workforce by using "outcasts" during the war was to assign captured POWs to large farms urgently in need of manpower, a method that was used especially in the major provinces of Istanbul, Hüdavendigâr/Bursa, Edirne, and in the districts surrounding these urban

⁴³⁴ Toprak, *İttihad - Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, p. 97.

⁴³⁵ See Karakışla, *Women, War and Work in the Ottoman Empire*. The author argues that urban women labor units were of only symbolic importance and acted to increase status and standard of living of some Muslim women, since the need for workforce in urban industries was not so desperate. But his argument must be limited to urban centers, since there was a considerable need for workforce in agriculture during the war years.

⁴³⁶ Öğün, *Kafkas Cephesinin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*, p. 89.

centers, such as İzmit and Çatalca.⁴³⁷ It seems that many Russian POWs were mostly employed in agricultural work this way.⁴³⁸ The procedure used for this purpose was that upon the demand of landowners, various numbers of POWs were assigned to the farms on condition that their shelter, provision and guardianship should have been provided by landowners. It was also required that landowners needed to report every week to their local administration and the military supply station inspectorate (*menzil müfettişliği*) about the presence of the POWs assigned to them; in case of desertions, urgent reporting was required together with physical descriptions of the POWs.⁴³⁹ Finally, regular troop units could also be employed in agricultural work in times of urgent need, if there was no combat situation on the battlefield. For example, an order issued in November 1916 to the army commands required that in possible situations regular troops should have helped agricultural works in their zones.⁴⁴⁰

Of course, forming labor units by civilians was not the same thing as the labor battalions in the army. The latter was a component of the military service obligation, the duration of which was subject to the mobilization regulations during the war, which practically meant that it continued as the war became prolonged. The labor battalions of the army were permanent military units during the war, where hard working conditions mingled with very poor supplies under a strict military hierarchy. Civilian labor units looked like rather local and temporary measures to cope with the workforce problem in agriculture. However, it should be emphasized that their

⁴³⁷ BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB. , 34/25, 18 Cemâziyelevvel 1335/12 March 1917; Toprak, *İttihad - Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, p. 227, note 14.

⁴³⁸ BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB. , 37/21, 25 Receb 1335/17 May 1917. Another interesting application in this respect was that Muslim POWs in the hands of the Germans were transferred to the Ottoman Empire to be employed in agriculture and factories, where laborforce was needed. See ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1835, Dosya 30, Fihrist 1-37.

⁴³⁹ BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB. , 31/36, 21 Şa'ban 1335/12 June 1917.

⁴⁴⁰ Öğün, *Kafkas Cephesinin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*, p. 93; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 76/134, 24 Receb 1335/16 May 1917.

formation process emanated from a similar military logic. They were the product of a militarist mentality which tried to put the whole society into a military discipline and treat it like an army personnel. Mobilizing civilian manpower in a militaristic way to increase agricultural production can also be regarded as the sign of the total war perspective, in which the military wanted to control all sectors including the economy for its war effort.

The Problem of Exemptions

As emphasized above, the Ottoman conscription experience had always been imbued with high number of exemptions since its beginning. Besides the general tendency of the Ottoman state to exclude non-Muslims from military service, which had only slowly and partly disappeared, a considerable number of Muslims also had the exemption status. Moreover, some regions of the empire, such as Yemen, practically remained outside of the conscription system because the state was unable to constitute the necessary infrastructure to carry out recruitment. The existence of many exemptions had not only caused a feeling of unfair treatment in the population, but also practically deprived the armed forces of a good deal of manpower. Apparently, this situation also produced a problem of corruption in society, since possibility of getting exempted from military service resulted in unethical and criminal behavior on the part of many Muslims.⁴⁴¹

One of the most stressed aims of enacting a new law for military service in 1914 was to end many exemptions which were regarded as unnecessary and thought

⁴⁴¹ "...*istisnaiyet imtiyazına mazhar olmak için birçok halkı ahlâksızlığa, sahtekârlığa, yalancılığa, irtikâb ve irtişaya sevk etmiştir*", Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 10.

to have undermined the Ottoman military power. Ending exemptions would also be a way “to bring the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, everybody under the same banner”. In fact, as has been mentioned above, efforts in this direction had already started after 1909, when the medrese students, who had not passed their exams in time, were no longer exempted from conscription. Ottoman authorities were more determined in 1914 to restrict every “unnecessary” exemption in the conscription system. Article 1 of the military service law of 1914 announced that only the members of the Ottoman imperial family would unconditionally be exempt from military service. However, while this determination was never abandoned during the war, it needed to be reshaped and revised under the actual conditions of mobilization. Therefore, as some exemptions were abolished on the one hand, others remained in use and sometimes even new exemptions were introduced.

The Exemption Fee

First of all, there was the issue of the exemption fee, which also constituted a major equality problem. One of the targets of the new law for military service of 1914 was to abolish the practice of paying exemption fee instead of serving in the armed forces. In fact, it had been an objective frequently declared since the reorganization efforts which started in 1909. But it practically always remained in effect, because the Ottoman state could not dispense with this extra source of financial revenue. Whereas the state officially used a discourse of equality of all Ottomans before law since 1909, it actually did not want to press it too hard in practice to abolish the exemption fee practice, because it served to alleviate its financial burdens. Moreover, it also seems that the exemption fee practice could always be tolerated within the Ottoman conscription system, since only the economically well-off segment of the

Ottoman population was able to resort to it. The exclusion of this minor portion of the population from conscription never jeopardized the manpower potential of the Ottoman military, and since the majority in this portion consisted of non-Muslims, their active service in the armed forces was not regarded as particularly indispensable from the Ottoman military point of view. This informal compromise was also welcome by the Ottoman non-Muslims themselves, who did not have a long history of military service in the Ottoman Empire and were never particularly enthusiastic about revisions after 1909 aiming to include them into the active service obligation.

This general approach of the Ottoman state to the exemption fee practice can be said to have continued during the Great War, while some significant modifications were made. Parallel to the official discourse since 1909, it was announced in 1914 that the abolition of the exemption fee practice was among the main targets of the new legal and organizational reforms regarding the conscription system.⁴⁴² But the points which this discourse needed to emphasize to justify itself acquired different dimensions after the declaration of mobilization. While the language of Ottomanism which stressed the abolition of the exemption fee as a way of equating Muslim and non-Muslim Ottomans through including them into the same military service obligation vaguely continued, the discourse now also needed to address certain discontents in the public sphere concerning the unequal treatment towards different economic classes in society. The “National Economy” policies of the CUP government offered many economic opportunities and privileges to the Muslim-Turkish elements of the empire, and, apparently, a considerable number of well-off Muslims had also begun to use the exemption fee option by the late 1914.⁴⁴³ This

⁴⁴² Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 7.

⁴⁴³ On the “National Economy” policies in this period, see Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat, 1908-1918* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982).

seems to have caused murmur and complaint in the public sphere that the conscription system favored the rich and the burden of defending the fatherland was imposed on the shoulders of the poor. Therefore, in propagating their intention to abolish the exemption fee, Ottoman authorities needed to emphasize that the rich were obligated to serve in the armed forces as much as the poor: “Now the most polite and the richest would defend their motherland in the same way as the poor peasant little Mehmeds... What an honor!”⁴⁴⁴

But neither the new law for military service nor the mobilization regulations could abolish the exemption fee practice entirely. It was confessed by authorities that though abolishing the exemption fee option had seriously been considered in the preparation process of the new law, this intention could not be put into effect fully because of financial needs of the state. Instead, it was restricted as much as possible.⁴⁴⁵ First of all, from now on, paying an exemption fee instead of actively serving in the armed forces did not mean that the payer would be exempted forever. Article 121 of the new law required that even if a person paid an exemption fee, he was required to get basic military training for six months in the nearest infantry division. The law also stipulated that while the exemption fee practice remained in effect, it would be available only in peacetime and nobody would be given this option in wartime.⁴⁴⁶ But not only the exemption fee practice continued after the mobilization was declared and during the war, various restrictions on it were also loosened. Initial statements that condemned the practice, such as the following one, would have to compromise with actual war conditions and be modified time and time again: “Resorting to the exemption fee in the time of mobilization would mean to sell

⁴⁴⁴ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 14.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

one's duty of defending his motherland with money or to buy his life at a cheap price; both of these are quite illogical and unwise."⁴⁴⁷

For example, the new law for the exemption fee, which was enacted on 6 March 1915, confirmed that the practice would continue in war conditions.⁴⁴⁸ The practice never disappeared during the war and was legally renewed with some modifications.⁴⁴⁹ The legal regulations that were made during the war confined it only to those who were in the active reserve (*ihdiyat*) and territorial reserve (*müstahfiz*) categories. Those who were at the ages of active military service were not allowed to use that option.

But even for those who were in the reserve categories, the procedure was not standard either. There was discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims. While only untrained (*gayr-i muallem*)⁴⁵⁰ Muslim reserve men were allowed to use the exemption fee option, all non-Muslim reserve men, whether trained (*muallem*) or untrained, could use it. All non-Muslim reserve men who were assigned to unarmed service because of their bodily conditions were also allowed to use it. This discrimination sometimes became more visible in practice. For example, a British consulate report from Aleppo on 31 August 1914 included an observation that Ottoman authorities "made no secret that they merely aimed at wringing exemption money from such of the Christians as could pay, and did not need them as soldiers".⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

⁴⁴⁸ "Bedel-i Nakdi Kanunu", 21 Şubat 1330/6 March 1915, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 7, pp. 434-435.

⁴⁴⁹ "Bedel-i Nakdi Kabulünün Temdidi Hakkında Kanun (tasdikan)", 26 Kanunisani 1331/8 February 1916, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 8, pp. 380-381.

⁴⁵⁰ The term "trained" (*muallem*) was used to describe those reserves who got at least three month military training during their active service before; "untrained" (*gayr-i muallem*) described those who got less than three month training.

⁴⁵¹ TNA:PRO FO 195-2460 (1914, Turkey on the Eve of War).

The Abolition of the Exemption Status of the *Muinsiz* and Its Social Consequences

One of the exemptions that the Ottoman state resolutely abolished with the new law in 1914 concerned the so-called *muinsiz*, who were previously exempted from active military service because they were the only breadwinners in their families.⁴⁵² Article 49 of the new military service law abolished their exemption status and the Interior Ministry informed provincial administrations about this change.⁴⁵³ However, since drafting families' only breadwinners would cause severe financial sufferings for them, which would also give rise to much discontent on the home front towards the mobilization effort, the law provided a certain amount of allowance for such soldiers' families in need of support. According to the law, the allowance was to be 30 piasters (*kuruş*) a month per person to be paid by the government. But, while this new regulation looked like a reasonable substitution for exemption, the Ottoman state increasingly had great difficulty in taking care of soldiers' families in need of support after the mobilization was declared. As the war became prolonged, increasing number of families lost their breadwinners. As drafted men remained in service for years, or did not return because they died on the front, were wounded or became POWs, their families suffered. The problem became a major social issue throughout the empire within a short time after the Ottomans entered the war.

The issue was multidimensional. First of all, although the law promised allowance, there emerged confusion about the definition of breadwinner. Various revisions were made in 1915 and 1916 about this. As increasingly more families

⁴⁵² *Muinsiz* was a term used for a person who did not have anybody to look after his mother or his wife. For a summary account of the changing status of the *muinsiz* during the evolution of the Ottoman conscription system, see Nicole A.N.M. van Os, "Taking Care of Soldiers' Families: The Ottoman State and the *Muinsiz alle* [sic] *maşı*", in Zürcher (ed.), *Arming the State*, pp. 95-110.

⁴⁵³ BOA, DH.İD., 180/52 , 10 Receb 1332/4 June 1914.

demanded allowance from the government, and as payments became unexpectedly a huge financial burden on the state budget, the definition of breadwinner was modified. In order to alleviate the burden, the government needed to extend the list of who would be “potential” breadwinner for a family other than the drafted men. In some cases, relatives were defined as “substitute breadwinners” if they lived geographically close enough to the family in need. The father and, in some cases, the well-off mother was accepted as breadwinner, if they lived in the same district with the family. A child, brother, grandfather or father-in-law could also be breadwinner, if they lived in the same village or the same neighborhood. The list also included more potential candidates from relatives, if they lived in the same household.⁴⁵⁴

Secondly, the state had difficulty in finding enough financial sources for this promise and could not pay allowances regularly. The provincial administrators recurrently demanded money from Istanbul to make these payments and they complained that they were unable to pay the allowances on time. Families also frequently complained and demanded their allowances be paid. Such complaints sometimes took the form of violent action. For example, in Aydın in March 1916, “a group of soldiers’ families attacked a bakery and beat up the official in charge of the allowances because they received no money for three months”; the unrest was pacified when the government, fearing that it would spread to other regions, decided to send money for allowances to the province.⁴⁵⁵ On the other hand, the purchasing power of the monthly payments dropped drastically against the skyrocketing cost of living in the Ottoman Empire during the war years. (See Table 7) The cost of living rose so dramatically in the Ottoman Empire compared to the European powers that only the case of Austria could pose a similarity.

⁴⁵⁴ Os, “Taking Care of Soldiers’ Families”, p. 98.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

Table 7
The Cost of Living Index in the Ottoman Empire and Major European Powers
during the Great War (1914=100)⁴⁵⁶

	Ottoman Empire	Britain	France	Germany	Austria	Italy
1914	100	100	100	100	100	100
1915	130	123	118	125	158	109
1916	212	139	135	164	337	136
1917	846	175	159	245	672	195
1918	1,823	203	206	293	1,163	268
1919	1,424	221	259	401	2,492	273

The increasingly worsened living conditions in the empire were characterized by ever rising food prices and shortages. To mention a few examples, the price of one *okka*⁴⁵⁷ sugar was 3 piasters in July 1914, but it rose to 62 piasters in January 1917 and to 140 piasters in January 1918; while one *okka* of potatoes was sold at 1 piaster in July 1914, it was sold at 20 piasters in September 1917 and at 36 piasters in January 1918; the price of one *okka* of mutton was 7 piasters in July 1914, but it reached to 28 piasters in January 1917 and to 120 piasters in September 1918.⁴⁵⁸ By the last year of the war, the discontent of soldiers' families reached an alarming level. A British intelligence report dated 31 July 1918 claimed that a group of women in Istanbul demonstrated in front of the War Ministry to protest the bad living conditions caused by the war. "They stoned the building, breaking windows and crying 'Feed us or bring back our husbands or sons'". The report also stated that the

⁴⁵⁶ Toprak, *İttihad - Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, pp. 154-155.

⁴⁵⁷ *Okka* was a weight measure, and one *okka* was equal to approximately 1,282 grams.

⁴⁵⁸ Yalman, *Turkey in the World War*, pp. 147-148; Toprak, *İttihad - Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, p. 165.

mob could be pacified only when the authorities distributed food and money to them.⁴⁵⁹

Another way of providing support for soldiers' families was charity activities. Charity campaigns for soldiers' families were a major part of the state-sponsored poor relief during the war.⁴⁶⁰ These were organized mostly by semi-official voluntary organizations. As in many aid campaigns for the Ottoman troops during the war, the National Defense League was quite active in such charity activities. In a press declaration issued by the National Defense League to invite people to help soldiers' families, it was stated that the holy war (*cihad*) in Islam also necessitated taking care of the families of fighters for the faith (*gazis*): "The duty to take care of soldiers' needy children and families in their villages is as religious and sacred as the duty to join the holy war enthusiastically to defend the religion and the nation." The declaration also said that even the richest states' budgets would require assistance from their peoples in such situations, and urged the Ottomans to aid the campaign in accordance with their own economic power.⁴⁶¹

Some charity works for soldiers' families were organized by wives of high ranking state authorities. They established an organization called the Ladies Working to Help Soldiers' Families (*Asker Ailelerine Yardımcı Hanımlar*). This charity

⁴⁵⁹ TNA:PRO WO 157-735, April-August 1918.

⁴⁶⁰ On the poor relief activities during the war, see Safiye Kıranlar, *Savaş Yıllarında Türkiye'de Sosyal Yardım Faaliyetleri (1914-1923)* (Ph.d. dissertation, Istanbul University, 2005). Approaching poor relief not merely as a way of providing help for the needy but also as a means of legitimating political power and forming a demographic control mechanism gained momentum in the Ottoman Empire during the era of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), who built various relief organizations emphasizing his own personage. In this sense, as Kıranlar has observed, the CUP government's poor relief policies during the war years displayed a remarkable continuation, but with a difference that the latter tried to turn poor relief into an integrated function of the state as social policy in a more modern sense, legitimizing not the rule of a single figure but the whole state. On the poor relief in the era of Abdülhamid II, see *Özbek, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet*.

⁴⁶¹ "Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti", *İkdâm*, 16 Eylül 1330/29 September 1914; "Asker Aileleri Menfaatine", *İkdâm*, 8 Ağustos 1330/21 August 1914.

organization was initiated in Istanbul by the wife of Liman von Sanders, the chief of the German Military Mission and the commander of the Ottoman First Army, and the wife of İsmail Canbulad, the director of the general security Department. Various other pro-CUP authorities' wives also joined it, such as Bedri Bey's, the police chief of Istanbul, Hikmet Bey's, the chief of the press department, and Selim Sırrı Bey's, the inspector of education. As high-ranking authorities' wives, both domestic and foreign, publicly worked to help poor women whose men were sacrificing their lives for the fatherland on the battlefield, the initiative also tried to reflect that the state had a compassionate attitude towards its people even in the hardest times. While the main aim of the initiative was declared to have been providing help for soldiers' families in need, there is no doubt that it also contributed to the legitimation of the government in its war policies. Branches were established for this purpose in the major parts of Istanbul, where food and other supplies were distributed each month to the needy.

But who were in need would be determined through an official procedure at the local level. Those women who wanted to get help from these branches on behalf of their families first needed to receive official documents from the *muhtar* or the *imam* of their neighborhoods, confirming that their men were in the armed forces and they were really in need of aid.⁴⁶² Similar charity works were also encouraged in the provinces.⁴⁶³ Moreover, while it seems to have never become a widespread campaign in Ottoman society during the war, there was also some public effort to find

⁴⁶² "Asker Ailelerine Yardımcı Hanımlar", *İkdâm*, 29 Kanunievvel 1330/11 January 1915; "Asker Aileleri İçin", *İkdâm*, 15 Kanunisani 1330/28 January 1915.

⁴⁶³ "Asker Aileleri Hakkında", *Tanin*, 15 Teşrinievvel 1330/28 October 1914.

employment for disabled war veterans, officers as well as drafted men, as a form of aid.⁴⁶⁴

Bureaucratic Exemptions

To keep its large bureaucratic machine running during the war, the Ottoman state also needed to exempt its bureaucrats and officials at key posts from conscription. For this reason, according to Article 90 of the law for military service, even if their ages were in the reserve categories, people such as ministers, top officials, ambassadors, governors, judges and muftis were not obliged to serve in the armed forces under all circumstances. But, more importantly, the state also needed its middle and lower ranking civil servants and technical personnel to continue their works in wartime, as their job description now also included to supervise the mobilization process in their localities, as well as fulfilling their routine works. People such as post office clerks and telegram technicians, banks clerks, railway technicians and clerks, accountants, policemen, etc. were equally indispensable during the war. Article 91 of the same law included a long and detailed list of middle and low ranking civil servants from many departments, whose reserve age categories would be exempted from military service even during the time of mobilization.⁴⁶⁵ In fact, middle and low ranking officials could sometimes be particularly important to carry out crucial works in the actual war situations, and sometimes even additional

⁴⁶⁴ “Malül Zabitan ve Efrada Muavenet”, *İkdâm*, 24 Teşrinisani 1333/24 November 1333; “Gazilerimiz İçin Bir Teşebbüs: Gaziler Nakliyat Anbarı”, *İkdâm*, 24 Kanunievvel 1333/24 December 1917.

⁴⁶⁵ For the full lists of top, middle and low ranking officials who were exempt from military service, see the articles 91 and 92 of the Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 6, p. 688-692.

number of people was needed to be employed in various departments, as it is evident from some laws issued regarding such regulations.⁴⁶⁶

However, though their function was significant, civil servants increasingly came under the control of military authorities during the war. The martial law situation, which continued throughout the war, gave not only practically but also officially the ultimate authority to military commanders in local administration.⁴⁶⁷ Although the mobilization decree gave the Interior Ministry the power to declare martial law, it was the War Ministry which executed the actual military government.⁴⁶⁸ This created a process in which state employees in the provinces, including the top local administrators, were required to obey the authority of military commanders. The War Ministry occasionally stressed this requirement in its correspondence to the Interior Ministry, upon which the latter needed to warn its local officials that they should have considered and carried out the measures and proposals coming the commanders.⁴⁶⁹ Recruitment became a top priority at which civilian officials were expected to be particularly careful during the war. Civilian officials of the provinces were recurrently warned by the center about their crucial function in ensuring that the draft procedure was carried out efficiently in their localities.⁴⁷⁰ They were also required to supervise the execution of the war tax

⁴⁶⁶ See, for example, “Seferberlik Münasebetiyle İlâveten İstihdam Olunan Memurin Maaşatı için 1332 Posta ve Telgraf ve Telefon Bütçesi’ne 2,000,000 Kuruş Tahsitat-ı Fevkalade İlavesi Hakkında Kanun (tasdikan)”, 5 Kanunisanı 1332/18 January 1917, *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 9, p. 115.

⁴⁶⁷ Köksal, “Divan-ı Harb-i Örfler”, pp. 24, 33-34. The martial law administration was only partly lifted in the later part of the war. It was lifted in some Anatolian provinces (Kastamonu, Konya, Ankara, Hüdavendigâr) and sub-provinces (Bolu, Kütahya, Eskişehir ve Afyonkarahisar), which were deemed secure and sufficiently away from the combat zones, on 19 December 1917.

⁴⁶⁸ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 175.

⁴⁶⁹ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 55/157, 11 Şevval 1333/22 August 1915.

⁴⁷⁰ For an early example of such warnings, see BOA, DH.ŞFR., 42/155, 6 Şa’ban 1332/30 Haziran 1914.

impositions. They were even threatened that if their contribution to the mobilization process in their localities was not satisfactory, they would be punished.⁴⁷¹

The law for military service also provided exemption for religious functionaries of every religion. According to Article 91, not only high and middle ranking religious representatives of all religious communities in the empire, but also low ranking ones were exempted, including priests, monks and deacons (who had a certificate) for the Christians, rabbis and deputy rabbis for the Jews. For the Muslim low ranking religious functionaries, the exemption list was a little more detailed. It was stipulated that for each mosque, one *imam*, one Quran reciter (*hafiz*), one call to prayer reciter (*müezzin*), one caretaker (*kayyim*) would be left out of the military service obligation. It was also announced that for those *imams* who did not have a certificate (*beratsız*), only one would be exempted as a deputy imam for a mosque, if that mosque had no other *imam* with a certificate.

It can be said that the Ottoman state was not so strict in obliging religious functionaries to serve in the armed forces; the state could be relatively flexible in giving exemption status in this respect, especially when the Muslim religious functionaries were concerned. Of course, there were reasons for this. Obviously, this flexibility did not stem only from the concern of providing uninterrupted religious service for believers in wartime. Low ranking religious functionaries, particularly the village *imam*, also played a crucial role in mobilizing men for the war. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, through his sermons and preaches, and with his respected personage among the local community, the *imam* was the key figure in justifying the military service as a sacred duty. He was the one whom local people

⁴⁷¹ BOA, DH.SYS., 123-1/1-7, 23 Zilhicce 1332/12 November 1914; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 60/116, 19 Rebûlahir 1334/24 February 1916.

took most seriously about the exaltation of martyrdom in war. As will be mentioned in Chapter 6, the *imam* was also influential in convincing draft evaders and deserters to re-join the armed forces. Therefore, since the *imam* was regarded as one of the main propagators and motivators of the Ottoman mobilization at the grass-roots level, their exemption status ensured that enough number of them was available in every locality.

Exemptions of Certain Social Groups

Exemption status was given to certain social groups as well. Two main groups stood out in this respect. The first and the largest group were Muslim refugees and immigrants (*muhacir*); the other was the nomads who had been recently settled. As the Ottoman Empire successively lost territories after major defeats in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 and the Balkan War of 1912-13, hundreds of thousands Muslim people of the lost territories in the Balkans and the Caucasus region immigrated into the empire. In fact, the law did not entitle the *muhacirs* to a lifelong exemption status. It was a temporary offer and they were allowed to be exempt for six years after the date of their immigration.⁴⁷² Apparently, this exemption period was offered to expedite the process of their settlement and adaptation to the new social environment. However, the actual war conditions and the increasing need for manpower caused this “courtesy” of the state to disappear quickly. The six year period of adaptation was modified during the war and reduced to three months as the manpower need became more pressing.⁴⁷³ They were also encouraged to join the armed forces as volunteers.

⁴⁷² Article 135, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, p. 700.

⁴⁷³ An amendment that was made to the Temporary Law for Military Service on 5 April 1915 determined that if the War Ministry needed and thought it necessary, males of all past and future

The law for military service also exempted the settled nomadic tribes from military service. Such tribes were mostly Kurdish living in southern and eastern Anatolia. The reason for this apparently involved an encouragement for all nomadic tribes within the empire to get settled, so that the state's control function over them could be increased. But their status of exemption was not absolute and lifelong either. Under war conditions, the Ottoman state tried to get use of the manpower of these tribes by joining them in volunteer forces. They were encouraged to join the Ottoman armed forces by forming their separate voluntary cavalry regiments, which were, in a sense, a continuation of the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments established by Abdülhamid II. (Both groups will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.)

Mobilizing "Citizen-Officers"

Another major aim of the reforms in the conscription system after the Balkan War was to constitute a mechanism to train enough number of reserve officers as a precautionary measure for a prospective mobilization, because the peacetime facilities regarding the availability of officers was much lower than planned wartime requirements. Ottoman authorities seriously considered that "it would be the low ranking officers who would be most needed during mobilization because of extended wartime reorganization of the army and casualties."⁴⁷⁴ Enver's purge of about 1,300 officers from the army in early 1914, who were seen as an obstruction to modernization because of their age or incapability, also widened the gap further in

muhaçirs, who were of military age, would be conscripted three months after the date they arrived in the empire. "Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatine Müzeyyel Kanun-ı Muvakkat", 23 Mart 1331/5 April 1915, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 7, no. 199, p. 546; BOA, DH.UMVM., 123/34, 30 Cemâziyelevvel 1333/15 April 1915.

⁴⁷⁴ Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 14.

the availability of officers. Moreover, the Ottoman military structure lacked an established corps of long service noncommissioned officers who could be useful in filling middle and low ranking command positions.⁴⁷⁵ A reserve officer training system was also recommended as a way of strengthening the existing command system by respected German generals who advised the Ottoman army, such as Colmar von der Goltz.⁴⁷⁶

The need for reserve officers began to be deeply felt when mobilization was declared only after a few months since the reforms had been undertaken. The organization and deployment of the Ottoman army in a multi-front war steadily required a considerable number of reserve officers to fill the necessary command posts. While the ratio of reserve officers in the Ottoman army was around 10 percent in 1914, it slightly exceeded 20 percent in 1916. Out of total 19,220 officers, 880 were reserve officers in 1914. The number of reserve officers increased to 2,055 in 1916, when the total number of officers was 19,058. Due to increasing casualties and declining rhythm of the mobilization by the last year of the war, the number of reserve officers eroded to 1,121 out of the total 21,144 officers in the Ottoman army.⁴⁷⁷

In fact, the Ottoman army's need for petty officers was so high during the war that even reserve officers did not suffice, and, therefore, it was decided that sergeants and top sergeants, who displayed remarkable capabilities in their units, would be

⁴⁷⁵ Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Fon der Golç [Colmar von der Goltz], *Osmanlılar Muharebelerini Nasıl Kaybettiler? Şimdi Nasıl Telifi ve Terakki Edebilirler?* (Istanbul: Sancakçıyan Matbaası, 1331/1915), p. 98.

⁴⁷⁷ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol.10, p. 615. This source gives two different figures for the number of reserve officers in the Ottoman army. The figure in page 615 is 1,725, while it is given as 1,121 in a tabulated calculation in page 700. I use the second one.

promoted and employed as deputy officers. This practice continued through the end of the war.⁴⁷⁸

Table 8
The Number of Reserve Officers in the Ottoman Army, 1914-1918⁴⁷⁹

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	Total
Infantry	594	579	1642	1681	701	5197
Artillery	207	105	277	263	265	1117
Engineering	62	80	102	107	116	467
Communications	15	43	34	5	33	130
Transportation	2	1	-	7	6	16
Total	880	808	2055	2063	1121	6927

In fact, being a reserve officer was already a category in the obligatory military service. The existing law for the reserve officers, which had been issued on 18 April 1910, was reenacted with slight modifications after the declaration of mobilization and announced to the public via newspapers.⁴⁸⁰ The reserve officer category was open to graduates of higher education schools and graduates of medreses.⁴⁸¹ To encourage these graduates for military service, the recruitment of educated people as reserve officers was announced by authorities as “a special privilege bestowed to those having knowledge and high position”.⁴⁸² On the other hand, this discourse of encouragement only slightly covered the heavy hand of compulsion. The need was so urgent and the regulations so strict that, the attitude of the state could easily become merciless. The War Ministry issued an order in the first

⁴⁷⁸ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 331.

⁴⁷⁹ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 10, p. 700.

⁴⁸⁰ “İhtiyat Zabitanı Kanunu”, *İkdâm*, 27 Temmuz 1330/9 August 1914.

⁴⁸¹ For a full lists of higher education schools graduates of which were eligible for being reserve officers, see Article 147, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, p. 706. Since the War Academy was practically closed during the war years, its students at earlier classes were also included in the reserve officer category and put though the same training procedure.

⁴⁸² Behic, *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatinin İzahı*, p. 15.

week after the declaration of mobilization, which summoned all who were eligible for the reserve officer category according to the law, and also threatened that those who did not show up within the required time would be subject to severe punishments including the death penalty.⁴⁸³

The draftees who would become reserve officers were gathered at training camps (*talimgâh*) in Istanbul. The first and main one of these camps was located in the War Academy at Pangaltı. As the number of draftees increased, new training camps were formed at different points of Istanbul, such as Maltepe, Yakacık, Pendik, Kızıltoprak, Erenköy, where intellectuals and professionals from various fields joined together.⁴⁸⁴ At these centers, draftees received a six month basic training, after which they were assigned to various military units as candidate officers (*zabit namzedi*). After three months of active service in their units, the candidates were promoted to deputy officers (*zabit vekili*).⁴⁸⁵

In fact, it can be argued that drafting educated people as reserve officers during the war meant more than contributing to the army's need for officers. Being a reserve officer was attributed more importance than fulfilling one's military service obligation. The participation of the most educated strata of society into the war effort by filling important command positions in the army would be an exemplary act for the whole society and serve to justify the war cause of the CUP government. This point was quite visible in the perspective of Hamdullah Suphi [Tanrıöver], a nationalist writer of the period and a leading figure of the nationalist Turkish Hearth Society. For him, the contribution of the urban educated Turkish man to the war

⁴⁸³ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 423; "İhtiyat Zabit Namzedlerine", *İkdâm*, 12 Eylül 1330/25 September 1914.

⁴⁸⁴ Reserve officers' adaptation process and daily lives in these training camps are recounted in detail in a semi-documentary popular novel, written from the nationalist mindset of the 1930s. See Burhan Cahit [Morkaya], *İhtiyat Zabiti* (Istanbul: Kanaat Kütüphanesi, 1933).

⁴⁸⁵ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 423-424.

effort was equally a source of pride compared to the contribution of the simple Anatolian peasant. In his view, the joining of educated people in the war was no less patriotic than that of Anatolian peasant boys. He claimed that the educated people's service in the armed forces was to be particularly appreciated because their intellectual formation did not involve soldierly skills, while the peasants had already grown up listening to stories about their father's holy wars and martyrdoms and been "naturally" accustomed to soldiering.⁴⁸⁶ Şevket Süreyya [Aydemir], an active figure during the 1930s in the etatist-nationalist circle called the *Kadro* movement, who himself was drafted as a reserve officer during the war and fought on the Caucasus front, attributed a more significant meaning to being a reserve officer during the war. He wrote after the war that drafting young educated people actually contributed to the nation-building process, as it presented an opportunity for them to meet the simple Anatolian peasant in his all aspects, who was "the true essence of the [Turkish] nation". For him, since there was nothing in common between the folk and the educated people before this moment, this meeting, which was "strengthened further by the comradeship of arms and blood during the National Struggle" in Anatolia after the Great War, was the first step towards the national unity attained in full in the republican era.⁴⁸⁷

But reserve officers were needed by the military for more practical purposes as well. In fact, the practical aspect was much more pressing under war conditions. the Ottoman military's need for technical personnel in various fields such as engineering, communications and transportation (see Table 8) would be met by civilian professional and technical personnel who were drafted. Besides filling the low ranking command posts, the reserve officers who had technical skills also took

⁴⁸⁶ Koroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı*, p. 198.

⁴⁸⁷ Şevket Süreyya, *Suyu Arayan Adam*, p. 101.

part in infrastructural improvement works in the regions they were located, as in the case of Münim Mustafa, who helped constructing telephone line at a nearby village when he was a deputy officer in Amman.⁴⁸⁸

Many important literary and intellectual figures, who would become famous in their fields in the future, such as historian Fuad [Köprülü], writer Falih Rıfkı [Atay] and politician-writer Şevket Süreyya served in the Ottoman army during the Great War as reserve officers. In fact, many members of the educated strata of Ottoman society got involved in the war this way. But not all of them shared the same approach with Şevket Süreyya, who attributed a formative meaning to being a reserve officer in the war in creating a Turkish nation-state. In fact, some of them, who recounted their experiences in their memoirs, adopted more critical approaches towards the war. For example, the case of Süleyman Nuri, who came to question the meaning of the war as he fought on the Dardanelles and Caucasus fronts respectively, provides us with a good example in this respect. As he has explained in his memoirs, having seen the dire conditions on the front and witnessed the slaughter of thousands of men, he began to think that the war was already lost for the Ottomans. Feeling that the CUP government did not care about even its own soldiers on the battlefield, he believed that once-applauded policies such as pan-Turkism were actually quite pointless. He complained that the Ottoman soldier was sent to death in vain because of thoughtless decisions by the politicians and commanders. He reached the conclusion that the decision to join the war actually served not the interests of the country, but only those of the CUP government, whose policies he

⁴⁸⁸ Münim Mustafa, *Cepheden Cepheye: İhtiyat Zabiti Bulunduğum Sırada Cihan Harbinde Kanal ve Çanakkale Cephelerine Ait Hatıralarım* (Istanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1998), p. 19.

was apparently already critical of before joining the army.⁴⁸⁹ In another example, Faik Tonguç, who served on the Caucasus front, has talked about his disenchantment about the “myths” of soldierly virtues as he observed actual conditions of war on the battlefield, where lives of ordinary soldiers were almost wasted, and he himself began to resort to inhuman methods, which he previously criticized, such as beating his soldiers as he lost his idealism.⁴⁹⁰

There are also others who have recounted their war experiences and observations without much comment, but also without filtering them. The published diaries and memoirs of Ottoman reserve officers present an invaluable source on the Ottoman mobilization experience during the Great War. The Ottoman peasant soldier was illiterate; therefore, unfortunately, he could not let his voice heard by us, because he did not record many things written on paper. On the other hand, there exists a considerable amount of published material written by high ranking Ottoman officers who actually liked to write about the war; but they either preferred to write an official history of war by omitting (deliberately and not deliberately) details in daily life, or used the memoir writing as a tool to justify their own actions in the war. They do not tell much about the actual war experience. The words of reserve officers are indispensable as the only available first hand accounts of the war, which would be very helpful to situate the Ottoman war experience in context.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁹ Süleyman Nuri, *Uyanan Esirler: Çanakkale Siperlerinden TKP Yönetimine* (Istanbul: Türkiye Sosyal Tarih Araştırma Vakfı, 2002), pp. 137-142.

⁴⁹⁰ Faik Tonguç, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Bir Yedek Subayın Anıları*, second edition (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1999), pp. 71, 107-108.

⁴⁹¹ Other than the ones which have already been mentioned in this chapter above, for a few more examples of such diaries-memoirs of reserve officers published in modern Turkish in recent years, see Fuad Gücüyener, *Sina Çölü'nde Türk Ordusu* (Istanbul: Anadolu Türk Kitap Deposu, 1939); Mehmed Fasih, *Kanlısirt Günlüğü: Mehmed Fasih Bey'in Çanakkale Anıları*, ed. by Murat Çulcu, (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1997); Fahri Çakır, *Elli Yıl Önce Şark Cephesi Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Çınar Matbaası, 1967); *Kendi Kaleminden Teğmen Cemil Zeki (Yoldaş)*, ed. by Engin Berber (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1994).

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a description of the Ottoman conscription practice in the context of the mobilization experience during the Great War. The Ottoman conscription system had gone through a comprehensive reform process after the Balkan defeat to create a more efficient draft system, which could use the available human potential in accordance with the requirements of a large-scale war. A substantial part of this overhauling effort involved a reestablishment of the conscription system at the local level through recruiting office branches in districts, which worked in collaboration with local civilian authorities and local notables. As the “gaze” of state authority in the smallest administrative unit, the *muhtar* also played a key role in implementing the draft procedure at the village level.

However, despite this major reform attempt at reorganization at the beginning of the war, various deficiencies which had been an important characteristic of the Ottoman system since the Tanzimat could never be overcome entirely. The intention to create a geographically standard recruitment procedure and to extend the military service obligation to all segments of society remained incomplete either due to the infrastructural weakness of state power or because of the CUP government’s discriminatory perspective. Not all exemptions could be abolished either. For example, although an official discourse condemned the exemption fee practice, the state could never dare to lift it entirely because of its financial shortages. Moreover, despite the existence of a discourse of Ottoman unity, the Ottoman conscription system’s treatment to different ethnic and religious communities of the empire became more unequal during the war. In fact, the new laws and procedures for military service consolidated the already existent discriminatory aspects in the

system. Although the CUP regime wanted to get use of non-Muslim and non-Turkish populations of the empire for the war effort by using a discourse of Ottoman unity, this discourse was actually based on the primacy of the Turkish element in this unity; the nationalist perspective of the regime involved a considerably amount of distrust towards the other groups, which resulted in such applications as putting non-Muslim enlisted men in the labor battalions. The reluctance of non-Muslim people in answering the call to arms also increased this distrust.

As the war necessitated more and more manpower on the battlefield, the actual war conditions recurrently required changes in the conscription system. While the Ottoman state had to deal with such necessary changes on the one hand, it also tried to overcome the incompleteness of its system on the other. Where the formal conscription system did not function sufficiently, the state still tried to get use of the manpower potential by resorting to amalgamating old imperial ways of recruitment with modern conscription methods and by creating alternative recruitment categories. Volunteers constituted such an alternative category, which not only helped the state mobilize those segments of its population that could not be conscripted formally due to infrastructural problems, but also provided the armed forces with additional manpower that could be used in “special” military missions. The next chapter will focus on volunteers.

CHAPTER 4

VOLUNTEERISM AS A RELATIONSHIP OF POWER: VOLUNTEERS IN THE OTTOMAN ARMY DURING THE GREAT WAR

As a prolonged and multi-front battle in the age of industrialized warfare, the Great War increasingly undermined the manpower of the belligerent countries, including the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the Ottoman case was unique in some respects, particularly regarding casualties. Because of the low medical capacity of the Ottoman military, the number of soldiers who died of disease (466,759) was higher than the number of combat dead or missing (305,085); and the number of deserters (500,000) was higher than both. Moreover, in just the first year of the war, the Ottoman military suffered the highest annual number of combat losses with 112,850 soldiers killed in action. This figure is remarkably high considering that the total number of Ottoman combat dead during the four years of the war was 175,220.⁴⁹² Another unique aspect of the Ottoman case was poor infrastructure of the state. The universal conscription was not applied in a standard way geographically. The mechanism of manpower mobilization worked at a reasonable level in the Anatolian provinces where the foundations of the citizen-mobilizing state had partially been established after the Tanzimat reforms. However, the state had difficulty in executing conscription in the regions where those foundations were weak; these were usually regions populated by Kurdish and Arab tribal groups.

Except for a brief period at the very beginning of the mobilization when the number of enlisted men sufficed to fill the ranks of the armed forces, the Ottoman armed forces were constantly in need of men to reinforce their ranks, not only because of combat losses, but also due to the insufficient capacity of the formal

⁴⁹² Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, pp.240-243.

conscription practice. A common and highly widespread solution to this problem was to make use of volunteers in the armed forces. In fact, using volunteers in various fields of the armed forces in the Great War was not a novel practice for the Ottoman military, since this method had already been used in previous wars of the modern era,⁴⁹³ such as the Crimean War of 1853-56,⁴⁹⁴ the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78⁴⁹⁵ and the Balkan War of 1912-13.⁴⁹⁶ Legal regulations concerning volunteers in the armed forces had become an integrated part of the Ottoman laws on military service as of 1846.⁴⁹⁷ But the practice became much more organized and acquired multiple forms during the Great War.

The Ottoman state emphasized that only those men who were not already legally obliged to enlist could apply to volunteer for fighting in the war, and the application was to be made only to recruiting offices.⁴⁹⁸ But the reality of Ottoman military volunteerism was more complex than this legal measure would indicate. First of all, potential volunteers who were not already obliged to enlist were quite numerous and diverse, and the state's relationship with them was shaped by certain preferences and expectations. Second, since the Ottoman state's poor infrastructure

⁴⁹³ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, vol. 3, part 6, p. 239.*

⁴⁹⁴ Candan Badem, *The Ottomans and the Crimean War (1853-1856)* (Ph.d. dissertation, Sabancı University, 2007), Chapter 3.

⁴⁹⁵ During this war, the Ottoman state also encouraged non-Muslim volunteers to join voluntary armed units called the *Asâkir-i Muâvine* (auxiliary troops). As many as 3,000 non-Muslim volunteers joined these forces in the Balkan territories of the empire during the war. The state used this point to show the European powers that Ottoman Muslims and non-Muslims could unite under the same banner in case of a war. See Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, pp. 115-117.

⁴⁹⁶ BOA, DH.SYS., 112-15/21-1, 9 Zilkâde 1330/20 October 1912; BOA, DH.SYS., 112-15/21-2, 2 Zilhicce 1330/12 November 1912; BOA, DH.SYS., 112-15/21-3, 2 Muharrem 1331/12 December 1912; BOA, DH.SYS., 112-15/21-4, 2 Muharrem 1331/12 December 1912.

⁴⁹⁷ See Ayn, *Tanzimat'tan Sonra Askeratma Kanunları*; Musa Çadırcı, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Askere Almada Kura Usulüne Geçilmesi (1846 Tarihli Askerlik Kanunu)", in Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Sürecinde Türkiye: Askerlik*, pp. 87.

⁴⁹⁸ BOA, DH. ŞFR., 49/193, 17 Rebîulevvel 1333/2 February 1915; BOA, DH.HMŞ., 23/115, 7 Rebîulâhir 1333/22 February 1915.

prevented it from recruiting everyone who was already obliged to enlist especially in peripheral regions, its appeal to volunteerism was also an attempt to compensate for the deficiencies of its conscription system. In this sense, volunteerism was actually a restoration of the obligation. Third, the use of volunteers provided the state with a very flexible manpower pool which would be used in carrying out “informal” military missions such as guerilla attacks into enemy territory, actions of violent oppression towards “distrusted” civilians on the home front, or operations aimed at achieving demographic homogenization in Anatolia. Such actions were difficult and legally improper to be carried out by formal military units. Therefore, people such as prisoners were accepted as volunteers in order to carry out such extra legal missions.

This chapter will present a panorama of volunteers in the Ottoman armed forces during the Great War. I argue that the practice of employing volunteers in the military was not a “neutral” procedure that was open to the participation of all. Military volunteerism was a relationship of power between the state authority and certain groups in society. It was a power relationship in which the state tried to impose its own rules and expressed its own preferences towards potential volunteers. Even when the call for volunteers was declared to the entire public at times of urgent need for manpower, the state had already a clear vision of who would be more “reliable” and “useful” volunteers. In this sense, the acceptance of volunteers was a selective strategy by which the CUP-dominated state authority not only tried to reinforce the military manpower from its own perspective of reliability and usefulness, but also to strengthen its bond of legitimacy with the social groups that provided the highest popular support for its war policies. Volunteering for the Ottoman military during the war meant accepting the state’s own terms, which had a marginalizing effect on non-supportive groups in society. On the other hand,

volunteers were not passive subjects in this relationship. Volunteerism was a way of getting closer to state power and acquiring the right to express certain expectations. As will be discussed below, in the cases of prisoners, refugees and immigrants, tribes and dervish lodges, volunteers gained a certain amount of negotiation power vis-à-vis the state. Thus, in cooperation with the state, they were able to upgrade their status in society or increase their micro-power in their localities or realms of action.

Prisoner Volunteers

A major source of volunteers in the Ottoman Empire on the eve of and during the war was prisons. Prisoners provided a potential pool of voluntary fighters for the armed bands (*çeteler*) which were organized by the Special Organization (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*). As a secret paramilitary intelligence organization founded by Enver Pasha soon before the war, the Special Organization was based on the model of Balkan paramilitary groups (especially the Bulgarian IMRO) that Enver had observed during his fighting against the Balkan insurgents. The Special Organization not only undertook a major role of carrying out propaganda activities to get support from Muslim populations in India, Russia, Iran and also Egypt for the Ottoman holy war (*cihad*), but also engaged in guerilla warfare on major fronts throughout the war. The combination of both the experiences of irregular warfare that the Ottoman forces applied and observed during the Tripolitania War of 1911 and the Balkan War of 1912-13, and the legacy of Abdülhamid II's spy network formed the basis of the Special Organization during the Great War. It was financed mainly by the secret fund (*tahsisat-ı mestûre*) of the War Ministry. The Special Organization sometimes also

got monetary support from the National Defense League.⁴⁹⁹ Philip H. Stoddard has described the major aims of the organization as “to maintain internal security, to assure the continued domination of the Turkish-speaking minority which was considered essential to the preservation of the state, and to prevent any further erosion of Ottoman territory.”⁵⁰⁰

The first guerilla warfare activities of the Special Organization started to take place at the Ottoman-Russian border in the Caucasus region in August 1914, even before the Ottomans actually entered the war. The objective was manifold: the Organization tried to stir up anti-Russian feelings and revolts among Muslims at both sides of the border, but especially in the formerly Ottoman provinces of Batum, Kars and Ardahan, which were occupied by the Russians after the 1871 Russo-Ottoman War.⁵⁰¹ It organized guerilla attacks into Russian soil both to weaken the Russian military existence in the region and to intimidate the Christian population. The

⁴⁹⁹ Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 3, p. 343.

⁵⁰⁰ Philip H. Stoddard, *The Ottoman Government and the Arabs, 1911 to 1918: A Preliminary Study of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (Ph.d. dissertation, Princeton University, 1963), pp. 3-4 [it has been published in Turkish as a book: *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa: Osmanlı Hükümeti ve Araplar 1911-1918: Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa Üzerine Bir Ön Çalışma*, trans. Tansel Demirel (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1994)]. This is still the most significant study on the Special Organization, about which there are insufficient primary sources available. For memoirs/observations about the organization during the war by the aide-de-camp of Talat Pasha, see Arif Cemil, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, ed. by Metin Martı, second edition (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, n.d.). (This book is the reprint of the author’s memoirs which were previously published serially in the daily *Vakit* in 1934). For memoirs of a high-ranking member of the organization, see Eşref Kuşçubaşı, *Hayber’de Türk Cengi: Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa Arabistan, Sina ve Kuzey Afrika Müdürü Eşref Bey’in Hayber Anıları*, ed. by Philip H. Stoddard and H. Basri Danişman (Istanbul, Arba Yayınları, 1997). For some recent studies on the Special Organization, see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 3, pp. 339-359; Taner Akçam, *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu: İttihat ve Terakki’den Kurtuluş Savaşı’na* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1999), pp. 161-312 [for the English translation of this study, see Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, trans. Paul Bessemer (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006)]; Hamit Pehlivanlı, “Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa: Türk Modern İstihbaratçılığının Başlangıcı mı?”, *Osmanlı*, vol. 6: *Teşkilat*, ed. by Kemal Çiçek and Cem Oğuz (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınevi, 1999), pp. 285-294; Mustafa Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’dan Cumhuriyet’e*, second edition (Ankara: Aslı Yayınları, 2004); Cemil Koçak, “Belgesel Bir Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Öyküsü”, *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 3 (Spring 2006), pp. 171-214; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, pp. 353-456; An in-depth analysis of the Special Organization is outside the scope of this dissertation.

⁵⁰¹ Michael A. Reynolds, *The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Power* (Ph.d. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003), pp. 216-223.

Special Organization also planned guerilla offensives to help the Ottoman army as an auxiliary force during the war.

The Special Organization also intimidated the local non-Muslim Ottoman population in the region, particularly the Armenians, on the pretext that the organization acted as a counterinsurgency force against disloyal elements of the Armenian population, some of whom, by evading the draft or deserting the army, formed their own armed bands and voluntarily joined the Russian army.⁵⁰² But, this mission of the Special Organization, as will be discussed below, took the form of direct abuses, attacks and massacres towards civilian Armenians during their forced migration in 1915.⁵⁰³ Rather than the Ottoman army, it was partly the Ottoman gendarmerie and partly the Special Organization which were most active in executing the Armenian deportation.⁵⁰⁴

To carry out the above-mentioned missions, the Special Organization organized armed bands of volunteer fighters acting under its command. In August 1914, the organization sent a delegation to the Russian border region that included some of its high-ranking members such as Bahaeddin Şakir, Hilmi, Ruşeni, Rıza and Ömer Naci. These members made Erzurum the center of their activities, but also formed branches in Trabzon and Van.⁵⁰⁵ The delegation held a meeting at Bayburt

⁵⁰² Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, 1, p. 354. On the Armenian volunteers, see Antranik Çelebyan, *Antranik Paşa*, trans. Mariam Arpi and Nairi Arek (Istanbul: Pêrî Yayınları, 2003), pp. 170-171. There are also examples showing that some Ottoman Jews and Greeks voluntarily joined the Entente powers. For an example of the case Ottoman Jews volunteering for the French army, see BOA, HR.SYS., 2403/7, 20 September 1914. For two examples of the case of Ottoman Greeks volunteering for the British and Greek armies, see BOA, DH.EUM.3.Şb., 5/19, 14 Cemâziyelâhir 1333/29 April 1915 and BOA, DH.EUM.3.Şb., 8/61, 4 Zilkade 1333/13 September 1915.

⁵⁰³ Ahmed Emin Yalman, *Turkey in the World War*, p. 220; Akçam, *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu*, pp. 227-239; Taner Akçam, “*Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur*”: *Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar*, third edition (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), pp. 168-180.

⁵⁰⁴ Stefanos Yerasimos, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Ermeni Sorunu* (Ankara: Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi Forumu, 2002), p. 16.

⁵⁰⁵ Reynolds, “The Ottoman-Russian Struggle”, pp. 217-218.

and decided that all the branches of the Special Organization in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus would operate under the name of the Caucasus Revolutionary Committee (*Kafkas İhtilal Cemiyeti*), which would be directed by Bahaeddin Şakir.⁵⁰⁶ Each branch was supposed to work to organize armed bands and local militia forces. In a letter sent on 5 September 1914, Süleyman Askeri Bey, who was the chief of the Special Organization at this time, explained to Bahaeddin Şakir that the aim of forming these bands was “to sabotage the Russian forces by destroying important railroad bridges, telegraph and telephone lines, and other means of communication by establishing and strengthening bands to act in different places, raising revolts, attacking supply, ammunition, and food caravans, threatening borders, attacking weak enemy detachments, disrupting shipments, and the like. Such bands could also attack the rear elements of the enemy armies.”⁵⁰⁷ In order to stir up the local Muslims in the Caucasus to support the Ottoman war cause, the organization prepared propaganda leaflets and distributed them among Muslims in the region. A quotation from such a leaflet succinctly represents the objective and mentality of the armed bands formed by the Special Organization at the beginning of the war:

When will we, if not now, get benefit from the disaster which Russia is suffering from? How much longer will we continue to bear the tortures of this bloody state? ... Now it is a duty of yours to provide any kind of sacrifices which would harm the enemy and facilitate the victory of our holy fighters (*mücahid*)... O you people of the faith! Now our dawn is breaking. We will hear our martyrs standing up from their graves in their bloody shrouds and shouting ‘revenge, revenge!’⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, pp. 430-431.

⁵⁰⁷ Arif Cemil, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, pp. 39-42; Quoted and translated in Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, pp. 420-421 (But Shaw seems to confuse it with the report sent by Bahaeddin Şakir to Istanbul about his activities.)

⁵⁰⁸ Arif Cemil, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, p. 33.

Though no precise statistical data are available, the Special Organization is said to have raised as many as 30,000 fighters at its height, most of whom consisted of prisoner volunteers.⁵⁰⁹ In March 1915, out of a total of 54,615 combatant personnel of the Third Army on the Caucasus front, the armed bands of Rıza Bey and Bahaeddin Şakir Bey, both of which served under the command of the same army in the same region, respectively consisted of 3642 and 1120 volunteers.⁵¹⁰

However, since the declaration of mobilization on 2 August 1914 required all able-bodied men between the ages of 20 to 45 to enlist for service,⁵¹¹ it was not easy for the Special Organization to find enough men to form armed bands that would be capable of undertaking guerilla warfare missions. Moreover, this problem became even more difficult as the Ottoman army suffered severe shortages of manpower due to the large number of men who had been wounded, become ill, or had deserted. As a result of these shortages, new amendments were introduced to the Temporary Law for Military Service on 29 April 1915 and again on 7 May 1917, which specified that men aged 17 and above until the age of 45, who had been exempted or had not been called for one reason or another, now were subject to service under arms.⁵¹²

Therefore, especially late in the summer of 1914 and at the initial stages of the war, namely, at a time when the Special Organization urgently needed volunteers for its missions at the Russian border, prisons came to be regarded as an attractive solution to this problem, since their able-bodied male criminals were quite ready and willing to take part in armed operations in return for gaining their freedom. The solution was

⁵⁰⁹ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, 1, p. 373.

⁵¹⁰ Sâbis, *Harb Hatıralarım*, vol. 2, p. 363.

⁵¹¹ “45 yaşına kadar olanların hizmet-i askeriye ile mükellefiyetleri hakkında kanun-ı muvakkat”, 21 Haziran 1330/3 August 1914, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 6, p. 912.

⁵¹² Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 156.

taken quite seriously and put into practice rapidly by a legal decision by Ottoman authorities. This was despite severe objections from statesmen such as Ahmed Rıza Bey who was a member of the Upper House (*Ayan Meclisi*) of the Ottoman Parliament.⁵¹³

The Special Organization also apparently worked to form local militia forces at the Russian border and on the eastern Black Sea coast by recruiting volunteers from local Muslim populations. It seems that the organization received considerable popular support in this process, at least in regions such as Arhavi, a sub-district of Trabzon (today a district of Artvin), where village *muhtars* helped Rıza Bey recruit local young boys.⁵¹⁴ However, while examples of locally recruited volunteer bands which were used as offensive forces are not totally absent,⁵¹⁵ such bands functioned largely for defensive purposes on the home front and remained largely attached to their own locales.⁵¹⁶ The core part of the Special Organization missions was carried

⁵¹³ Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 3, p. 351.

⁵¹⁴ Sadık Sarısan, "Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri ve Gürcü Lejyonu", *XIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi: Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler*, vol. 3, part 1, p. 12.

⁵¹⁵ A major example in this respect was the Osmançık Volunteer Battalion, which was formed by 700-800 volunteers from Osmançık, a district of Ankara. The battalion was originally intended to be sent on special mission to the Russian shores of the Black Sea, but that plan was abandoned. It was instead sent to the Baghdad region in November 1914 under the leadership of Süleyman Askeri, a leader of the Special Organization, to fight against the British army in Iraq. For more information on the Osmançık Volunteer Battalion, see, *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 118 (July 2004, document no. 11, 32, 34, pp. 27, 108, 114. Also see Orhan Koloğlu, "Küt-ül-Amara Zaferine Rağmen Irak Nasıl Kaybedildi?", *Popüler Tarih*, no. 32 (April 2003), pp. 50-55; Cevdet Saraçer, *Osmançık: Tarihsel Doku İçinde Unutulan Bir Kent* (Istanbul: Dört Renk, 1999), pp. 94-109; Hamza Osman Erkan, *Bir Avuç Kahraman* (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 1946), pp. 6-15; C. C. R. Murphy, "The Turkish Army in the Great War", *The Journal of Royal United Service Institution*, no. 65 (February/November, 1920), p. 93.

⁵¹⁶ Several books on local histories of the towns in the Black Sea region mention such militia bands, each of which usually included 100 to 300 men recruited under the leadership of a notable of a town among his fellow residents. For a few examples, see Muzaffer Lermioğlu, *Akçaabat-Akçaabat Tarihi ve Birinci Genel Savaş-Hicret Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Kardeşler Basımevi, 1949), p. 198-201; M. Adil Özder (ed.), *Artvin ve Çevresi: 1828-1921 Savaşları* (Ankara: Ay Matbaası, 1971); Haşim Albayrak, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Doğu Karadeniz Muharebesi ve Of Direnişi*, (Istanbul: Babıali Kitaplığı, 2007). Locally raised volunteers also constituted a symbol of patriotism and enthusiasm that could be exploited by authorities for propaganda. News about such local volunteers was presented in newspapers as an exemplary act to be followed everywhere. See, for example, "Gönüllü Alayları", *İkdâm*, 27 Kanunievvel 1330/9 January 1915.

out by prisoner volunteers, who were better fit to undertake offensive strategies, guerilla tactics and intimidating civilians, since they were more mobile, usually had previous experience with weapons, and were more inclined to violence.

In fact, the Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914 allowed the conscription of prisoners who had committed minor crimes and who were sentenced to imprisonment for less than one year. The law also allowed conscripting suspects whose legal prosecutions continued at the time of mobilization. But this was done on the condition that their cases would be resumed after the demobilization.⁵¹⁷ However, after 2 August 1914, this practice apparently went far beyond these limits, as the eligible pool of prisoners who could volunteer the armed bands of the Special Organization came to include men who had been condemned to death for crimes such as murder, desertion from the army, robbery and even banditry.⁵¹⁸ This situation was contrary to conventional post-Tanzimat restrictions on volunteers in the armed forces since all laws for military service required that volunteers should be not only physically fit, but also morally.⁵¹⁹ The Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914 was in theory no exception in this respect, as it added the condition that local officials should confirm that potential volunteers were of sound repute and that they had not been involved in any degrading crimes.⁵²⁰ But instead of this insistence on morality, the authorities now tended to underline the points that volunteers should be “brave, physically enduring and trustworthy in carrying out duties assigned to

⁵¹⁷ Article 88, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, p. 687.

⁵¹⁸ Sarısamam, “Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri ve Gürcü Lejyonu”, p. 11; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 375.

⁵¹⁹ See Ayn, *Tanzimat'tan Sonra Askere Alma Kanunları*.

⁵²⁰ Article 73, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, p. 683. Osman Köksal, “Osmanlı Devleti'nde Asker Almada Son Durum: 29 Nisan 1330 Tarihli Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanunu ve Başlıca Hükümleri,” *Askeri Tarih Bülteni*, no. 29 (August 1990), p. 78.

them.”⁵²¹ Additionally, the previous condition that volunteering would result in a postponement of the volunteer’s sentence was abandoned; if they performed useful and effective service in fighting, prisoner-volunteers could be pardoned entirely.⁵²²

The available evidence suggests that the options of release and amnesty, which were offered by the Ottoman authorities to prisoners in return for voluntary military service, had been received by prisoners with great enthusiasm. Many prisoners applied to become volunteers to fight in the armed bands of the Special Organization. As soon as official announcements were made that prisoner-volunteers would be accepted for guerilla fighting,⁵²³ prisoners began to send telegrams to the Interior and War ministries, expressing their wish to be released to volunteer for the armed forces. Such telegrams, examples of which exist in abundance in the Ottoman archives, were usually written and signed by a prisoner spokesman on behalf of all prisoners in a particular prison. The text of almost all these telegrams contains formulaic patriotic expressions, which emphasize such points as “all prisoners wish to participate in the holy war against the infidel enemies” or “we too want to die for our fatherland.”⁵²⁴

The number of applications from provincial prisons was at such a high level that military authorities, while they seemed quite content with this situation, needed to set up certain procedures and also restrictions for the acceptance of prisoners as

⁵²¹ BOA, DH.EUM.MTK., 79/8, 21 Muharrem 1333/9 December 1914.

⁵²² BOA, DH.ŞFR., 47/245, 11 Muharrem 1333/29 November 1914.

⁵²³ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 46/134 , 12 Zilhicce 1332/1 November 1914.

⁵²⁴ For a few examples, see BOA, DH.ŞFR., 48/93, 3 Safer 1333/21 December 1914, from Diyarbekir; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 47/420, 22 Muharrem 1333/10 December 1914, from Baghdad; BOA, DH.EUM.ADL., 24/29, 28 Zilkâde 1334/26 September 1916, from Urfa; BOA, DH.EUM.ADL., 20/52, 12 Şa’ban 1334/14 June 1916, from Yozgat; BOA, DH.EUM.ADL., 24/22, 22 Zilkâde 1334/20 September 1916, from Isparta; BOA, DH.EUM.ADL., 33/7, 9 Şa’ban 1335/31 May 1917, from Muğla; BOA, DH.EUM.ADL., 33/25, 26 Şa’ban 1335/17 June 1917, from Siverek.

volunteers.⁵²⁵ First of all, medical examinations to determine whether a volunteer was physically fit for military service were required in all cases.⁵²⁶ Elderly, sick and disabled prisoners were not eligible. Secondly, “political prisoners” were not regarded as appropriate for voluntary military service, even if they were physically or morally fit.⁵²⁷ Although documents do not specify what exactly it meant to be a “political prisoner” in the war years, it is quite likely that after 1913, this first and foremost implied being anti-CUP, or being a dissident of the CUP government’s policies. Moreover, even a slight public criticism of the CUP government could be enough for a person to be sent to an Anatolian town as a political exile, if not becoming a prisoner *per se*. Whereas there are examples that some “political exiles” could from time to time be released to join the army during the war,⁵²⁸ the exiles who were more overt dissidents of the CUP, such as journalist Refii Cevat [Ulunay], were never given this option.⁵²⁹

Ottoman authorities also gave priority to those prisoner-volunteers who they thought would be immediately useful in guerilla fighting. Particularly for the Caucasus region, volunteers who were familiar with the geography, local people and languages were preferred and this preference was clearly stated in documents. Criminals who engaged in smuggling and banditry were also among the most desirable, since it was thought that such activities made them most familiar with the

⁵²⁵ BOA, DH. ŞFR., 48/28, 28 Muharrem 1333/16 December 1914.

⁵²⁶ BOA, DH. ŞFR., 48/27, 28 Muharrem 1333/16 December 1914.

⁵²⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 44/134, 8 Şevval 1332/30 August 1914; BOA, DH. ŞFR., 48/27, 28 Muharrem 1333/16 December 1914.

⁵²⁸ Refik Halid Karay, who himself was a political exile in Sinop when the war started, has said in his memoirs that many of the exiles in Sinop were pardoned and the younger ones were drafted in the army. See Refik Halid Karay, *Bir Ömür Boyunca*, second edition (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996), p. 40.

⁵²⁹ Refii Cevat Ulunay, *Menfalar/Menfiler: Sürgün Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1999), pp. 212-213.

territory in which they would serve.⁵³⁰ Bandits of the eastern Black Sea region in particular were urged to join the armed bands of the Special Organization with the promise of amnesty. In this way the authorities intended to achieve multiple objectives: they would not only stop banditry in the region (a goal which the security forces could never achieve entirely), but armed guerilla forces would get benefit from their familiarity with the territory.⁵³¹ Some documents even contain specific names of the people to be released from prisons to be employed in the armed bands. For example, a decision of the Chamber of Deputies made on 1 December 1914 stated that the prisoners Mihaliçli Kazım, Kurtdereli Mehmed, Çerkes Dereli Saadet, Keçi Dereli Receb, Kazık Salih Hüseyin, Manyaslı Hüseyin and Darıcalı Kâzım were to be released (and their sentences were to be postponed) to be employed in the armed bands as volunteers that would sent to the Caucasus.⁵³² Similarly, the Interior Ministry sent a telegram to the governor of Bitlis on 8 November 1914, asking specifically to release the prisoners Çerkes Eşref and Çerkes Allahverdi from the provincial prison for the same purpose.⁵³³

The authorities also preferred “influential prisoners” (*nüfuz sahibi mahpus*) who would be able to form their own armed bands. A telegram that was sent by the Interior Ministry to the provinces of Van, Mosul, Bitlis, Erzurum and Diyarbakir on 9 September 1914 asked the governors of these provinces to search for such “influential prisoners” in their provincial prisons, who would be released to be used for that specific purpose.⁵³⁴ The fact that this telegram was sent to the eastern and

⁵³⁰ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 47/96, 96-1, 2 Muharrem 1333/20 November 1914.

⁵³¹ Arif Cemil, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, p. 84.

⁵³² BOA, MV., 195/28, 13 Muharrem 1333/1 December 1914.

⁵³³ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 46/251, 19 Zilhicce 1332/8 November 1914. Note that the Circassians usually stand out in such lists.

⁵³⁴ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 44/224, 18 Şevval 1332/9 September 1914.

southeastern Anatolian provinces where tribal structures were strong suggests that “influential prisoners” here might actually have meant important local persons who could recruit voluntary fighters by using their tribal connections. Another telegram sent from the Interior Ministry on 18 November 1914 to the governors of Erzurum, Bitlis, Basra, Baghdad, Aleppo, Diyarbekir, Mamüretülaziz, Mosul, Van, Urfa, Zor seems to prove this point as it directly states that it would be appropriate to pardon those prisoners whose release could exert a positive effect on their tribes.⁵³⁵

Preferences and priorities in accepting volunteers from prisons kept this practice within certain limits and did not extend to all prisoners. The Interior Ministry warned its local administrators that a prisoner would be released as volunteers only when it became really necessary.⁵³⁶ However, such restrictions and the priorities given to certain prisoners seem to have caused resentment among those prisoners who were aware of the practice but had not been considered for voluntary service. Many telegrams were sent to the authorities from such prisoners, protesting this situation and petitioning the authorities to reconsider their bid for volunteerism. One such telegram was by a prisoner named Hacı İbrahim from the Malatya prison again speaking on behalf of all prisoners. After complaining that they were not released like fellow inmates in other prisons who were now employed in the armed forces as voluntary fighters or in fields as farm laborers, Hacı İbrahim remorsefully stated that they were also “the sons of the same fatherland”, “who happened to be prisoners only because of ignorance (*cehalet*)”; he stated that whatever mistakes they had made in the past, they were now “ready for self-correction and to sacrifice their lives for the fatherland and nation.”⁵³⁷ Another letter was sent from the prison of

⁵³⁵ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 47/70, 29 Zilhicce 1332/18 November 1914.

⁵³⁶ BOA, DH. EUM.MTK., 79/66, 30 Rebîulevvel 1333/15 February 1915.

⁵³⁷ BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M., 31/65, 3 Safer 1336/18 November 1917.

Karahisar-ı Sâhib (Afyon) by a prisoner named Osman. He complained that even prisoners who had been sentenced to death or life imprisonment were released from other prisons and sent to the front, while they were “devoid of this honorable duty”; he petitioned “in the name of justice” for all the prisoners in his prison to be released to join the armed forces.⁵³⁸

How can we interpret this willingness of Ottoman prisoners to volunteer for war? Was it sincere patriotism, or an opportunistic attitude in the guise of an overstated enthusiasm for war? Of course, among many applications for voluntary military service, there might have been some sincerely patriotic volunteers who wanted to contribute to the country’s armed forces. But it is also quite obvious that becoming a volunteer in this respect was actually a response to the state’s call and, therefore, an occasion for prisoners –legally “outcasts” in society due to punishment by the authority- to restore their rights and status in the eyes of society and the state. After all, freedom on the battlefield must have been much more desirable than captivity in prison for a very long time, where living conditions during the war years were actually not better than those on the battlefield.⁵³⁹ Voluntary service could also be a shortcut to amnesty, which was promised by the state with the condition of

⁵³⁸ BOA, DH.EUM.ADL., 17/10, 20 Cemâziyelevvel 1334/25 March 1916.

⁵³⁹ See Fatmagül Demirel, “Kastamonu Hapishanesi”, in Lütfü Seymen (ed.), “*Üsküdar’a Kadar*” *Kastamonu* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008), pp. 299-305. For a general study on the process of reforming the prisons in the late Ottoman Empire, see Kent Fielding Schull, *Penal Institutions, Nation-State Construction, and Modernity in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1908-1919* (Ph.d. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 2007). Regarding the Great War period, the writer evaluates the process almost entirely through legal regulations and projects concerning the prison reform. Therefore, he neither comments on the practice of prisoner volunteers during the war nor discusses how it fit in the CUP government’s perspective of penal institutions, which, the writer argues, functioned as “a laboratory” for the CUP’s “vision of a progressive, civilized, scientific and thoroughly modern imperial society” (p. 113). More balanced research on the Ottoman prisons, that pays more attention to the problems and *ad hoc* applications in practice, and that undertakes a more critical analysis of the CUP government’s approach to the prisons and prisoners (at least during the Great War), would certainly necessitate the revision of this argument.

usefulness on the part of volunteers.⁵⁴⁰ Moreover, another incentive offered by the state was that the duration of a prisoner's voluntary service in the armed bands could be officially counted towards that person's actual military service obligation.⁵⁴¹

Another factor that might have increased the willingness of prisoners to volunteer might have been the fact that the state wanted them to serve in irregular armed bands, not to be employed in regular military divisions and subject to strict discipline. This would grant them a certain amount of autonomy in action and a space to act on their own, which could be used and abused for personal interests. As will be discussed below, some armed band leaders and members tried to carve out individual power and gain material benefits out of their missions.

Indeed, some contemporary observers testified that there were many people willing to join armed bands as voluntary fighters with the hope of gaining material benefit.⁵⁴² At the very least, being a volunteer in an armed band could secure a free subsistence throughout the war years, since the provisions of such armed bands (at least those on the Caucasus front) were to be provided by the local population in the form of "donation" (*iane*).⁵⁴³ In addition, volunteers also received supplies and food from the army units to which they were attached.⁵⁴⁴ Collecting provisions from local people in the form of donation was an officially imposed decision that was assigned to local administrators as a duty.⁵⁴⁵ This situation gave the members of armed bands

⁵⁴⁰ In fact, amnesties in the Ottoman Empire could sometimes be issued without expecting much from prisoners. For example, upon the sultan's "returning to good health" (*iade-i afiyet*), the Ottoman state issued amnesty on 1 July 1915 for the prisoners who had completed two-thirds of their imprisonment periods. "Zat-ı Şevketmeab Hazret-i Hilafetpenahinin İade-i Afiyetleri Münasebetiyle Müddet-i Cezaiyelerinin Sulsanını İkmal Eden Mahkûminin Afv-ı Hakkında Kanun-ı Muvakkat", 18 Haziran 1331/1 July 1915, *Düstûr*, 2, vol. 7, no. 262, p. 631.

⁵⁴¹ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 47/440, 24 Muharrem 1333/12 December 1914.

⁵⁴² Arif Cemil, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, p. 118.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., pp. 85-86; "Gönüllü Alayları", *İkdâm*, 27 Kanunievvel 1330/9 January 1915.

⁵⁴⁴ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 365.

⁵⁴⁵ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 61/88, 1334.R.18 (23 February 1916).

the *de facto* right to act as if they were war tax collectors and put pressure on civilians for this purpose. They were also virtually entitled to get “booty” during their raids in enemy territory, mostly in the form of livestock.⁵⁴⁶

Such practices sometimes encouraged arbitrary actions on the part of the armed bands, and the lack of a legally defined job description and the difficulty of subjecting such volunteers to a formal control mechanism gave rise to the problem of the uncontrolled individual power of some armed band leaders. Topal Osman (Osman the Lame) was a good example of a voluntary armed band leader who carved out remarkable autonomy and power for himself. From Giresun, a district of Trabzon, Osman volunteered for the Ottoman army during the Balkan War even though his father had paid his exemption fee. His leg was wounded during the war (hence the nickname “the lame”). He also served in the Special Organization during the Great War by forming a band of volunteers under his leadership. He mainly carried out guerilla attacks against the Russians on the Caucasus front. Of the 150 volunteers who he recruited for this mission, almost all were prisoners from Trabzon.⁵⁴⁷ He also recruited volunteers from various villages near his hometown via a festive campaign that found him wandering villages with a group of drum and horn players, announcing the call to voluntary service accompanied by a musical rhythm.⁵⁴⁸ Osman also carried out other missions, such as pursuing and capturing draft evaders and deserters in the Black Sea region.⁵⁴⁹ The draft evaders and deserters whom he pursued were mostly Ottoman Greeks, some of whom also

⁵⁴⁶ Arif Cemil, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, pp. 48, 59.

⁵⁴⁷ Ömer Sami Coşar, *Atatürk'ün Muhafızı Topal Osman (Osman Ağa)* (Istanbul: Harman Yayınları, 1971), pp. 5-7.

⁵⁴⁸ Cemal Şener, *Topal Osman Olayı*, tenth edition (Istanbul: Etik Yayınları, 2004), p. 125.

⁵⁴⁹ Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Millî Kurtuluş Tarihi, 1838'den 1995'e*, vol. 3, fifth edition (Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1983), pp. 1187-1201.

formed their own armed bands to resist domestic security forces and attack villagers in the region.⁵⁵⁰

However, it seems that although his assignment was to help military authorities on the battlefield and the home front, Topal Osman did not always obey the authorities and often acted on his own, sometimes even interfering with local administrators and abusing civilians. For example, local civilian officials in the Black Sea region, such as the governor of Trabzon Cemal Azmi, complained that Topal Osman's band was out of control and had interrupted government affairs in the region. Civilian officials even petitioned the Third Army headquarters and requested that Topal Osman's band be dissolved or sent away from Giresun. The Third Army headquarters took these complaints seriously and summoned Topal Osman to the Sivas court martial to be interrogated; Topal Osman was subsequently kept under arrest for a few months.⁵⁵¹

In fact, such cases of arbitrary action and lack of discipline not only constituted a source of tension between volunteers and authorities, but also caused suspicion on the part of military commanders about the usefulness of volunteers. Maintaining its control over volunteers was a key factor for the Ottoman state to accept the continuation of the practice. The available cases show that even the most terrible murderers and robbers could be accepted as volunteers only as long as the decision was taken by the state which would be able to control every action of such volunteers. Voluntary military service could provide criminals with a means of escape from captivity, arrest or legal prosecution, but the awareness and approval of the state were always needed. From the state's perspective, volunteerism was

⁵⁵⁰ Mustafa Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Cumhuriyet'e*, p. 116.

⁵⁵¹ Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Cumhuriyet'e*, pp. 119-120. On irresponsible behaviors of Topal Osman as an armed band leader, also see Arif Cemil, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, pp. 168-175.

valuable as far as it was directed by the state itself. In cases where it began to be out of its control, the state could try to void any voluntary mission regardless of its usefulness.

The case of Hazinedarzade Ekrem Bey from Canik, a sub-province of Trabzon, helps clarify this point. Accused of murder, Hazinedarzade Ekrem Bey was apparently about to avoid sentencing since he led a volunteer band in the war. But a telegram sent by the Interior Ministry to the governor (*mutasarrıf*) of Canik on 18 January 1915 required that legal prosecution should be carried out for this person, since the Ministry of Justice had not informed the Interior Ministry of his participation in the war and deployment on the front.⁵⁵² In another case, the Ministry of Justice ordered the governor of Mosul to “re-capture and imprison” the prisoner volunteers from the Süleymaniye prison, who had been released to join the army by local officials without the final official approval of the Ministry of Justice. The action was not only declared “illegal”, but the governorship of Mosul was also required to make an explanation as to why the local officials behaved this way.⁵⁵³ The Ottoman state did not tolerate any re-interpretation or alternative action concerning the release of prisoners for voluntary service that would go beyond the limits that it had drawn. Therefore, the Interior Ministry reacted immediately when it learned that some prisoner volunteers in Siirt, a district of Bitlis, were released by the district governor and, instead of joining armed bands as volunteers, went to their village to encourage local people to volunteer for the army. In a telegram to the Bitlis province, the Interior Ministry declared that this action was outside the accepted official practice of releasing prisoners for voluntary service. The ministry further stated that the action was also intolerable because it could harm public order as local

⁵⁵² BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/59,2 Rebûlevvel 1333/18 January 1915.

⁵⁵³ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 64/118, 20 Receb 1334/23 May 1916.

people would react negatively to seeing former criminals wandering freely in their local setting.⁵⁵⁴

On the other hand, when a volunteer proved to be useless on the battlefield, the authorities did not hesitate to dismiss him from the mission. Halil Bey from Artvin was one example of a prisoner who joined the armed forces on the Caucasus front as a voluntary band leader, but was dismissed because of “cowardice” in fighting.⁵⁵⁵

While prisoner volunteers were mostly employed in the armed bands that were formed by the Special Organization for informal missions, there are also examples of prisoners who joined regular armed units on the battlefield, as in the case of some prisoners serving long-term sentences, who were employed in auxiliary services on the Dardanelles front.⁵⁵⁶

Immigrant and Refugee Volunteers

Immigrants and refugees (*muhacir*) constituted another major source of volunteers for both the Special Organization and formal military units. The Muslims who were forced to emigrate because of military invasion or political oppression in various territories of Russia and the Balkans reshaped the demographic composition of the Ottoman Empire since the late nineteenth century. As far as the obligation of military service was concerned, the *muhacirs* in the Ottoman lands had to fulfill the

⁵⁵⁴ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/92, 5 Rebiulevvel 1333/21 January 1915; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 53/264, 24 Receb 1333/7 June 1915.

⁵⁵⁵ He was also accused of collecting money and jewelry by force from civilians in Artvin and sent to court martial. BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/91, 5 Rebiulevvel 1333/21 January 1915; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/240, 24 Rebiulevvel 1333/9 February 1915.

⁵⁵⁶ Emin Çöl, *Bir Erin Anıları: Çanakkale-Sina Savaşları*, ed. by Celal Kazdağlı (Istanbul: Nöbetçi Yayınları, 2009), p. 53.

requirements of the Ottoman conscription system to acquire full Ottoman citizenship status. Moreover, a decree was issued in August 1914, which required all men who took Ottoman citizenship to accept conscription into the Ottoman army in return for their right to be accepted as *muhacirs* and settled on Ottoman lands.⁵⁵⁷

However, the Ottoman state tended to provide a degree of flexibility to these newcomers in order to make their process of settlement and adaptation easier. The Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914 determined that all past and future *muhacirs* would be subjected to the military service procedure after six years from the date they arrived in the empire.⁵⁵⁸ Therefore, at a time when almost all able-bodied males of the empire were already conscripted in the military, the male population of such *muhacirs* provided an attractive source of energetic volunteer fighters for the Ottoman armed forces during the war. Although the above-mentioned six-year period of adaptation was modified during the war and reduced to three months as the need for manpower became more pressing,⁵⁵⁹ many *muhacirs* of military age actually remained undrafted because of infrastructural problems related to demographic records and the mobility of these new subjects.⁵⁶⁰ But in any case,

⁵⁵⁷ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 157.

⁵⁵⁸ Article 135, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatı”, p. 700.

⁵⁵⁹ An amendment that was made to the Temporary Law for Military Service on 5 April 1915 determined that if the War Ministry considered it necessary, males of all past and future *muhacirs* who were of military age would be conscripted three months after the date they arrived in the empire. “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatine Müzeyyel Kanun-ı Muvakkat”, 23 Mart 1331/5 April 1915, *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 7, p. 546.

⁵⁶⁰ Although the Ottoman state promulgated a new Census Law on 27 August 1914 requiring all former residents and newcomers to be registered in the census registers set up in districts and villages, which actually specifically targeted *muhacirs*, the regulation was not fully enforced, either because of infrastructural deficiencies in the Ottoman bureaucracy or because many *muhacirs* tried to avoid registration in order not to be conscripted and taxed. Therefore, in late 1916, the head of the Department of Tribes and Refugees (*Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdürlüğü*), Şükrü Bey, stated: “Up to now we have not been able to find a census document which gives any sort of definite figure of how many *muhacirs* have come to the Ottoman Empire and how many have been settled”. Quoted in Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol.1, p. 577.

where conscription efforts failed, the calls to voluntary service tried to compensate that failure.

There were also other and perhaps more significant factors that made *muhacirs* into desirable volunteers most preferred by Ottoman authorities, especially the Special Organization. For example, volunteering for the armed bands of the Special Organization in the Caucasus provided *muhacirs* who fled from Russia with an opportunity to fight against the former oppressor; it was a chance to exact “revenge” and to regain their former homes. While *muhacirs* were aware of the difficulty of attaining this goal, volunteering for the Ottoman armed forces against Russia had other potential advantages: it was a rather effective way of strengthening their right to new homes in their new country. Volunteering for the armed forces would confirm their rights to be granted land and status in the Ottoman territory, and expedite their integration into Ottoman society. Volunteering opened up new channels for *muhacirs* to engage in dialogue with the Ottoman state, a dialogue which would further establish their legitimate existence in the Ottoman Empire and increase their status.

The Ottoman state’s appeal to *muhacir* populations to mobilize volunteers was shaped by the specific conditions and objectives of military campaigns on a particular front. As far as the Caucasus front was concerned, for example, former Muslim residents of the Caucasus and the Laz people of the eastern Black Sea region were most preferred. Thus, the Ottomans tried to mobilize Circassian *muhacirs* who had settled in Anatolian provinces and in Syria during the previous decades.⁵⁶¹ These *muhacirs* would be useful in two ways: firstly, they were familiar with the mountainous geographical conditions of the region and, secondly, “they had come

⁵⁶¹ BOA, DH.EUM.EMN., 89/14, 6 Ramazan 1332/29 July 1914.

into the empire because they been driven out of their homes by the Russians, so they were particularly interested in joining the Ottoman forces that were attempting to regain control of the lands that they had been forced to leave.”⁵⁶² The sentiment of revenge was a major motivating factor in their mobilization.⁵⁶³

In fact, making use of *muhacirs* for militaristic purposes was not an entirely new strategy for the Ottoman state. Abdülhamid II, for example, relied on Circassian refugees because they were considered a “trustworthy” Muslim group. They were not only increasingly employed in the ranks of the Ottoman army and gendarmerie, but also used as irregular forces for domestic security purposes against internal threats to the sultan’s authority. The Circassians continued to provide militaristic services to the Ottoman state during the CUP-dominated Young Turk regime after 1908. In fact, their relationship with the state during this period became even more stronger.⁵⁶⁴ They also became actively involved in the Special Organization during the Great War. Therefore, it is no coincidence that some of the most famous, active and high-ranking members of the Special Organization were Circassians, such as Eşref Kuşçubaşı⁵⁶⁵ and Yakub Cemil,⁵⁶⁶ who were most active in the Arab provinces and in the Caucasus.

⁵⁶² Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 157.

⁵⁶³ As has been discussed in Chapter 2, revenge was indeed one of the major motives in the discourse of popular mobilization after the Balkan War. But although there is no in-depth study as to what degree the actions of *muhacirs* were really affected by this revenge discourse, there is a tendency in Ottoman-Turkish historiography to take the sentiment of revenge among the *muhacir* population as a “given”. However, as has been mentioned above, a future-oriented motivation for a better integration into the new land could be as much (maybe much more) influential for the *muhacirs* as the sentiment of taking revenge from the former oppressor. On the other hand, there are still some examples that imply that some *muhacirs* could be mobilized by the discourse of revenge. For example, Dido Sotiriou mentioned that the *muhacirs* who had been forced to flee from Greece worked to provoke hatred among the Muslim population in the Aegean region against the Ottoman Greek villagers. See Sotiriou, *Farewell to Anatolia*, pp. 80-81.

⁵⁶⁴ On the relationship of the Ottoman state with the Circassian refugees, see Arsen Avagyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Kemalist Türkiye’nin Devlet-İktidar Sisteminde Çerkesler*, trans. Ludmilla Denisenko (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2004), pp. 95-153.

⁵⁶⁵ See his own account, Eşref Kuşçubaşı, *Hayber’de Türk Cengi*.

Volunteering was for the most part an answer to the call of the state, not a mere voluntary decision taken by volunteer. The Ottoman state sometimes made open announcements that it was in need of men, who were familiar with the territory, local people and languages of the Caucasus. The state sometimes even specified that Circassians and the Laz were preferable for this mission and urged local administrators to recruit as many Circassian and Laz volunteers as possible, including those in prison.⁵⁶⁷

It should be noted that it was actually the local administrators who played the key role in mobilizing volunteers for the Ottoman army. As the primary agents of the state in the provinces, they were in dialogue with local populations and communicated the state's call to voluntary service to local people. In this sense, their role in mobilizing volunteers was as important for the Ottoman military as their function of supervising the standard process of conscription. The efforts of some local administrators in this direction show that they acted not only as mediators but also as organizers. Their efforts also hint as to how the Ottoman state's preference towards *muhacir* recruitment was realized during the war. For example, the governor of Ankara, Mazhar Bey, reported on 10 December 1914 that "he was in the process of enlisting about 30,000 volunteers consisting of Circassians, Kurdish tribesmen, local Turks, and *muhacirs* from the Caucasus and Southeastern Europe, who were anxious to serve in the Ottoman armed forces. He was organizing them into a unit which he would send to eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus after a few weeks of

⁵⁶⁶ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 55-A/95, 25 Şevval 1333/5 September 1915.

⁵⁶⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 47/196, 8 Muharrem 1333/26 November 1914; BOA, DH.EUM.MTK., 79/8, 21 Muharrem 1333/9 December 1914. Also see Fuat Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskân Politikası (1913-1918)*, second edition (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), p. 131; Ziya Şakir, *Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare Ettik?*, p. 50.

military training.”⁵⁶⁸ Similarly, the governor (*mutasarrıf*) of Kal’a-i Sultaniye (Çanakkale) “enrolled almost one hundred *muhacirs* who had come across Anatolia from Daghistan and other places in the Caucasus.”⁵⁶⁹ The governor of İzmir also organized a volunteer force of some 100 men, who were mostly Laz, Muslim Georgian and Abkhaz *muhacirs* who immigrated into the region from Batoum.⁵⁷⁰

Some *muhacirs* undertook the role of organizing volunteer units on their own and led their own armed bands, usually containing fellow members of the same ethnic group. Sheikh Şamilzade Kâmil of Daghistan, for example, gathered some 300 volunteers in Bursa to join the fight on the Caucasus front, most probably from fellow countrymen who had immigrated there, and formed an armed band to join fighting in the Caucasus.⁵⁷¹ Circassian Hüseyin Bey was another example of a figure who recruited some 200 volunteers in Korkudeli, a district of Teke, to form a band of cavalrymen that the Ottoman military thought would be useful for the military operations for domestic security purposes in the Teke region and its environs.⁵⁷² Moreover, in search of volunteers who were familiar with the Caucasus region, the Ottoman state also sought the cooperation of Christian Georgian nationalists against Russia.⁵⁷³

Muslim Georgian refugees in the Ottoman Empire, who mostly immigrated from the Russian-occupied Batoum and settled in the central and eastern Black Sea

⁵⁶⁸ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 378.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

⁵⁷⁰ Pehlivanlı, “Teşkilât-ı Mahsûsa”, p. 291.

⁵⁷¹ ATASE, BDH, Dosya 2181, Klasör 1.

⁵⁷² ATSE, BDH, Klasör 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 4-23 (26 Kanun-i evvel 1332/8 January 1917).

⁵⁷³ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 47/96, 96-1, 2 Muharrem 1333/20 November 1914. On the cooperation of the Ottomans with the Georgian nationalists, also see Arif Cemil, *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, p. 41; Vahdet Keleşyılmaz, “Kafkas Harekatının Perde Arkası”, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, vol. 16, no. 47 (July 2000), pp. 367-392. Sarısaman, “Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri ve Gürcü Lejyonu”, pp. 22-26.

region, were also active in organizing volunteer bands to fight for the Ottoman army. The band of Çürüksulu Ziya Bey, which consisted of some 300 men recruited from the region between Ordu and Samsun, was made up of Muslim Georgian *muhacirs* in the empire. The band leader Ziya Bey was a son of Çürüksulu Ali Paşa who acted as the state official (*iskân memuru*) responsible for settling Muslim Georgians in the Black Sea region. He was also the virtual leader of the Muslim Georgian population in the empire, a role that passed to his son Ziya Bey after his death in 1911.⁵⁷⁴ Ziya Bey's brother, Fuat Bey, also organized a band of volunteers consisting of Muslim Georgians in the same region. These volunteer forces helped the Ottoman military defend the Black Sea coast and joined in fighting on the Caucasus front against the Russians.⁵⁷⁵ In return for this contribution, the settlement of Muslim Georgians in the region became more established and legitimate.

Tribal Volunteers

The new conscription system of the Ottoman Empire obligated each male subject of the empire to serve in the army for a determined period, but making this a legal responsibility was much easier than implementing it in reality. Infrastructural deficiencies of the empire made it quite difficult in some parts of the country to keep comprehensive demographic records, to carry out regular censuses, to establish an efficient local administration at the village or small town levels, and to establish a functional security force to enforce law. It can be said that the Ottoman conscription

⁵⁷⁴ Oktay Özel, "Muhacirler, Yerliler ve Gayrimüslimler: Osmanlı'nın Son Devrinde Orta Karadeniz'de Toplumsal Uyumun Sınırları Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler", *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 5 (Spring 2007), p. 107.

⁵⁷⁵ Oktay Özel, "Çürüksulu Ali Paşa ve Ailesi Üzerine Biyografik Notlar", *Kebikeç*, no. 16 (2003), pp. 121-123.

system barely functioned in peripheral regions where tribal and nomadic lifestyles were still existent, and the hand of modernizing reforms touched only slightly. This was the case in various parts of the eastern and southeastern Anatolian provinces, which were mostly populated by Muslim Kurds (and also in various parts of the Ottoman Middle East where Arab-Bedouin tribes lived⁵⁷⁶). However, at least as far as the mobilization of military manpower was concerned, this situation did not necessarily mean that populations of these regions remained completely unintegrated from the system. Where the methods of the centralizing modern state failed, the Ottomans applied “old” imperial strategies, but they did in a revised form influenced by the mentality of modernization. Where individual-based universal conscription failed, the state could apply a method used in *ancien regime* armies, in which “soldiers constituted a corporate group and as such owed military service to the state.”⁵⁷⁷

The Ottoman state had designed a method during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909) to use tribal manpower for military purposes. This method had created tribal military units as of 1890 in eastern and southeastern Anatolia, which were called the Hamidiye Light Cavalry (*Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları*). This was an irregular militia composed of select Kurdish tribes that was

⁵⁷⁶ Recruiting volunteers in the Ottoman Middle-East was not confined to the Bedouin elements. It was actually a wider practice which had political implications. The issue of Arab volunteers in the Ottoman armed forces can be studied (in a separate in-depth study) within the wider context of political relations between the CUP government and important local Arab political figures. Although these relations tended to become tense in the second half of the war, various Arab notables/political figures actually formed volunteer units at the beginning of the war to join the Ottoman armed forces as a sign of loyalty to the Ottoman government. An important example in this respect is the volunteer unit formed in the Hijaz by Abdullah, the son of Sharif Huseyin, the emir of Mecca. See Kral Abdullah, *Biz Osmanlı'ya Neden İsyan Ettik?*, third edition, trans. Halit Özkan (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2006), pp. 81-82. Another example was Shakib Arslan's volunteers from the Druze. See Kayalı, *Arab and Young Turks*, p. 189. There were other examples too, and the official history of the war also emphasizes the political importance of such volunteers units, as well as their manpower contribution. See *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi, vol. 4, part 1: Sina-Filistin Cephesi, Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979), p. 174.

⁵⁷⁷ Mjoset and van Holde, “Killing for the State, Dying for the Nation”, p. 30.

based on the Russian Cossack model. The basis of joining this militia was, at least in principle, voluntary. Besides its intended function as being an auxiliary force in the region acting on behalf of the Ottoman state, the Hamidiye was also a part of a larger socio-political project aimed at creating a special bond of unity between the center and the Kurds.⁵⁷⁸ In Robert Olson's words, "it would tie the empire more firmly to its Muslim roots and provide a defense against Russia and the Armenians, both increasingly aggressive after 1878, and the Kurds could be used as a balance against the urban notables and the provincial governments."⁵⁷⁹ The more direct aims of the Hamidiye project were defined by Martin van Bruinessen as "suppression of Armenian separatist activities and a better control over the Kurds."⁵⁸⁰

The Young Turk regime did not abandon this goal after 1908 and these tribal regiments continued to exist, although slight modifications were made in 1910, including changing their names to the Tribal Light Cavalry Regiments (*Aşiret Hafif Süvari Alayları*).⁵⁸¹ This change was part of a larger project that aimed to turn these regiments into auxiliary military forces to be used in modern guerilla warfare.⁵⁸² The 1910 regulations also stipulated that only members of nomadic tribes could join the

⁵⁷⁸ Janet Klein, *Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle over Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890-1914* (Ph.d. dissertation, Princeton University, 2002), p. 6. For an earlier account of the Hamidiye forces within the context of Abdülhamid II's centralist policies, see Bayram Kodaman, "Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları: II. Abdülhamid ve Doğu Anadolu Aşiretleri", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, no. 32 (1979), pp. 427-480. Also see Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, pp. 68-93; Selim Deringil, "From Ottoman to Turk: Self-Image and Social Engineering in Turkey", in Dru C. Gladney (ed.), *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey, and the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 217-226; Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia", *Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 9 (1973), pp. 130-155. Also see Osman Aytar, *Hamidiye Alaylarından Köy Koruculuğuna* (Istanbul: Medya Güneşi Yayınları, 1992), pp. 53-150.

⁵⁷⁹ Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), p. 8.

⁵⁸⁰ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992), p. 186.

⁵⁸¹ They were also called during the Great War "the Reserve Cavalry Regiments" (*İhtiyat Süvari Alayları*) or sometimes just "militia forces" (*milis kuvvetleri*). Klein, "Power in the Periphery", pp. 7, 9.

⁵⁸² Kodaman, "Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları", p. 477.

tribal regiments, abolishing the existing ones formed by sedentary tribes, which would now be regarded in the same light as settled populations for recruitment purposes.⁵⁸³ However, the Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914 exempted those (ex-) nomadic tribes which were settled (*aşâir-i seyyareden iskân olunanlar*), from military service.⁵⁸⁴ But legal exemption from military service did not mean not serving at all in the armed forces, as these tribes had been a main target of the state's encouragement effort to mobilize voluntary forces during the war.

The irregular tribal regiments took on new roles when the Ottoman Empire entered the Great War. They were now expected to not only continue to repress domestic threats against the Ottoman interests in their region, but they were also deployed on various fronts (especially in the Third Army on the Caucasus against the Russians,⁵⁸⁵ but also on the Mesopotamia front⁵⁸⁶) as auxiliary forces to support the Ottoman army.⁵⁸⁷ Robert Olson has estimated that in 1914 the total number of volunteers in tribal regiments was around 50,000.⁵⁸⁸ On the Caucasus front, British military intelligence estimated that from 20,000 to 30,000 tribal cavalry volunteers were in the field against Russia at the earlier stages of the war.⁵⁸⁹ The estimate of

⁵⁸³ Klein, "Power in the Periphery", pp. 221-222.

⁵⁸⁴ Article 135, "Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati", *Düstûr*, 2, vol. 6, p. 700.

⁵⁸⁵ S. Selçuk Günay. "I. Dünya Harbi'nin Başlangıcında Rus Saldırısı Karşısında İhtiyat (Hamidiye) Süvari Alayları", in *Türkler*, vol. 13, Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2002, pp. 331-335; Mehmet Evsile, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Kafkas Cephesi'nde Aşiret Mensuplarından Oluşturulan Milis Birlikleri", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, vol. XII, no. 36 (November 1996), pp. 911-926.

⁵⁸⁶ On the use of tribal irregular forces on this front, see Orhan Avcı, *Irak'ta Türk Ordusu, 1914-1918* (Istanbul: Vadi Yayınları, 2004), pp. 33-40.

⁵⁸⁷ They "also became identified with the mass murder and deportation of Armenians that took place during the war." Klein, "Power in the Periphery", p. 8.

⁵⁸⁸ Olson, *Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 13.

⁵⁸⁹ *Handbook of the Turkish Army*, eighth provisional edition (originally released by the General Staff War Office, London, 1916), reprinted by the Imperial War Museum (London, 1996), p. 65.

20,000 tribal volunteers on the Caucasus front has also been confirmed by various recent studies.⁵⁹⁰

However, while the established method of forming tribal cavalry regiments continued, recruiting and using tribal volunteers to support the Ottoman armed forces on the battlefield turned into a much wider-ranging practice during the Great War, which did not always run within the limits of the established rules, but also often functioned by *ad hoc* applications. As the need for manpower grew seriously, the practice appealed to more tribes than just the “select” ones, provided that their loyalty was not questionable.⁵⁹¹ A more generic name of “voluntary tribal forces” (*gönüllü aşiret birlikleri*) was often used to describe them. The state’s intended goals now included more immediate considerations than a general aim of forging unity between the center and the periphery; the units were now primarily regarded as a potential addition of manpower to the armed forces on the battlefield. Forming voluntary tribal units was also seen as a remedy to the failure of the implementation of conscription among tribal populations, as well as a method to attract many tribal draft evaders and deserters to military service.⁵⁹² Although the law for military service made it quite clear that only those who were not already obligated to enlist could volunteer for service in the armed forces, this condition was also sometimes overlooked and these men were accepted as volunteers.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ Günay, “I. Dünya Harbi’nin Başlangıcında Rus Saldırısı Karşısında İhtiyat Süvari Alayları”, p. 333.

⁵⁹¹ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 54-A/354, 29 Ramazan 1333/10 August 1915. Even when there was urgent need for manpower, the help of some tribes seems to have not been taken into consideration. For example, the Interior Ministry stated in a telegram to the governor of Diyarbekir that “since the Bedirhan family had never been reliable, the volunteers that they recruited would be useless”. BOA, DH.ŞFR., 53/344, 30 Receb 1333/13 June 1915. On the relationship between the Bedirhan tribe with the Ottoman state before the war, see Klein, “Power in the Periphery”, pp. 248-252.

⁵⁹² BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/263, 28 Rebûlevvel 1333/13 February 1915.

⁵⁹³ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 4462, Dosya 136, Fihrist 6-14.

Yet, certain aspects of previous practice appear to have remained unchanged during the war and certain primary political preferences continued. Loyalty of the tribe to the government was regarded as *sine qua non* by the CUP government. The following comment, which was sent in a telegram by the Interior Ministry to the governor of Mamuretülaziz about the project of forming volunteer units from tribal people in the Dersim region, succinctly summarized the government's perspective toward tribal volunteers during the Great War:

Your valuable opinion about establishing volunteer militia in the Dersim region is appropriate and right. However, it is necessary to ensure that the militia chiefs to whom military ranks would be granted are selected from those who are trustfully loyal to the government and those whose influence on the tribes can be properly used by the state. It is also necessary to ensure that they are not able to abuse their status and authority.⁵⁹⁴

Although the military always wanted to subjugate voluntary tribal units to the army's chain of command and to put them under the direct authority of regular unit commanders,⁵⁹⁵ volunteers from a certain tribe continued to be treated as a separate entity and were not distributed among the ranks of regular units as individual soldiers. A military report written by the Second Army headquarters to the commander of XVI Corps in Diyarbekir on 1 July 1916 advised that tribal volunteers should be put through strict military training like regular soldiers before being sent to the front, but also warned that volunteers from different tribes should neither mix with each other, nor should they merge into regular units; volunteers of different tribes were to be dealt with differently and separately.⁵⁹⁶ One reason for this method of approaching tribal volunteers was probably to make controlling them easier.

⁵⁹⁴ “*Dersim’de milis teşkilatı hakkındaki mütalaa-i valâları muvâfik ve musibdir. Ancak kendilerine rüteb-i askeriye tevcih olunacak rüesanın hükûmete merbutiyet ve sadakatleri müsellemler olan ve aşâyir üzerindeki nüfuz ve tesirlerinden devletçe bihakkin istifade me’vül bulunan zevatdan intihab olmaları ve bunların bilahare mevki ve nüfuzlarını suiistimal edememeleri esbabının şimdiden bil-etraf istikmâl ve temini icab eder...*” BOA, DH.ŞFR., 54-A/354, 29 Ramazan 1333/10 August 1915.

⁵⁹⁵ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 4-6.

⁵⁹⁶ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 4462, Dosya 136, Fihrist 28.

Volunteers from a certain tribe were usually recruited by the chief person of that tribe, who was also made the commander of that volunteer unit. This way, the hierarchy of the tribe was automatically carried to the battlefield with its own inner discipline, and the army, which had suffered from the scarcity of commanding officers, did not have to assign its own officers to these units.⁵⁹⁷ Another reason was a strategic one, since the Ottoman military wanted to keep and use them as irregular units, fulfilling duties on the front that only relatively small irregular forces could do, such as guerilla raids, missions of exploration, or guiding the regular forces in a territory that tribal units were familiar with.⁵⁹⁸

Another reason for keeping tribal volunteers as separate units seems to have been a certain level of condescension on the part of the Ottoman elites towards the Kurdish population—a language which echoed what Deringil calls “the civilizing mission” mentality of the late Ottomans and their “project of modernity” in their provincial administration.⁵⁹⁹ A report which was prepared by Lieutenant Colonel Yuzuf İzzet, who was an inspector of tribes (*aşiret müfettişi*), about the existing situation of tribal cavalry regiments presents interesting points in this respect. In the report, which was submitted the War Ministry on 22 April 1914, Kurdish tribal volunteers are praised for their bravery and fighting skills; but the report also presents extreme suspicion about their usefulness, since “almost all tribal people [were] in an absolute ignorance in terms of religion and piety, and live[d] in a primordial age in terms of education and learning, and, so, it would not be appropriate to expect them to show religious and human sentiments for the

⁵⁹⁷ ATSE, BDH, Klasör 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 2-9.

⁵⁹⁸ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 4462, Dosya 136, Fihrist 28.

⁵⁹⁹ Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2003), p. 311.

fatherland.”⁶⁰⁰ The inspector advised an urgent and strict training after Kurdish tribal volunteers were employed in the armed forces, a training which could both “correct” their negative attitudes and increase their love for the fatherland.⁶⁰¹

What is more interesting is the fact that a similar pejorative discourse was sometimes also used by tribal chiefs themselves. In a telegram that was sent to the General Command of Irak on 18 December 1914 about transferring tribal units to Kut al Amara , Mahmud Pasha (also called Sheikh Mahmud), who was the chief of the Caf tribe in Salahiye (a sub-district of Baghdad), complained that since his tribal people were “savage” (*vahşi*) they were afraid of getting on a steam ship which they had never seen before, and therefore he asked for permission to transfer his tribal force via the land route.⁶⁰²

Why would tribal people want to volunteer for the Ottoman army, then? What did motivate them for this mission? What kind of a discourse did the Ottoman state use to convince them to volunteer for the army? Was there any systematic propaganda effort to mobilize them? One can hardly see such a systematic propaganda targeting tribal volunteers, except occasional emphases made by Ottoman authorities on religious fraternity against the “infidel” enemy. A defensive religious discourse was a constant during the war, and there were many cases in which tribal volunteers stated that they had volunteered for the Ottoman armed forces “to take part in the holy war as a religious duty and not to be bereft of this

⁶⁰⁰ “Efrad-ı aşair hemen kâmilin din ve diyanet derecesiyle cehl-i mutlakada, ilim ve maarif cihetiyle devre-i evvelde bulduklarından kendilerinden dini ve beşeri hissiyat-ı vataniye aramak pek de muvafık olamayacaktır.” Quoted in Balçoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’dan Cumhuriyet’e*, p. 30.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

⁶⁰² ATASE, BDH, Klasör 3603, Dosya 3, Fihrist 11-13.

honor.”⁶⁰³ The holy war discourse was certainly not insignificant, but I argue that volunteerism should be located within the power relations between the Ottoman state and tribal volunteers. First of all, it was usually a tribal chief or notable — not ordinary members — who decided to volunteer the tribe for the Ottoman armed forces. This decision was, in a sense, a kind of contract between the tribal power holder and the state authority. Moreover, as has already been emphasized above, tribal volunteers continued to act as a tribal group in the armed forces and the Ottoman military authorities treated them as such. In accepting voluntary military service from a certain tribe, the state actually treated that tribe as a peripheral power holder and virtually accepted its autonomy. Recognizing and promoting a certain tribe’s regional power appears to have been a major method used by the state to mobilize volunteers from that tribe.

This situation was contrary to the post-Tanzimat centralization and modernization process, and was definitely divergent from the universal conscription system that the Ottomans tried to apply throughout the country during the war. Here is an example of Ottoman pragmatism: where and when a modernization effort such as universal conscription (which actually belonged to the realm of centralized nation-states) failed, the Ottomans used old imperial methods envisaged within a modern mentality. The Ottomans had known and also observed that their commitment to the universal conscription would not work in the regions where its infrastructural power was underdeveloped and where tribal structures were strong. But at a time when the Ottoman military urgently needed manpower on the battlefield, they tried to solve the problem in these regions within the context of rewarded volunteerism, which was

⁶⁰³ İ. Hakkı Sunata, *Gelibolu’dan Kafkaslara: Birinci Dünya Savaşı Anıları* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2003), p. 411; “Cihad-ı Ekber Yolunda”, *İkdâm*, 24 Teşrinisani 1330/7 December 1914.

redesigned so as not to oppose state power in local settings, and in a way that was congruent with the expectations of the military and the requirements of modern warfare.

Granting medals and decorations to chiefs and prominent persons of tribes in return for effective voluntary service was a very common method of encouragement, examples of which are abundant.⁶⁰⁴ This method had also been used commonly by the Ottomans to garner the support of Arab-Bedouin tribes.⁶⁰⁵ But while medals and decorations were important symbols of power that signified the state's recognition and promotion of the status and autonomy of a particular tribe, wartime conditions required more immediate rewards to mobilize voluntary participation in the periphery. Thus, money became a major mobilizing reward in this respect. Normally, when dealing with volunteers, the Ottoman military supplied only basic provisions;⁶⁰⁶ in fact, the state sometimes assigned this task to local authorities who were supposed to collect required provisions from local civilians in the form of "donations." But documents show that volunteers sometimes received daily fees in cash (*yevmiye*), as in the case of some armed bands of the Special Organization.⁶⁰⁷

As far as tribal volunteers were concerned, monetary payments in the form of a reward such as gold were more systematic. These rewards were offered in higher amounts both before service as an incentive to volunteer, and as rewards for

⁶⁰⁴ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 3684, Dosya 373, Fihrist 5-07, 5-08; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 3693, Dosya 1, Fihrist 1-10; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 3687, Dosya 382. On the Ottoman use, and also the types, of medals and decorations during the Great War, also see Edhem Eldem, *Pride and Privilege: A History of Ottoman Orders, Medals and Decorations* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Centre, 2004), pp. 396-415.

⁶⁰⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157/687, August-September 1914 (the Sinai-Palestine front).

⁶⁰⁶ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 4447, Dosya 79, Fihrist 3.

⁶⁰⁷ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2077, Dosya 1, Fihrist 1-1. Moreover, it is understood from documents that another source of financing volunteers during the war became the abandoned properties (*emvâl-i metrûke*) of the deported Armenians. See Akçam, "Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur", p. 235-236.

performing a duty in order to solidify the bond of voluntary unity.⁶⁰⁸ As a volunteer recruitment strategy towards tribes, the Ottomans apparently used money as commonly as the discourse of the brotherhood of Islam.⁶⁰⁹ Especially in the war of propaganda against the British on the Mesopotamia and Sinai-Palestine fronts, money rewards were seen by the Ottomans as a legitimate complementary factor in attaining the military support of Muslim tribal people in the region, whose “conscience and faith had not yet poisoned by the British money and propaganda.”⁶¹⁰

In designing methods to encourage tribal people to volunteer and to use them to full advantage in the armed forces, the reports and propositions of the commanders working in eastern Anatolian areas where the tribal population was concentrated were taken seriously by the Ottoman military. Colonel Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), who was the commander of XVI Corps in Diyarbekir in 1916, had been very active in this process. He submitted detailed observations and pragmatic propositions to both higher military authorities and civilian administrators in the region. It is quite evident that Mustafa Kemal attributed great importance to potential tribal volunteers as a complementary source of manpower for the Ottoman armed forces and that he was quite eager to mobilize them. For example, on 9 April 1916 he sent a telegram to Mehmed Bey, a deputy of Genç (a sub-province of Bitlis), in which he described such volunteers as “patriotic people” (*erbâb-ı hamîyyet*), who “would be welcomed by the army in every necessary way” (*her türlü hüsn-i kabul gösterileceğinin*).⁶¹¹ In another telegram to the War Ministry on 31 March 1916, Mustafa Kemal expressed that it was quite possible to form a large militia organization in the Diyarbekir

⁶⁰⁸ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 3687, Dosya 384, Fihrist 10-1.

⁶⁰⁹ Stoddard, “A Preliminary Study of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, p. 123.

⁶¹⁰ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 3603, Dosya 3, Fihrist 11-03.

⁶¹¹ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 4462, Dosya 136, Fihrist 6-06.

region, which would be very helpful for the army during the war. For this, he proposed paying each individual tribal volunteer a maximum of one gold lira a month and each tribal chief, according to his degree of service, five to ten liras a month. He added that this would not only encourage a high number of volunteers to join the armed forces with their own arms and ammunitions, which they usually hid from the Ottoman authorities, but would also mobilize many draft evaders and deserters who had taken shelter among these tribes to re-enlist in the army.⁶¹² He also proposed that besides supplying the basic provisions of these volunteers, it would be highly encouraging to promise and grant monetary rewards to those who performed remarkable service in the armed forces. In this respect, he mentioned an effective method used on the Dardanelles front where the army paid up to sixty liras to those captured and brought enemy arms, ammunitions or prisoners.⁶¹³

Monetary incentives were also used directly to “convince” tribal people to volunteer for the Ottoman army.⁶¹⁴ The source of such monetary payments was the discretionary fund (*tahsisat-ı mestûre*) of the Ottoman military budget.⁶¹⁵ Other payments were also made from this fund. Militia officers were paid a regular salary, although militia officers received only half of the amount actually paid to the same rank held by an official military soldier.⁶¹⁶ The Ottoman state also considered the families of tribal volunteers within the limits of its mobilization efforts. Tribal volunteers who were killed in fighting were recognized by the state as “martyrs” and

⁶¹² ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 2-4.

⁶¹³ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 2-3.

⁶¹⁴ *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 117 (January 2004), Document no. 43, p. 124.

⁶¹⁵ ATASE, BDH, Klasör, 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 13.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

their families were allocated a monthly salary that was paid to the families of martyred soldiers.⁶¹⁷

Religious Volunteers

Perhaps the most consistent mobilizing discourse throughout the war was a religious one, emphasizing the point that Islam itself was under attack by the infidel enemy, and that it was therefore incumbent upon every Muslim to join the fight against that enemy. One aspect of this discourse was the official proclamation of jihad and the call on both domestic and foreign Muslims to the fight for the Ottoman state. But it would be misleading to presume that the use of a religious discourse to mobilize Muslims was limited to the proclamation of holy war. In fact, at least as far as the Muslim Anatolian population was concerned, the role of religion in the mobilization process during the war—both its use by the state and its effect in practice—was much more complicated. The fact that the state resorted to declaring jihad and the role played by the higher ulema in proclaiming holy war constituted only one (and actually a less effective) aspect of the process. As argued in Chapter 2, a less appreciated, but no less significant dimension of the process was the contribution and participation of middle and lower strata religious people and institutions in the mobilization during the Great War. Various dervish lodges, medrese students and even local prayer leaders not only functioned as religious intermediaries between the state and the civilian population working to mobilize Muslims for the war aim, but

⁶¹⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 48/279, 18 Safer 1333/5 January 1915; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 3684, Dosya 373, Fihrist 36; *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 117 (January 2004), Document no. 37, p. 111.

also they sometimes themselves volunteered for the Ottoman army, both individually and in volunteer units.

This section of the chapter will discuss their role in recruiting volunteers and forming volunteer units within the broader phenomenon of religious popular mobilization. What this section aims to emphasize is that religious volunteerism was part of Ottoman power politics during the war. The CUP-dominated Ottoman state welcomed contributions from the middle and lower ulema or dervish lodges to its mobilization efforts at popular levels, but only as long as they were controlled and managed by its own authority. Similarly, as will be discussed below, the religious persons and dervish lodges which were most enthusiastic and active in increasing volunteerism for the Ottoman armed forces were actually the ones who had close relations with the state in general and the CUP government in particular. Especially as far as dervish lodges were concerned, the most active orders were the ones that believed that voluntary mobilization would increase their own power and credibility vis-à-vis the state.

It should not be forgotten that religion was quite embedded in the Ottoman military structure. It was part of both the military education and troop training. “A good soldier is to be a good Muslim and a good Muslim is to be a good soldier” seems to have been a training principle adopted by the military. Ulema such as İzmirli İsmail Hakkı and Ali Vahid Üryanizâde⁶¹⁸ wrote religious textbooks to be used as lecture pamphlets within the army, and the number of such texts increased remarkably during the Great War. As İsmail Kara has pointed out, a central reason for this increase was the Ottoman military’s goal of reinforcing the faith of its

⁶¹⁸ Such persons were state-employed religious scholars who occupied middle and high ranking posts in the late Ottoman religious education system. Politically they were close to, or at least not critical of, the CUP. For a brief biography of their lives and careers, see Sadık Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması: İlmiye Ricalinin Teracim-i Ahvali*, 3 vols (Istanbul: Medrese Yayınları, 1980), for Ali Vahid Üryanizâde see vol. 1, pp. 317-318; for İzmirli İsmail Hakkı, see vol. 2, pp. 279-281.

soldiers, and thus their religious enthusiasm for fighting, commitment to such religiously based military categories as martyrdom and holy warrior (*gazilik*), and their morale in general—all of which, it was thought, had been damaged due to continuous wars and defeats.⁶¹⁹ Routine religious obligations were observed in the military, even during fighting, and there were established posts within the units, such as battalion prayer leaders (*tabur imamları*).⁶²⁰ These were quite effective for maintaining troop morale during the war, and we see many cases where Ottoman soldiers prayed with their battalion prayer leaders before going into battle.⁶²¹ At times of crisis such as when the number of desertions increased or discipline dissolved on the battlefield, Ottoman counter-measures always included, among other things, religious lectures and advice to be given to the troops by influential prayer leaders and other religious persons. We see this, for example, in the case of the measures taken against desertions on the Palestine front in late 1917, where it was planned that “influential and articulate religious persons [in charge] were to lecture the soldiers about the evilness of desertion.”⁶²²

With regard to conscription, there was reluctance among some segments of the Ottoman Muslim ulema, particularly medrese students, whose traditional exemption from military service had been restricted as of 1909 so that students who did not pass their exams in time were now required to serve.⁶²³ Already discontented with the CUP-dominated administration, medrese students’ disappointment increased

⁶¹⁹ Kara, “İyi Asker İyi Müslüman, İyi Müslüman İyi Asker Olur”, pp. 48-53.

⁶²⁰ In 1909, the religious leaders of Christian subjects of the empire began to demand the same facilities for Christian enlisted men in the Ottoman army. Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, pp. 142-143.

⁶²¹ Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness*, p. 63.

⁶²² *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi, vol.4, part 2: Sina-Filistin Cephesi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1986), p. 762. Similar religious practices were existent also on the other fronts; for an example on the Dardanelles front, see, Çöl, *Bir Erin Anıları*, p. 59.

⁶²³ Zürcher, *Turkey*, p. 98.

with the declaration of mobilization in 1914, as many of them were now involuntarily mobilized for military service.⁶²⁴ However, some examples imply that the Ottoman military tried to engage medrese students by working with them to find volunteers. One British military intelligence report cites the formation of two large volunteer (*fedai*) units in the Istanbul area in 1916, which were enrolled under the auspices of the ulema. The Ottoman military employed “young theological students” as recruiters, who “often brought in 20 or 30 recruits at a time. In this way two battalions were raised, one from the Constantinople area and Europe, one from Asiatic provinces.”⁶²⁵

While the ulema of higher education were hesitant in terms of war enthusiasm, some dervish lodges were quite enthusiastic about embracing the CUP government’s war cause and promoting it on the popular level through their local networks. The Mevlevi and Bektaşi orders were the most active in this process. The Mevlevis, who had been usually opposed to Abdülhamid II, had close ties with the CUP-dominated state authority during the Second Constitutional Era.⁶²⁶ Sultan Mehmed Reşad V, who was himself said to have been a follower of the Mevlevi order, had been congratulated on his accession to the throne in 1909 by Abdülhalim Çelebi, the sheikh (*postnişin*) of the Konya Mevlevi lodge (the center of the Mevlevi order). Abdülhalim Çelebi’s coming to Istanbul solely for this purpose has been interpreted as a confirmation of the close tie of the order with state authority.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Amit Bein, *The Ulema, Their Institutions, and Politics in the Late Ottoman Empire (1876-1924)* (Ph.d. dissertation, Princeton University, 2006), p. 201.

⁶²⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157/703, March-April 1916.

⁶²⁶ İrfan Gündüz, *Osmanlılarda Devlet-Tekke Münasebetleri* (Istanbul: Seha Neşriyat, 1984), pp. 212-213, 233; for the Ottoman state’s pragmatic approach to dervish lodges during the reign of Abdülhamid II, see pp. 216-235.

⁶²⁷ Engin Öncüoğlu, *Osmanlı Ordusunda Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları* (master’s thesis, Hacettepe University, 2004), p. 39.

The Mevlevis supported the pro-war policies of the CUP government and actually worked to legitimize them at the popular level. Veled Çelebi, the sheikh of the Konya Mevlevi lodge during the Great War (who was banished from this post in 1919 by Sultan Vahdeddin), was very close to the CUP government and had nationalist inclinations.⁶²⁸ His pro-CUP position was so obvious that during his post as the sheikh of the order, many written complaints were made to the Ministry of Imperial Foundations (*Evkaf*) and the Office of the *Şeyhülislam* alleging that he was actually a political figure acting on behalf of the CUP.⁶²⁹ The culmination of this political closeness was the formation of the Mevlevi Volunteer Battalion (*Mevlevi Gönüllü Taburu*, sometimes also called *Mevlevi Alayı* or *Mücâhidîn-i Mevleviyye*) in 1915.⁶³⁰ The directive to form such a volunteer unit allegedly came from the pro-Mevlevi sultan Mehmed Reşad V,⁶³¹ while some sources have attributed its foundation to the activities of the Special Organization.⁶³² In any case, it was a voluntary initiative that was patronized by the state.⁶³³ This patronage included a wide range of support, from open political encouragement to supplying arms for

⁶²⁸ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

⁶²⁹ Nüri Köstüklü, *Vatan Savunmasında Mevlevihaneler: Balkan Savaşlarından Milli Mücadeleye* (Istanbul: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2005), p. 78.

⁶³⁰ Some sources also use the term “regiment” (*alay*) for the Mevlevi volunteers, which is a larger military unit (usually composed of three battalions) than a “battalion” (*tabur*), which is composed of 1000 to 1500 troops. Considering the total number of the Mevlevi volunteers (it was, as will be mentioned below, slightly more than a thousand), the term “battalion” is more appropriate.

⁶³¹ “Gönüllü Mevlevi Taburları”, *İkdâm*, 22 Kanunisanı 1330/4 February 1915; Öncüoğlu, “Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları”, p. 65; Nüri Köstüklü, *Vatan Savunmasında Mevlevihaneler*, p. 65. The battalion that was formed by Mevlevi volunteers of Istanbul was granted a banner (*alem-i şerif*) from the Caliphate, which was handed over with a public ceremony. “Mevlevi Gönüllüleri”, *İkdâm*, 26 Kanunisanı 1330/8 February 1915; “Mevlevi Gönüllüleri”, *İkdâm*, 27 Kanunisanı 1330/9 February 1915; “Mevlevi Gönüllülerinin İhtifalatı”, *İkdâm*, 1 Şubat 1330/14 February 1915.

⁶³² Pehlivanlı, “Teşkilât-ı Mahsûsa”, p. 290; Stoddard, “A Preliminary Study of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, p. 71.

⁶³³ Öncüoğlu, “Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları”, p. 73.

training the Mevlevi volunteers,⁶³⁴ and even exempting the Mevlevis from paying telegram fees in their volunteer recruitment activities.⁶³⁵

The main motive for organizing the Mevlevi Volunteer Battalion was to raise troop morale on the battlefield. The volunteer battalions “would carry the spiritual influence of the order directly to the front, among troops who were often conscripted from provinces not noted for their enthusiastic support of the Unionist government.”⁶³⁶ The Ottoman military also tried to use Mevlevi volunteers in the army as propaganda targeting the general public to mobilize more voluntary support for the armed forces. The main propaganda journal of the Ottoman military during the war, *Harb Mecmuası* (The War Journal), gave extensive coverage to the Mevlevi volunteers in the army and published numerous photographs showing them in processions and during military drills.⁶³⁷

The number of volunteers who joined the battalion reached slightly more than one thousand in March 1915.⁶³⁸ Volunteers were recruited by local lodges of the Mevlevi order throughout Anatolia. The lodges of Jerusalem, Tripoli, Homs, and Latakia also contributed. The Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge in Istanbul (138 volunteers) and the Konya Mevlevi lodge (110 volunteers) recruited the highest number of

⁶³⁴ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/209, 19 Rebûlevvel 1333/4 February 1915; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1729, Dosya 83, Fihrist 3-11.

⁶³⁵ BOA, DH.SYS., 123-12/35, 24 Rebûlâhîr 1333/11 March 1915.

⁶³⁶ Stoddard, “A Preliminary Study of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, p. 71.

⁶³⁷ *Harb Mecmuası*, no. 5 (February 1331/1916), p. 752; *Harb Mecmuası*, no. 9 (May 1332/ 1916), p. 133; *Harb Mecmuası*, no. 10 (June 1332/1916), p. 148; *Harb Mecmuası*, no. 19 (May 1333/1917), p. 294.

⁶³⁸ Köstüklü gives the number of 1026 (p. 91), while Öncüoğlu says it was between 1016 and 1026 (p. 69).

volunteers.⁶³⁹ Konya was the center of the Mevlevi order and also functioned as the base for gathering and transferring volunteers.⁶⁴⁰

The Mevlevi Volunteer Battalion was sent to Damascus in March 1915, where the Ottoman Fourth Army was based under the command of Cemal Pasha. However, although the battalion was integrated into the chain of command of the Fourth Army, it was not regarded as (and not expected to be) a combatant force and, therefore, was assigned mostly non-combatant duties. The volunteers were not denied the right to carry arms, but the rifles they were given were usually old-fashioned ones.⁶⁴¹ The Mevlevi were assigned to perform religious rituals and to deliver sermons to increase the morale of troops. They were also assigned to logistical jobs such as transportation, guardianship and construction services.⁶⁴² Some dervish lodges in the Fourth Army region also provided logistical facilities to the Ottoman army, as in the case of the Aleppo lodge, the buildings of which were used as storage of arms and ammunitions of the army.⁶⁴³

Like the Mevlevi, the Bektaşi order had also many followers and supporters among the Young Turks and there was a politically motivated cooperation between them. The relationship of the order with the CUP was very close since the days when the latter had been in opposition to Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁶⁴⁴ Although the CUP did not have a single overall inclination towards a certain dervish lodge and actually employed a pragmatic approach in its relations with such orders, the rapport between

⁶³⁹ Köstüklü, *Vatan Savunmasında Mevlevihaneler*, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁴⁰ For two illustrations of Mevlevi volunteers, see Appendix D.13 and D.14.

⁶⁴¹ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1729, Dosya 83, Fihrist 3-12.

⁶⁴² Öncüoğlu, “Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları”, p. 120; Köstüklü, *Vatan Savunmasında Mevlevihaneler*, p. 95.

⁶⁴³ Ahmed Cahit Haksever, *Son Dönem Osmanlı Mevlevilerinden Ahmet Remzi Akyürek* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2002), p. 57. The sheikh of the Aleppo lodge, Ahmet Remzi Efendi, also joined the army with the Mevlevi Volunteer Battalion.

⁶⁴⁴ Öncüoğlu, “Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları”, p. 37.

prominent members of the party and the Bektaşî order sometimes became so clear that some claimed that Talat and Enver pashas were followers of the order.⁶⁴⁵

The Bektaşî Volunteer Regiment (*Bektaşî Alayı* or *Mücâhidîn-i Bektaşîyye*) was formed in 1915, under the leadership of Çelebi Cemaleddin Efendi, the sheikh of the Hacı Bektaş lodge during the war. Similarly, the Bektaşî Regiment was a product of dialogue between the state power and the Bektaşî leadership. It was actually a dialogue of pragmatism, in which both sides expected to benefit from each other's power. While the CUP-dominated state tried to exploit the popular religious influence and manpower assets of the Bektaşî order in legitimizing its war cause and mobilizing popular support, the Bektaşîs hoped to gain state patronage in strengthening its own position in society. Available documents indicate that the state had the upper hand in this arrangement and that the regiment was formed upon the request of the state—more specifically by the “wish and consent” (*arzu ve muvafakatim ile*) of Enver Pasha.⁶⁴⁶

According to the account of Veliyeddin Çelebi, the last sheikh of the lodge, the number of volunteers which joined the regiment was over seven thousand.⁶⁴⁷ This number was probably exaggerated by the sheikh, since a reserve officer serving in the Third Army which the Bektaşî Regiment joined in 1915 testified that Çelebi's volunteer force was composed of about 1500 men.⁶⁴⁸ While the latter observation might have been made at an initial phase of the volunteer recruiting process, the total number still seems to have been quite high for a volunteer unit, at least as compared

⁶⁴⁵ Hülya Küçük, *Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Bektaşîler* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2003), pp. 97-98. This book is about the active support and participation of the Bektaşîs in the Turkish War of Independence.

⁶⁴⁶ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 1-19.

⁶⁴⁷ His account was published in the *Hâkimiyet-i Milliye* newspaper on 5 May 1922. See Küçük, *Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Bektaşîler*, p. 103. For the text of his account, see *idid.*, pp. 290-292.

⁶⁴⁸ Rifat Erdal, “Bir Yedek Subayın I. Dünya Harbi Hatıraları”, I, *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası*, vol. 2, no. 7 (August 1971), p. 60.

to the Mevlevi volunteers. The main reason for this is probably the fact that the Bektâşîs, besides recruiting volunteers from the active followers of the order, also tried to mobilize the Anatolian Alevi population for voluntary service.⁶⁴⁹ While the main purpose of the units was to draw on their religious and moral influence in order to increase morale among the troops and society in general, unlike the non-combatant character and mostly logistical services of the the Mevlevi Volunteer Battalion, the Bektâşî Regiment was also used as a combatant militia force on the Gallipoli and the Caucasus fronts.⁶⁵⁰

However, the Ottoman military's expectations were not met by the Bektâşî Regiment as a separate unit on the battlefield, at least as a combatant militia force. Vehib Pasha, the commander of the Third Army in eastern Anatolia stated in a telegram sent to the War Ministry on 15 March 1916 that since "the Bektâşî battalions recruited by Çelebi Efendi had not been useful enough", their personnel were distributed to the regular divisions individually. Vehib Pasha also asked for permission to let Çelebi Efendi go back to his hometown Kırşehir. However, Çelebi Efendi had apparently already left the front when the telegram was sent, and was in Sivas recruiting more volunteers.⁶⁵¹

Whereas the Ottoman state was willing to welcome volunteers from dervish lodges who could contribute to the military both by their manpower and religious influence, it wanted this process to be under its control, operating with its "wish and consent", in congruence with its own expectations. These expectations apparently included not only immediate benefits such as mobilizing popular support or

⁶⁴⁹ Küçük, *Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Bektâşîler*, p. 103; Öncüoğlu, "Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları", p. 91.

⁶⁵⁰ Küçük, *Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Bektâşîler*, p. 103; Öncüoğlu, "Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları", p. 91; Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 377; Stoddard, "A Preliminary Study of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa", p. 72.

⁶⁵¹ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1942, Dosya 223, Fihrist 1-18.

increasing the morale of the Ottoman troops, but also getting their political backing and help in legitimating the CUP policies during the war, in return for the state patronage given to these orders. This situation formed a selective relationship between the state and dervish lodges. Therefore, the Ottoman state authorized only the Mevlevi and Bektaşi orders to recruit volunteers. Members of other dervish orders were not allowed to recruit volunteers on their behalf during the Great War.⁶⁵²

But this did not mean that followers of other dervish orders in the Ottoman Empire could not volunteer for the army. They could volunteer as long as they joined either one of the Mevlevi and Bektaşi volunteer forces as individuals. For example, there were volunteers from the Kadiri and Rifai orders in the Mevlevi Volunteer Battalion in the Fourth Army.⁶⁵³ There were also individual volunteers who joined the Ottoman armed forces from the Sultantepe Uzbek lodge in Üsküdar, as well as well as from other Uzbek lodges in Tarsus.⁶⁵⁴

Voluntary Associations in Search of Volunteers

As discussed in Chapter 2, officially supported voluntary associations dominated the Ottoman public sphere on the eve of the Great War and undertook campaigns in cooperation with the CUP-dominated state to mobilize popular support for the war effort. These associations, particularly the National Defense League, also played an active role in recruiting volunteers for the Ottoman Army. In fact, this was one of the

⁶⁵² Öncüoğlu, “Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları”, p. 68.

⁶⁵³ *Harb Mecmuası*, no. 9 (May 1332/1916), p. 133; *Harb Mecmuası*, no. 19 (May 1333/1917); Öncüoğlu, “Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları”, p. 65.

⁶⁵⁴ I am thankful to Lale Can, who is studying the Uzbek lodges of Istanbul, for drawing my attention to this example.

main activities which this association initiated as soon as it was established.⁶⁵⁵ The National Defense League formed committees for recruiting volunteers (*gönüllü heyetleri*) within itself, which tried to recruit volunteers throughout the country. Its guidance committees (*irşad heyetleri*) also helped recruit volunteers, which employed members of the ulema to mobilize voluntary support at the popular level. These men of religion preached to local people both orally and through written statements published in the press about the religious virtues of volunteering for the army and of fighting for the motherland.⁶⁵⁶

The committees for recruiting volunteers were quite active during the Balkan War. It is also important to note here that during the Balkan War, they particularly targeted Muslim refugees who had been forced to immigrate from recently lost European (*Rumeli*) provinces. The National Defense League worked in collaboration with the Association of the Muslim Refugees from Rumeli (*Rumeli Muhacirîn-i İslamiye Cemiyeti*), and the theme of “revenge” seems to have often been emphasized in statements to mobilize volunteers. For example, on 4 February 1913, the daily *İkdâm* called to service those who “wish, in a patriotic mood, to volunteer not only to defend their Ottoman and Muslim dignity and honor (*namus*), but also to take revenge from the enemy.”⁶⁵⁷

The National Defense League’s recruitment efforts continued at a wider scale during the Great War. In recruiting volunteers, the National Defense League acted as the conveyer of the state’s call to voluntary service on the popular level. It also worked in close cooperation with the Special Organization and helped it raise

⁶⁵⁵ Polat, *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, p. 56.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶⁵⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 56.

volunteers for its militia forces.⁶⁵⁸ Local branches of the league worked as if they were volunteer recruiting offices. For example, the branch in Ordu, a district of Trabzon, raised a volunteer force of about 500 people in the area along the coast of the Black Sea between Ünye and Ordu, which was sent to the Caucasus front.⁶⁵⁹

The National Defense League worked in solidarity with other volunteer units and also provided logistical support for them. For example, the Mevlevi lodge in Konya used the Konya branch as a base to gather volunteers.⁶⁶⁰ The league also raised cash donations to be provided for volunteer units. For example, the İzmir branch made a contribution of 100 liras to the Mevlevi volunteers in the region, to be spent on supplying uniforms and other needs of the new volunteers.⁶⁶¹ The Diyarbakir branch of the National Defense League organized a volunteer force of 500 men, which was sent to help the Special Organization force in Erzurum. In the process of their organization and transfer to the front, such volunteer forces were usually accompanied by an alim (religious scholar) who was assigned by the league to provide guidance (*irşad*), increase morale, and mobilize additional men on the way to the front. The Diyarbakir volunteer force was led by the town's mufti, Hacı İbrahim Efendi, who reported that "on their way to the front he attracted so many men to join them that they numbered one thousand men by the time they reached their objective."⁶⁶²

When it did not recruit volunteers, the National Defense League still worked to provide military training for civilians on the home front. An interesting activity in this respect was training capable civilians of all ages, who "could be useful in the

⁶⁵⁸ Pehlivanlı, "Teşkilât-ı Mahsûsa", p. 291.

⁶⁵⁹ Pehlivanlı, "Teşkilât-ı Mahsûsa", p. 291; Shaw, *Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 378.

⁶⁶⁰ Polat, *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁶¹ "Mevlevi Gönüllüleri İçin", *İkdâm*, 2 Kanunisani 1330/15 January 1915.

⁶⁶² Pehlivanlı, "Teşkilât-ı Mahsûsa", p. 291; Shaw, *Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 378.

defense of the fatherland”, in how to use a Mauser rifle.⁶⁶³ Local branches of the National Defense League organized shooting drills for civilians in such provinces as Erzurum and Diyarbekir. They even organized competitive drills to attract more participation.⁶⁶⁴ It is worth noting that although the National Defense League was not part of the military, it could apparently carry out military activities on the home front. Moreover, it had access to military arms and ammunition, and could employ military trainers to teach civilians how to use a rifle. It is clear that the National Defense League sometimes acted as a paramilitary organization and also worked in collaboration with military authorities. It was the perfect example of how a popular association became militarized under total war conditions.

Uses and Misuses of Volunteers

The Ottoman military authorities seem to have had mixed feelings about the performance and usefulness of volunteer forces in the Great War. For example, Cemal Pasha, a high-ranking commander stated in 1914 that

According to my experiences both during the Balkan War and the present mobilization, volunteers rather cause trouble than providing any usefulness... Since they lack necessary training and discipline, they exert negative effects on regular troops. And to feed them we need more provisions.⁶⁶⁵

Similar doubts about the performance of volunteer forces were expressed by other observers who wrote their memoirs after the war.⁶⁶⁶ Some high ranking commanders claimed that they were not only “totally useless”, but that they served as shelters for

⁶⁶³ The German-made Mauser rifle (9.5 mm) was the main infantry rifle of the Ottoman army during the Great War. In addition, less effective single-shot Martini rifles were also used widely. Larcher, *Büyük Harbde Türk Harbi*, p. 81.

⁶⁶⁴ BOA, DH.İD., 176/38, 9 Rebiulâhir 1332/5 February 1914.

⁶⁶⁵ Quoted in Öncüoğlu, “Gönüllü Tarikat Alayları”, p. 66.

⁶⁶⁶ Ziya Şakir, *1914-1918 Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare Ettik?*, p. 132.

those who actually tried to escape real combat and did not want to get enlisted in the regular armed forces.⁶⁶⁷ For example, writing about Mevlevi volunteers, Major Vecihi Bey, who served in Palestine during the last phase of the war, recounted that the Mevlevis did not carry out the spiritual missions initially expected from them and that the ones in Damascus were akin to “a unit of entertainment and enjoyment” (*zevk ve eğlence fırkası*) that performed music on certain occasions such as banquets.⁶⁶⁸ Difficulty in maintaining discipline in the volunteer forces also increased such doubts. Desertions were particularly widespread among certain volunteer units, especially the tribal volunteers on the Caucasus front. For example, it was reported that after the Köprüköy battle in November 1914, the number of Kurdish tribal volunteers in the Third Army, which was around twenty thousand at the beginning, dramatically dwindled to around three thousand because of desertions.⁶⁶⁹

The Turkish General Staff’s official military history of the war states quite firmly that the strategy of recruiting tribal volunteers was unsuccessful.⁶⁷⁰ This view interprets the Ottoman military’s relationship with tribal forces (in fact, with all “peripheral forces”) from the strict perspective of state sovereignty; however, contemporary official historiography understands sovereignty only in its nation-state form. Therefore, this perspective has claimed that that the main reason for this failure was that “the Ottoman state was unable to establish *complete authority* over tribal leaders, even though it granted them the rank of pasha and granted them

⁶⁶⁷ Aziz Samih İltar, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Kafkas Cephesi Hatıraları* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2007), p. 27.

⁶⁶⁸ *Filistin Ricatı: Erkân-ı Harb Binbaşısı Vecihi Bey’in Anıları*, ed. by Murat Çulcu (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1993), p. 20.

⁶⁶⁹ Aytar, *Hamidiye Alaylarından Köy Koruculuğuna*, pp. 140-141.

⁶⁷⁰ It should be noted that although the official history of the war published by the Turkish General Staff always tends to approve Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s actions and sayings, this approach is actually in contradiction with Atatürk’s above-mentioned pragmatic consideration of Kurdish volunteers.

decorations.”⁶⁷¹ Of course, from the retrospective lens of total defeat in 1918, the contributions of volunteers to the Ottoman army would tend to be underrated. This perspective became even more powerful with the rise of absolute centralism in the age of the Republican nation-state, when universal conscription was established on a full-scale and volunteerism was neither needed nor allowed in the armed forces.

However, it should not be forgotten that during the war, volunteer or “irregular” forces were always needed and used by the Ottoman army on all major fronts. The lack of drafted manpower and the inability to implement conscription, difficult geographical conditions for regular troops, the specific necessities of guerilla warfare, and sometimes even the hope of benefiting from the spiritual influence of volunteers (as in the case of religious volunteers) in mobilizing more popular support for the war cause were the main reasons why Ottoman authorities utilized volunteers. For example, Mustafa Kemal’s description of potential tribal volunteers as “patriotic people” and his willingness to welcome them at any time is quite illustrative of the Ottoman approach toward volunteers during the Great War.⁶⁷² Similarly, in a telegram to the Iraqi Command on 30/31 July 1915, Enver Pasha insisted that the command should continue to use tribal forces throughout the war, since, he warned, the war would last much longer than expected.⁶⁷³ Moreover, available documents show that volunteer forces were sometimes so successful and helpful in fighting that they received the appreciation of the highest authorities.⁶⁷⁴ In reference to the Special Organization’s efforts to recruit tribal volunteers in the Arab provinces, Stoddard argues that such efforts should not be seen as futile because “in

⁶⁷¹ *Birinci Dünya Harbi’nde Türk Harbi, vol.3, part 1: Irak-İran Cephesi, 1914-1918* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979), p. 33. (Italics mine).

⁶⁷² ATASE, BDH, Klasör 4462, Dosya 136, Fihrist 6-06.

⁶⁷³ *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 90 (September 1990), Document no : 2219, p. 20.

⁶⁷⁴ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 50/168, 17 Rebûlevvel 1333/4 March 1915.

view of the Ottoman Empire's very limited monetary and manpower resources, the chief consideration was to win at the lowest cost.⁶⁷⁵

The ways in which volunteer forces acted and were used during the war were not always in agreement with the Ottoman military's expectations; there was almost always a tension between the chiefs of volunteer forces and regular army officers in terms of command. As has already been noted, whereas the Ottoman military preferred to keep volunteer forces as separate units, it still wanted to integrate them within the military chain of command. Thus, regular military officers could sometimes be assigned as commanders of volunteer armed bands.⁶⁷⁶ However, this did not always mean that volunteer bands were put under the direct authority of army command; they could still act autonomously and carry out plans of action which were not approved by the military headquarters on the front. This was especially a problem with armed bands on the Caucasus front, which were formed by the initiative of the Special Organization. Instead of obeying the orders of the assigned regular officers, they ignored them and continued to take orders from authorities of the Special Organization.⁶⁷⁷ For example, in a June 1915 report, the commander of Iraq in Kut complained to Enver Pasha that Süleyman Askerî Bey, a leading member of the Special Organization and the chief of "irregular forces" in the region, did not act in accordance with the command structure. He explained that Süleyman Askerî had made the grave mistake of relying too much on his irregular forces instead of considering the actions of the regular army. The commander also complained that his regular army officers lost their enthusiasm and eagerness to fight as they saw that the officers of irregular forces, who were assigned by the Special Organization, had large

⁶⁷⁵ Stoddard, "A Preliminary Study of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa", p. 124.

⁶⁷⁶ For an example, see *Binbaşı Süleyman Bey'in Manzum Anıları*, ed. by Ömer Türkoğlu (Ankara: Kebikeç Yayınları, 1997), p. 135.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-137.

sums of money in their disposal. This situation caused resentment on the part of regular officers because they were not paid even the half of their regular salaries.⁶⁷⁸

But a graver problem with these volunteer bands was their lack of discipline and their abusive acts towards local civilian populations. When the intensity of fighting increased and the tide of the battle turned against the Ottoman forces, volunteers usually tended to desert in great numbers and undermined the combat capacity of their units; in times of victory, they often engaged in pillaging.⁶⁷⁹ Their arbitrary actions and abuses sometimes became so intolerable that the War Ministry expressed that it did not want any more volunteer bands in certain regions. A telegram that was sent to all the provinces on 4 April 1915 by the Interior Ministry upon receiving such a warning from the War Ministry is quite exemplary in terms of the degree to which the abuses could reach:

Since the bands of volunteers which were sent to X Corps terrorize villagers and attempted to use arm against their superior officers, and since their existence in the war is considered harmful, the War Ministry requested that no more volunteers be sent to the region.⁶⁸⁰

In an effort to prevent such tensions, the Third Army command issued a regulation in September 1914, regarding relations between the army and the armed bands. The intention was to control the bands, but only little success was achieved and relations between the Ottoman military and the Special Organization bands “continued to be very difficult throughout the war, greatly limiting the success of both.”⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ “Kut’dan Başkumandanlık Vekâletine Şifre”, *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 118 (July 2004), document no. 30, p. 98.

⁶⁷⁹ Sarısamam, “Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri ve Gürcü Lejyonu”, p. 26.

⁶⁸⁰ “Onuncu kolorduya gönderilen gönüllü çete efradının ahali-i kurraya zulm ve zabitlerine karşı teşhir-i silah eyledikleri ve harbde bunların vücudundan mazarrat görülmekte olduğundan gönderilmemesi Harbiye nezaretinden işar kılınmıştır.” BOA, DH.ŞFR., 51/209, 19 Cemâziyelevvel 1333/4 Nisan 1915. The X Corps was stationed on the Caucasus front at this time.

⁶⁸¹ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 444.

A reason for the continuation of such tensions was the fact that band leaders of the Special Organization sometimes received informal support and patronage from the CUP circles. Some contemporary observers from within the military, such as Lieutenant Colonel Şerif Bey who served on the Caucasus front, criticized this political connection and condemned the armed bands of the Special Organization as “harmful and pointless” (*muzır ve manasız*). He described them as “secret militia forces which were formed by a political party in a clandestine way to carry out virtually certain political missions that party could not perform openly.”⁶⁸²

The majority of complaints were made about the recruitment of prisoners for the armed bands and their violent acts towards civilians. Their abuses against the non-Muslim subjects of the empire during the war, especially their role in the massacres of civilian Armenians during the forced migration of the Anatolian Armenian population in 1915 were criticized and condemned by various observers of the period. For example, Ahmed Refik [Altınay] described these bands as being composed of “murderers and robbers”, who “committed the most terrible atrocities against the Armenians.”⁶⁸³ A similar observation and criticism about the abuses committed by the armed bands of the Special Organization against civilian Armenians were made by the contemporary journalist Ahmed Emin Yalman. He explained that these armed bands “followed directly a goal of destruction (*imha*)” of the Armenian population.⁶⁸⁴ This was also one of the major allegations directed at the leaders of the CUP and the Special Organization, who were tried in the Martial

⁶⁸² *Kaymakam Şerif Bey'in Anıları: Sarıkamış*, ed. by Murat Çulcu (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1998), p. 156

⁶⁸³ Ahmet Refik (Altınay), *İki Komite, İki Kıtıl* (Istanbul: Bedir, 1999), pp. 33-34. (The first edition of this book was published in 1919.)

⁶⁸⁴ Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim, vol. 1*, pp. 331-332.

Courts formed after the Mudros Armistice.⁶⁸⁵ Recent researchers have attributed the chief responsibility for the abuses against the Armenians during the war to the armed bands of the Special Organization.⁶⁸⁶ On the other hand, Guenter Lewy has argued that the incomplete character of the available documents does not allow us to attribute all of the abuses against the Armenians to the Special Organization—although he has not denied the existence of convicted criminals in the armed bands and has confirmed the attacks of “irregulars” or “volunteers” towards the Armenian deportees. Lewy has also written that while it is hard to determine whether Kurdish bands were directed by official authorities or whether they acted on their own initiative in plundering or as a result of religious fanaticism, Kurdish irregular and volunteer forces, as well as Circassian volunteers, played a considerable role in the massacres of the Armenian deportees.⁶⁸⁷ It can be argued that voluntary forces played an important role in changing the demographic composition of Anatolia during the Great War.

It should also be added that such abuses were not limited to non-Muslims. Some armed bands also attacked and pillaged Muslim villages in the Erzurum region.⁶⁸⁸ During the Russian retreat from eastern Anatolia in late 1917, similar armed bands were also formed by non-Muslim groups in the region in a mood of retaliation. These bands attacked local Muslim villages. In describing inter-communal conflicts in the central Black Sea region during this period, which was

⁶⁸⁵ “*Tehcir ve Taktik*”: *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi Zabıtları, İttihad ve Terakki'nin Yargılanması, 1919-1922*, edited by Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008), pp. 234-239. See also the rest of the compilation.

⁶⁸⁶ Akçam, *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu*, pp. 231-253.

⁶⁸⁷ Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, pp. 82-89, 221-228. For a similar discussion about the role of the Special Organization, see Edward J. Erickson, “Armenian Massacres: New Records Undercut Old Blame: Reexamining History”, *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 67-75.

⁶⁸⁸ Akçam, *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu*, p. 234.

characterized by migrations and deportations, Oktay Özel has used the expression “the hatred in the guise of armed bands” (*çeteleşmiş nefret*).⁶⁸⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a panorama of volunteers in the Ottoman army during the Great War. I have argued that the use of volunteers was practically a systematic practice during the war that was conceived of as a way of complementing the insufficiencies of the Ottoman conscription system. Where the official draft procedure did not function due to legal, infrastructural or demographic problems, resorting to volunteers became the main alternative way of mobilizing the manpower potential of tribal and *muhacir* populations. In this sense, volunteerism was a substitute of compulsion. While volunteers were used in myriad ways, certain categories of volunteers tended to be used for specific purposes. Prisoner volunteers were mostly employed in the armed bands of the Special Organization, which carried out informal military missions and guerilla attacks both on the battlefield against the enemy forces and on the home front against “distrusted” civilian elements. *Muhacir* volunteers were particularly employed in campaigns in regions with which they were familiar, as in the case of Circassian volunteers on the Caucasus front. Kurdish tribal volunteers were usually employed as separate cavalry forces which served as auxiliary units on the fronts that were near their native regions, such as on the fronts of the Caucasus and Mesopotamia. Religious volunteers were used mostly for increasing troop morale; their religious influence in society was also used for propaganda purposes to increase the legitimacy of the CUP government’s war

⁶⁸⁹ Oktay Özel, “Muhacirler, Yerliler ve Gayrimüslimler”, p. 106.

policies. This chapter has contended that volunteerism during the war was actually a relationship of power. The acceptance of volunteers was characterized by certain political preferences of the CUP-dominated state; only those elements that were regarded as “loyal” and “useful” from the state’s perspective were welcomed as volunteers. Volunteerism as such fostered the bond of loyalty between state authority and certain social groups (Muslim elements of Anatolia) on the one hand, and it functioned to marginalize “disloyal” groups on the other. Therefore, it was no coincidence that all kinds of volunteers that have been mentioned in this chapter also took part in one way or another in the demographic homogenization of Anatolia during the Great War.

CHAPTER 5

YOUNG BOYS INTO SOLDIERS, THE HOME FRONT INTO BARRACKS: ATTEMPTS AT PERMANENT MOBILIZATION THROUGH PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

A major challenge for the CUP-dominated Ottoman state throughout the Great War was to maintain a permanent state of military mobilization. The challenge was twofold: Mobilizing manpower for war did not only entail establishing an infrastructural system of enlistment and constantly conscripting enough number of men that would match the increasing needs of armed forces on the battlefield, but also required permanent preparation of society for war, which first and foremost meant a militaristic education and regimentation of the youth, the most dynamic part of the population and the backbone of mass armies in the age of universal conscription.

Although compulsory military service had already become universal before the war, the pressing needs of the war led Ottoman authorities to consider that an extended training period for the youth, which started long before entering into the actual service, would greatly contribute to the Ottoman mobilization effort. This extended training period would include both physical and mental educational methods: it would not only continuously prepare young boys for war by providing them with physical and military skills, but also would serve as a propaganda campaign to get popular support on the home front for the government's war policies. Militarization of society in this way would facilitate maintaining a permanent mobilization effort that was necessitated by the war. It would also increase the CUP government's capacity of social control, since such a permanent state of mobilization would go hand in hand with further penetration into every level of society. This perspective led Ottoman authorities to attribute a significant role to

militaristic youth associations, such as boy scouting and physical training organizations which had already emerged in the Ottoman Empire before the Great War. Approaches to physical education had already acquired militarist tendencies during the Second Constitutional Era. Being inspired by the effectiveness of large-scale paramilitary youth organizations in European countries, particularly in Germany, Ottoman authorities aimed to re-establish a more extensive and centralized youth associational network in the country during the war. They conceived of paramilitary associations as an instrument to the permanent mobilization of the population needed for the war effort.

This chapter focuses on the paramilitary youth associations in the Ottoman Empire, which acquired particular importance on the eve of and during the Great War. While the chapter presents a general discussion on the emergence and increasing importance of militaristic youth associations on the eve of the war, its main focus is the Ottoman Youth League, which was established in the middle of the war with the specific aim of mobilizing unschooled provincial and peasant Ottoman boys. Rather than confining myself to narrating an institutional history of such paramilitary youth organizations, I aim to situate these associations within the social context of the mobilization process. My main intention is to understand what kinds of relations these associations formed between the state and society in this process and how they were received by the very people they targeted. One of the main contentions of this chapter is that the people who were targeted or affected by such organizations were not passive and produced responses that re-shaped the establishment and activity process of paramilitary associations. Based on how these people's expectations and priorities matched up with state policies, I will try to demonstrate that these responses constituted a wide spectrum ranging from voluntary

support to open resistance. In this sense, I argue that the Ottoman paramilitary associations often had difficulty realizing their originally conceived aims and were forced to respond to social actors by continually re-shaping themselves and their methods during the mobilization process.

The Existing Literature on Ottoman Paramilitary Associations and Its Critique

So far, the Ottoman experience of paramilitary youth associations has not received sufficient attention in Ottoman-Turkish historiography. Zafer Toprak's short but pioneering essays have brought the subject-matter into the realm of social history,⁶⁹⁰ but no synthetic and comprehensive in-depth studies have followed them since. In fact, there are several recent writings dealing with the subject-matter by shedding light on a single example of Ottoman paramilitary associations, and such writings usually also contain valuable documentary material about the institutional history of the association it focused on. But, besides the problem of singling out a case from the general process, these essays are limited in scope and descriptive in content.⁶⁹¹

On the other hand, a more important problem with the existing literature is that since they almost solely focus on the legal documentary materials (such as regulations, by-laws, manuals, laws and public declarations) that belonged to the

⁶⁹⁰ See Zafer Toprak, "İttihat ve Terakki'nin Paramiliter Gençlik Örgütleri", *Boğaziçi University Journal: Humanities*, vol. 7 (1979), pp. 95-113; Zafer Toprak, "II. Meşrutiyet Döneminde Paramiliter Gençlik Örgütleri", *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), pp. 531-536. As another initial referring to the subject, Tarık Zafer Tunaya also drew attention to these associations in his study on the political parties during the Second Constitutional Era. See Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 3, pp. 366-367.

⁶⁹¹ For essays on individual cases, see Mustafa Balcıoğlu, "Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri", in Mustafa Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Cumhuriyet'e*, second edition (Ankara: Asil Yayın, 2004), pp. 198-208; Sadık Sarısamam, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İhtiyat Kuvveti Olarak Kurulan Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri", *OTAM: Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, no. 11 (2000), pp. 439-501; Sadık Sarısamam, "Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri", in Atilla Şimşek and Yaşar Kalafat (eds.), *Abdülhalük M. Çay Armağanı*, vol. 2 (Ankara: Işık Ofset, 1998), pp. 833-846.

association studied, they usually re-tell the quite “official” and almost impeccable story about the emergence and establishment process of that association. Such legal materials and declarations actually draw a picture of a prospective perspective of a desired process aimed at the beginning, not of what happened in the actual process. Such a one-dimensional approach could be quite misleading and give an uncritical and unchecked impression that the association under study was very successful and effective, realizing all the goals declared at the beginning. Such an approach does not tell us much about such important points as what kinds of problems emerged in practice, how the association tried to cope with them, how this coping effort reshaped its activities and how the targeted people responded to its call. A similar tendency of taking the above-mentioned kind of documents as the complete representation of the reality can also be observed in some discourse analysis studies, as in the case of a recent book on militarism in the late Ottoman Empire, which implies that there was almost a perfect militarism emanating from the paramilitary associations in the late Ottoman Empire and this militarism was imposed on society smoothly, without facing any resistance from people.⁶⁹²

On the other hand, paramilitary youth associations in the late Ottoman Empire have also been highlighted in some recent critical and synthetic researches which have tried to analyze the evolution of the Ottoman-early Turkish republican approach to physical education and sports in the light of the Foucauldian concepts of “governmentality” and “bio-politic”.⁶⁹³ However, despite a more multi-dimensional

⁶⁹² See Handan Nezir Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey: The Ottoman Military and the March to World War I* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 163-172.

⁶⁹³ Bkz. Yiğit Akın, “*Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar*”: *Erken Cumhuriyet’te Beden Terbiyesi ve Spor*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004); Y. Tolga Cora, *Constructing and Mobilizing the ‘Nation’ through Sports: State, Physical Education and Nationalism under the Young Turk Role, 1908-1918* (master’s thesis, Central European University, 2007); Y. Tolga Cora, “II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi’nde Millet-i Müsellaha Fikri ve İdeal Erilliğin Yaratılmasına Doğru: Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri’nin Kurulması

perspective of these studies, the Great War years receive only tangential attention in them. They tend to put the Ottoman experience of paramilitary youth associations into an almost uninterrupted line of evolution from the mid-nineteenth century through the early republican era (the Single Party Period), which had been characterized by a nationalist “ideology of body”. While I do not take issue with drawing such a deep background and continuity in this matter, I argue that the Great War period, with its specific conditions and urgent needs, had its own unique and significant impact on this evolution. The expectations of Ottoman authorities from the paramilitary associations established in the war years were not the same with the expectations before and after the war. The specific conditions and needs of the war indeed transformed the phenomenon of physical education from a minor part of healthy life activities into a mass militaristic phenomenon.⁶⁹⁴ But many components of this discursive transformation have not been explored at the practical level. The war years not only reshaped this process, but also revealed its limits in the Ottoman context. For example, as will be discussed below, the establishment of paramilitary youth associations in the Ottoman provincial areas was often a story of failure rather than success, and the actual living conditions of peasant youths played a significant role in their relationship with the state’s militarist projects targeting them. If there was an Ottoman ideology of physical education, this ideology was greatly re-shaped by the needs of the Ottoman mobilization in the war years.

(1914)”, unpublished paper presented to the International Congress of 1908–2008 Centennial of the Young Turk Revolution, Ankara University, 28-30 May 2008.

⁶⁹⁴ Akın, “*Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar*”, s. 130.

Militarization of Physical Education and the Ottoman Strength League

The Balkan War constituted a turning point in the militarization of physical education and sports in the Ottoman Empire. The disappointing defeat on the battlefield against the newly modernized Balkan armies led Young Turk elites to think about the role of physical education in a militarist way and begin considering that militaristic physical education classes at schools could contribute to preparing the young boys of pre-military ages for military service. The Balkan catastrophe, in their opinion, was connected to a larger problem of lack of vigor and health in Ottoman society; as some people complained after the defeat, “out of every thousand men who had been called up for service, only one hundred were healthy and the remainder had one sort of illness or another”.⁶⁹⁵ In an age when social Darwinist ideas became quite prevalent among the Ottoman elite,⁶⁹⁶ the defeat was not considered merely a military failure, but it was actually regarded as a social weakness due to physical incapability of the Ottomans: “We say that to live is to fight, and it is always the strong who dominates in a fight... The weak is always a slave to the strong. What bothers us most is the weakness of the Turk. Yes, our nation failed, but it failed because it failed to improve its strength!”⁶⁹⁷

This perspective led Ottoman authorities to put new emphasis on the role of physical education at schools in improving the health of youth and preparing them for military service in a soldierly way. In the words of a prominent Ottoman pedagogue just after the Balkan War, the education of the young population was

⁶⁹⁵ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. I, p. 199; “Türk Gücü’nün Umumi Nizamı”, in Toprak, “İttihat ve Terakki’nin Paramiliter Dernekleri”, p. 101.

⁶⁹⁶ See Atila Doğan, *Osmanlı Aydınları ve Sosyal Darwinizm* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2006).

⁶⁹⁷ “Talim ve Terbiye: Türk Gücü”, *Türk Yurdu*, no. 35 (7 Mart 1329/20 March 1913), [transliterated text in modern Turkish, vol. 2, Ankara: Tutubay Yayınları, 1998, p. 186].

even perceived as an integral part of training for informally extended military service: “Our children must begin to be soldiers just when they are still at school. They must be educated in a soldierly way. They must be inculcated with sentiments of vengeance and revenge (*kin ve intikam*). The whole nation must be living for vengeance and revenge.”⁶⁹⁸ However, a more practical and immediate product of this approach was an attempt to put boy scouting activities, which had already begun to gain momentum in the Ottoman Empire after the 1908 Revolution,⁶⁹⁹ into a more organized form for training the youth in a militarized way. As a sub-organization of the Turkish Hearths Association, itself a pro-CUP and Turkish nationalist literary organization established in 1912,⁷⁰⁰ the Turkish Strength Association (*Türk Gücü Derneği*) was established in June 1913 for this purpose. Its major objective was to “improve the health of Turks, reinforce their physical strength, and raise active generations as a contingency in times of hardships.”⁷⁰¹ However, rather than being a public association trying to reach an empire-wide organization appealing to as many people as possible, the Turkish Strength Association was conceived as almost like a private club open to limited number of people (Unionist and nationalist), and was actually established at only a few high schools. Although membership was not restricted to anybody theoretically, prospective members were required to get the

⁶⁹⁸ Edhem Nejad, “Organsal ve Bedensel Gelişmemiz”, *Türklük ve Terbiye Yolları* (Istanbul: Yeni Turan Matbaası, 1329/1913), [new edition in modern Turkish, Istanbul: Kızılelma Yayınları, 2001, p. 44], quoted in Yiğit Akın, *Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar*, p. 132.

⁶⁹⁹ On the evolution of boy scouting in the Ottoman Empire, see Cora, “Constructing and Mobilizing the ‘Nation’ through Sports”; Zafer Toprak, “Meşrutiyet ve Mütareke Yıllarında Türkiye’de İzcilik”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 52 (April 1998), pp. 13-20; Zafer Toprak, “Türkiye’de İzciliğin İlk Evresi: II. Meşrutiyet’ten Mütareke Yıllarına”, *Tombak*, no. 24 (February 1999), pp. 19-27; Gökhan Uzgören, *Türk İzcilik Tarihi* (Istanbul: Papatya Yayıncılık, 2000), pp. 1-34; Turgay Tuna, “Galatasaray’da İzcilik”, *Tombak*, no.28 (October-November 1999), pp. 56-71.

⁷⁰⁰ On the Turkish Hearths Association, see Füsün Üstel, *İmparatorluktan Ulus-devlete Türk Milliyetçiliği: Türk Ocakları, 1912-1931* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1997).

⁷⁰¹ Cüneyd Okay, “Sport and Nation Building: Gymnastics and Sport in the Ottoman State and the Committee of Union and Progress, 1908-1918”, *The International Journal of History of Sport*, vol. 20, no. 1 (March 2003), p. 153.

unanimous approval of the administrative board of the association and also needed to swear an oath. Moreover, membership to the association required paying an acceptance fee (1 *mecidiye*) and a monthly payment (5 piasters/*kuruş*).⁷⁰² Therefore, the Turkish Strength Association remained virtually ineffective and unpopular, until Enver Pasha tried to turn it into a more extensive organization in 1914, when the association became attached to the War Ministry.

The attempts to put boy scouting activities in an organized form targeting the whole young population of Ottoman society intensified in 1914, as a proposal was made to the Council of Ministers on 28 April 1914 to expand the Turkish Strength Association on a more centralized basis by institutionalizing it at schools throughout the empire. This proposal was accepted, and the association was reestablished with the name of the Ottoman Strength League⁷⁰³ (*Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri*) on 27 May 1914.⁷⁰⁴ Moreover, the Ottomans also invited Harold Parfitt, a British citizen who led the boy scouting organization in Belgium from 1909 onwards, to reorganize boy scouting activities in the Ottoman Empire and to supervise the organization process of the Ottoman Strength League.⁷⁰⁵

According to its regulation⁷⁰⁶ and instruction manual⁷⁰⁷, the Ottoman Strength League was established by the “approval and patronage” of the War Ministry, and would remain attached to it. Its main purpose was “to prepare the youth, both physically and spiritually, for the defense of the fatherland, and to ensure that they

⁷⁰² “Talim ve Terbiye: Türk Gücü”, p. 188-189.

⁷⁰³ I prefer to use the term “league” for such associations with a multi-branch structure, all of which united for a common militarist goal.

⁷⁰⁴ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 197.

⁷⁰⁵ Cora, “II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi'nde Millet-i Müsellaha Fikri”.

⁷⁰⁶ “Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri Hakkında Nizamname”, in Toprak, “İttihat ve Terakki'nin Paramiliter Gençlik Örgütleri”, pp. 105-107.

⁷⁰⁷ *Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri Talimatı* (Istanbul: Matbaa-yı Askeriye, 1330/1914); BOA, DH.İD., 224/3, 19 Safer 1333/6 January 1915.

keep their strong patriotic character until death”. As has been mentioned above, after the catastrophe which the Ottoman army had experienced during the Balkan War, a major complaint, which was also voiced in the founding documentation of the league, was that “out of every thousand men who had been called up for service, only one hundred were healthy and the remainder had one sort of illness or another”.⁷⁰⁸ Therefore, the Ottoman Strength League primarily targeted young boys below the minimum age for military service, for whom it aimed to provide physical training to make them strong and nationalistic enough to defend the country when they were subsequently called up for service in the army. It was compulsory for all public schools, including the medreses, to establish branches of the Strength League in their school structures. Similar branches were also expected to be established by non-Muslim communities’ schools, privately-owned schools, and even by ordinary civilians outside schools.

In the case of non-Muslim and non-public schools and civilians it was not compulsory, but was expected to be initiated by voluntary action. However, this voluntarism was not supposed to lessen the militaristic tone of the Strength League; on the contrary, it was expected to be a civilian contribution to a militaristic cause. It can be said that this civilian and voluntary contribution was highly desired by the authorities and attributed a symbolic importance. For example, official documents and correspondence about the league often used statements such as “the Strength League belonged to the people”.⁷⁰⁹ On the other hand, the regulation of the league made it quite clear that the league would work under the supervision of the military. Its local branches were to function “under the authority and supervision of the chief of the recruiting office branch” of the region in which a particular branch was

⁷⁰⁸ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. I, p. 199.

⁷⁰⁹ BOA, DH.EUM.MH., 87/137, 24 Şa’ban 1332/18 July 1914.

located. Moreover, local branches were also required to report their activities to the military authorities in their region.

The Strength League's program for 1914 reveals detailed information about what sort of activities were planned to be carried out at schools.⁷¹⁰ First of all, on a general level, the main objective of these activities was to improve physical education of pre-military age students. But it should be noted that what the league meant by physical education activities were actually almost exclusively military exercises and drills. The program categorized the training of students under two headings, one being drills without arms and the other drills with arms. The drills without arms aimed to improve the body fitness of students and to make them physically stronger. This category also included various activities to train students to become able to find their way better in open fields like good soldiers, such as learning how to use maps, recognizing geographical shapes, and finding directions and following a trail. The drills with arms primarily focused on target practices, which were planned to be done with real rifles and live ammunition. Rifles and ammunition would be provided by the Ottoman military.⁷¹¹

In addition to these drills, the program also included moral education courses. These courses received a particular emphasis, because it was said that moral education was an inseparable part of the training of soldier-candidates. From the perspective of the Strength League, besides being psychically strong and able to use a weapon, a good young man also needed to be someone who was consciously aware of his duties both to himself and to "his fellow citizens and elders"; he was supposed

⁷¹⁰ *Güç Dernekleri'nin Programı* (Istanbul: Matbaa-yı Askeriye, 1330/1914); BOA, DH.İD., 224/3, 19 Safer 1333/6 January 1915.

⁷¹¹ "In order to keep the people's warlike character and its love for the army alive", these target practices were also declared to be open to civilians, who could participate in them by paying a certain amount of fee. Sarısamın, "Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri", p. 835. And it is understood that this activity was also seen as a good propaganda material to publicize. See, for example, *Harb Mecmuası*, no 24 (Kanunievvel 1333/December 1917), p. 381.

to be not only capable of protecting his health with personal hygienic care, but also an honest man who never lied. Such young men needed also to be “obedient” people, who knew how to respect and treat “the state, soldiers, the police, the gendarmerie and their superiors”.⁷¹²

The Strength League promised a license and also certain privileges for its young participants who attended the training activities regularly and proved at the end-of-year exams that they became “ready for military service and capable of carrying out various military exercises”. The license holders were also offered certain encouraging privileges that would make their military life easier, such as that when they were drafted they would be sent to any unit they wanted, and they would not be sent to units in extremely hot provinces such as the Hicaz and Yemen (*bilad-ı harre*). Moreover, during their military service, the license holders were also promised promotion to the rank of corporal four months earlier than their fellows, and, if they did not face any punishment during military service, they would be granted leave for one and a half months after the regular maneuvers each year.⁷¹³

The Ottoman Strength League aimed to prepare the Ottoman youth for military service and integrate a militarized physical training perspective into the Ottoman school system. It can be said that the Ottoman state took this militaristic objective very seriously. Just in the first months of its establishment process, state authorities expressed expectations that branches of the league be established everywhere “to the tiniest villages by military units to train the people” and to make each of them “a perfect soldier”.⁷¹⁴ The statement which Enver Pasha sent to the Ottoman press on 20 June 1914 about the establishment of the Strength League not

⁷¹² *Güç Dernekleri'nin Programı*, pp. 14, 18, 22.

⁷¹³ *Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri Talimatı*, p. 22-23.

⁷¹⁴ BOA, DH.EUM.MH., 87/137, 24 Şa'ban 1332/18 July 1914; BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M., 15/30, 6 Ramazan 1332/29 July 1914.

only reflected this seriousness very clearly, but also presented a succinct summary of the militaristic mentality of the period, which was formulated by Colmar von der Goltz as “nation-in-arms” (*millet-i müsellaha*).⁷¹⁵ According to Enver Pasha, “there [was] no other way than becoming a nation-in-arms totally for each nation which aim[ed] to defend its existence, chastity and honor (*ırz ve namus*) against an enemy”. With the establishment of the Strength League, he said, “everybody is a soldier now”, and “nobody who calls himself a man would wander around the streets idly when the fatherland is in danger, but he would grab a weapon and run to defend the Ottoman honor” (*Osmanlı namusu*).⁷¹⁶

These short quotations from Enver Pasha also highlight the strong emphasis on manliness/masculinity, which was a major characteristic of militarist discourses of the Great War era, and the Ottoman case was not an exception.⁷¹⁷ As Tolga Cora has analyzed, the idea of manliness that emanated from a strong body was a main foundation block of the “patriotic-heroic-manly-citizen model” which nationalist ideologies always idealized.⁷¹⁸ It can be said that militarist associations such as the Strength League tried to add “soldier” to this formulation. Moreover, as is clear in Enver Pasha’s words, the defense of the fatherland was identified with defending the “chastity and honor” of a woman. This point remained to be another important characteristic of the Ottoman militarist mentality during the war years, though it was

⁷¹⁵ Von der Goltz’s militarist ideas and their effect on the Ottomans will be dealt with in more detail below.

⁷¹⁶ Quoted in Sarısamancıoğlu, “Güç Dernekleri,” p. 834.

⁷¹⁷ It is an ironic detail to add that it was also Enver Pasha who initiated various practices to mobilize Ottoman women labor during the First World War years. See Karakışla, *Women, War and Work in the Ottoman Empire*.

⁷¹⁸ Cora, “Constructing and Mobilizing the ‘Nation’ through Sports: State”, s. 7. Also see Y. Tolga Cora, “II. Meşrutiyet’te Beden Terbiyesi: *Genç Kalemler*’in ‘Milli Jimnastik’ (1911) adlı Risalesi Üzerine”, *Müteferrika*, no. 29 (2006/1), pp. 177-192.

not unique to it.⁷¹⁹ This discourse also stated that the “manly soldier” model had already been existent in the nature of “the Ottoman son”, but he had lost it as he had “become feminine” (*kadınlaşma*) in the course of time. Therefore, it was expected that the Strength League would help the Ottomans regain that old “manly soldier” model to create a new generation of young people who would be “embarrassed to become feminine like today’s weak children” who spent their time in “coffeehouses and soft cotton mattresses”.⁷²⁰

However, despite remarkable enthusiasm at the beginning of its foundation, the Strength League largely remained a project on paper and could not realize the expectations declared in its regulations and programs initially. Although the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the Great War actually further increased the importance of paramilitary associations which would be used to mobilize popular support for the war cause of the CUP government, the Ottoman Strength League could not become an efficient association in this sense and could not realize the expectation of undertaking mobilizing actions at the popular level. As the war turned into a multi-front battle of attrition requiring permanent mobilization on the home front, Ottoman authorities, though not abandoning the aims set for the Strength League, needed to form a more efficient paramilitary organization for mobilizing the youth on a more extensive basis.

⁷¹⁹ For an interesting study which analyzes the nationalist identification of the fatherland with womanhood in the context of Egypt, see Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). For a similar analysis in the case of Iran, see Joanna de Groot, “‘Brothers of the Iranian Race’: Manhood, Nationhood, and Modernity in Iran, c.1870-1914”, in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds.), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 137-156.

⁷²⁰ “*Bugünkü cılız çocuklar gibi kahve köşelerinde, pamuk şilteler içinde kadınlaşmaktan haya eden...*”, “Osmanlı Milletine Harbiye Nezareti’nin Beyannamesi”, BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M., 15/30, 6 Ramazan 1332/29 July 1914; “Osmanlı Milletine Harbiye Nezareti’nin Beyannamesi”, *İkdâm*, 30 Haziran 1330/13 July 1914.

The major reason for the ineffectiveness of the Strength League was that the association remained almost solely as a part of the Ottoman school system. It was able to target only the young boys at schools and could not reach out the rest. While its activities were confined to schools in major provincial centers, expected voluntary initiatives on the part of civilians at small town and village levels never emerged, nor a systematic campaign to stimulate a larger popular participation was carried out by the authorities, except for initial press statements.

Schools, Mobilization and Peasant Boys: From the Strength League to the Youth League

Ottoman authorities were quite aware of the process in Europe that physical education had increasingly become militarized and integrated into school systems towards the Great War.⁷²¹ It is apparent that the Ottomans wanted to see a similar change occurring in their own school system. The school curricula during the Second Constitutional Era began to put a new emphasis on the “body”, and the discourse of “healthy life” became one of the major themes presented as an indispensable part of modernization in school textbooks.⁷²² Moreover, the concept of discipline in

⁷²¹ For a comprehensive analysis of the militarization of education in German primary and secondary schools, and of the relationship between education and popular mobilization during the war years, see Andrew C. Donson, *War Pedagogy and Youth Culture: Nationalism and Authority in Germany in the First World War* (Ph.d. dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2000). On the Italian experience in this respect, see Andrea Fava, “War, ‘National Education’ and the Italian Primary School, 1915-1918”, in Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, pp. 53-69. On the militarized practices of physical education in British primary schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see J. A. Mangan and Hamad S. Ndee, “Military Drill – Rather More than ‘Brief and Basic’: English Elementary Schools and English Militarism”, in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *Militarism, Sport, Europe: War without Weapons* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 65-96.

⁷²² Füsün Üstel, “*Makbul Vatandaş*”ın Peşinde: II. Meşrutiyet’ten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi, second edition (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), p. 74. In fact, physical education courses had entered Ottoman school curricula much earlier, in the mid-nineteenth century. For example, according to the 23rd article of the General Education Regulations (*Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi*) of 1869, gymnastic courses had become compulsory for all secondary (*rüşdiye*) schools. Akın, “*Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar*”, p. 50. However, it is also obvious that it took quite a long time for this “obligation” to be effective and extensively functional in practice. For instance, there was no physical education course in the curriculum of 1904 that was prepared for “primary schools in towns and villages; in the

education also received a militarist emphasis during this period. According to a famous pedagogue of the era, Ahmed Cevat [Emre], who wrote civic instruction textbooks (*Malumat-ı Medeniye*) for Ottoman school children, discipline was the key to prepare children for military service; in his words, “if a child attends physical education courses regularly from the start of his education, if he keeps exercising, learns how to shoot a rifle, participates in scouting and rides a horse, he becomes a perfect soldier”.⁷²³ Such words echoed almost entirely similar statements made in Europe, as, for example, in the case of Italy. In a speech in favor of physical exercises at schools and their importance for preparation for military service, an Italian deputy stated in 1890 that:

The citizen-soldier is not trained in the barracks but in school; for only those who in school and at home have learned the passion for freedom, the holy love of country, and that for it, one must vanquish or die on the battlefield, can be citizen-soldiers. The young men who will enter the army at the age of twenty, having received military training in adolescence, having had target practice in their gymnasiums, will arrive beneath the flags as already-formed soldiers...⁷²⁴

The objectives of the Ottoman Strength League were perfectly in agreement with such an understanding of physical education and discipline. However, it was very hard for a mobilizing association in the Ottoman Empire to reach a sufficient number of young people only through the existing school system. The infrastructural development level of the Ottoman school system was far from being able to achieve this goal. Although the Ottoman Constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*) of 1876 declared that

curriculum of the same year for secondary schools, there was only a “hygiene” (*hıfzıssıha*) course. Similarly, in the curriculum of 1899 for high schools (*idâdi*), there were only “knowledge of public works and hygiene” (*malumat-ı nafia ve hıfzıssıha*) courses. But there is an interesting detail that in the curriculum of 1899 for the School for Tribes (*Aşiret Mektebi*), there were “training” (*talim*) and “foot training” (*ayak talimi*) courses, which could mean gymnastic courses. See Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), appendices 4, 5, 6, 7.

⁷²³ Quoted in Üstel, “*Makbul Vatandaş*” in *Peşinde*, p. 86.

⁷²⁴ Sabina Loriga, “The Military Experience”, in Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt (eds.), *A History of Young People, vol 2: Stormy Evolution to Modern Times*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 21.

primary education was obligatory for every Ottoman subject (*Osmanlı efradının kâffesince*),⁷²⁵ the Ottoman Ministry of Education statistics revealed that only one-fifth of the Muslim children of school age attended primary schools in the academic year of 1913-1914.⁷²⁶ According to another set of statistics, at the beginning of the twentieth century, out of the total population of 12,136,000 living in the territory corresponding to the land within the borders of today's Turkey (excluding Istanbul), the number of all students at all schools was 913,436, which was only 7.5 percent. For example, this ratio in the Ankara province was 3.6, where there were only 31,081 students out of the total 850,000 population.⁷²⁷ The situation was not promising for the capital Istanbul, either. In the academic year of 1913-1914, out of the total 4,486 public primary schools throughout the empire, there were only 80 in Istanbul, which had only 10,430 students.⁷²⁸ The total population of Istanbul in 1914 was estimated as 909,978, which means that the ratio of primary school students to the total population was only 1.14 percent.⁷²⁹ On the other hand, even in Freiburg, Germany, which had a population of around 85,000 in 1913, there were totally 9,246 students (namely 10.9 percent out of total) at primary and secondary schools.⁷³⁰

The role of education in the Ottoman mobilization experience during the Great War was almost at a negligible level compared to the cases, for example, of Germany and France. It can be argued that if a Turkish version of Erich Maria

⁷²⁵ Article 114, *Sened-i İttifak'tan Günümüze Türk Anayasa Metinleri*, Suna Kili and A. Şeref Gözübüyük (eds.), second edition (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2000), p. 55.

⁷²⁶ Mustafa Gencer, *Jön Türk Modernizmi ve "Alman Ruhü": 1908-1918 Dönemi Türk-Alman İlişkileri ve Eğitim* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), p. 119.

⁷²⁷ Necdet Sakaoğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Eğitim Tarihi* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2003), pp. 109, 119.

⁷²⁸ Mehmet Ö. Alkan (ed.), *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Modernleşme Sürecinde Eğitim İstatistikleri, 1839-1924* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 2000), pp. 165-166

⁷²⁹ Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914*, p. 171.

⁷³⁰ Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 54.

Remarque's famous *All Quite on the Western Front* were written in the Ottoman context, it would be highly difficult to find Ottoman equivalents for some main characters of the novel, such as the student-soldier Paul and the teacher-war propagandist Kantorek; or, their Ottoman equivalents would not be as representative and convincing because of the minor role the school system played in the Ottoman case. The statistical picture drawn above shows that, while it tried to include a paramilitary association in its structure, the infrastructural development of the Ottoman education system was not at a satisfactory level to make a remarkable contribution to Ottoman mobilization efforts during the war.

The backbone of the Ottoman military strength consisted overwhelmingly of illiterate and unschooled peasant boys, rather than schooled urban youths.⁷³¹ Therefore, any attempt at permanent mobilization of young people in the Ottoman Empire would be doomed to fail without targeting unschooled peasant boys. This point was a major motive for Ottoman authorities in their attempt at establishing a new and much wider-scale paramilitary association to mobilize the youth in the middle of the war. For this purpose, the Ottoman Youth League (*Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri*) was established on 17 April 1916. The need to target unschooled peasant boys for a successful mobilization in the Ottoman Empire was one of the major themes that the German officer Colonel Von Hoff, who was the advisor-trainer and general inspector (*müfettiş-i umumi*) of the Ottoman Youth League, highlighted as being the main objectives of the association:

In a country where only twenty young people out of a hundred could attend school, the Youth League is something very important and primarily needed. Those eighty unschooled boys actually constitute the most important mass

⁷³¹ It is a widely accepted view that the essence of the Ottoman military manpower was the Anatolian Muslim population (mainly the Turks, but also the Kurds and smaller ethnic groups such as the Laz and the Circassians). For example, see Erickson, Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, pp. xv-xvi; Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System", p. 91.

that should be targeted. Actually it is primarily these young people who should benefit from the Youth League. A few sports clubs that were established within schools would not be of any significant value for disciplining (*terbiye*) the nation.⁷³²

The same point was insistently made on every appropriate occasion by Von Hoff, who also underlined it in his reports presented to the Ottoman War and Interior ministries.⁷³³

However, the emphasis on the need to target unschooled boys in villages did not mean to neglect the ones in cities. On the contrary, it seems that the state's security forces in the major cities such as Istanbul even sometimes resorted to using force to make young boys in the street to participate in the trainings. For example, a record of the Istanbul branch of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) stated that the police sometimes caught homeless youths, shoeshine boys, and young porters in the street to make them participate in the trainings of the Youth League.⁷³⁴ But it is certain that war conditions required a much larger-scale youth mobilization and the priority was given to unschooled peasant boys.

⁷³² Von Hoff, "Genç Dernekleri'nin Şimdiye Kadar Teşkilat ve Tevsii", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 1 (1 September 1333/1 September 1917), p. 8; Toprak, "İttihat ve Terakki'nin Paramiliter Gençlik Örgütleri", p. 97.

⁷³³ "Genç Dernekleri Müfettiş-i Umumisi Miralay Von Hoff'un Vilayatta Genç Dernekleri Teşkilatı için Yaptığı Seyahat Hakkındaki Raporu", BOA, DH.UMVM., 150/62, 22 Zilhicce 1335/9 October 1917; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403, Fihrist 1-3. This point is also related to the mentality that the military considered itself as a "school" for peasant boys. When the state was unable to establish an extensive school system throughout the country, the role of military service also included an educational function. Even in today's Turkey, the army teaches illiterate young men how to read and write during their military service. This complementary educational role of the military was also emphasized by various Ottoman pedagogues at the time, such as İsmail Hakkı: "The army is the most fervent hearth of training the common people... The army functioned as a hearth of education and provided education and skills during the times when this country suffered from lack of schools and when the available school system failed. The army is a great school." See İsmail Hakkı [Baltacıoğlu], *Terbiye-i Avam* (Istanbul: İkdâm Matbaası, 1330/1914), pp. 47-48. Needless to say, of course, this educational function was characterized by a militarist disposition. On the other hand, it can be said that this emphasis on the school dimension of the military quite weakened during wartime. Yet it can be argued that this weakening was tried to be compensated by the paramilitary associations. On the educational role of the military, also see Yücel Yanıkdağ, "Educating the Peasants: The Ottoman Army and Enlisted Men in Uniform", *Middle Eastern Studies*, (November 2004), pp. 91-107.

⁷³⁴ Toprak, "Türkiye'de İzcilik", p. 19.

The Effect of German Militarism and Colmar von der Goltz

While the Ottoman Youth League was established on 17 Nisan 1916, the preparation for its establishment had informally started in early 1916 by Von Hoff, who had been offered to supervise the entire process by the Ottoman authorities. Von Hoff, who had previously no assignment in the Ottoman Empire, was recommended to the Ottoman authorities for this task by Marshal Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz shortly before his death for typhus in January 1916, when commanding the Ottoman Sixth Army in Baghdad. Von Hoff was a disciple of von der Goltz in his formative years in Germany and worked under the supervision of the latter in the field of youth education in a militaristic perspective.⁷³⁵

Colmar von der Goltz (who was also known as Golç Pasha by the Ottomans) had been an influential figure for Ottoman military thinking during its phase of modernization. He also previously took an active part in the German advisory commission invited to the Ottoman Empire by Abdülhamid II after the Ottoman defeat at the Russo-Ottoman War of 1878 to modernize the army and military education. He stayed in the empire from 1883 to 1895 and also held the post of the inspector of the modernization process of Ottoman military schools.⁷³⁶ His famous treatise on the necessity of the universal conscription system and the need to re-organize society according to military needs, *The Nation in Arms (Das Volk in Waffen)*, was translated into Ottoman-Turkish in 1884, only a year after its original publication in German and even before its English translation appeared. The second

⁷³⁵ Balcıoğlu, “Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri”, s. 201.

⁷³⁶ F. A. K. Yasamee, “Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz and the Rebirth of the Ottoman Empire”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 9, no. 2 (July 1998), p. 91.

edition of the Ottoman-Turkish translation came out in 1888.⁷³⁷ Goltz's vision of preparedness for war in the modern era entailed not only a systematic recruitment and training system for civilian-soldiers, but also a permanent popular support for military mobilization from society. This book in particular and Goltz's militarist ideas in general deeply affected Ottoman cadets at the War College where he also taught and his above-mentioned book used as a textbook.⁷³⁸

While many of his former pupils, who had become high ranking officers during the Balkan War, were retired and replaced with younger officers by the CUP-dominated military leadership on the eve of the Great War, Goltz continued to be admired by the younger generation of Ottoman officers. He was once again invited to the Ottoman Empire in November 1914 as army commander at a remarkably old age of 71, when he held a non-combatant post of military governor of occupied Belgium.⁷³⁹

It is no coincidence that Goltz's ideas were also influential in envisioning the Ottoman Youth League. In Germany, Goltz had advocated the systematic pre-military training of primary school students since 1876, even when this idea was not welcome by conservative German military leaders.⁷⁴⁰ He himself was the founder of a similar association in Germany in 1911, the Young Germany League (*Jungdeutschlandbund*), which worked virtually as a part of the German military,

⁷³⁷ Colmar Freiher von der Goltz Paşa, *Millet-i Müsellaha: Asrımızın Usul ve Ahval-i Askeriyesi*, trans. Mehmed Tahir, second edition (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ebüzziya, 1305/1888).

⁷³⁸ Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey*, p. 69.

⁷³⁹ Yasamee, "Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz", p. 120.

⁷⁴⁰ Derek S. Linton, "Preparing German Youth for War", in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds), *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 167.

aiming to prepare German young boys for military service.⁷⁴¹ Local branches of this association “sought to gather boys of 16 and older from all social classes and political persuasions and to provide them with thorough military training in the service of the Fatherland”.⁷⁴² It was also through the Young Germany League that Goltz got to know Von Hoff, where the latter worked as a junior officer under the command of the former until the war started. That is why Goltz recommended Von Hoff for the supervision of the Ottoman Youth League.⁷⁴³ When he arrived in the Ottoman Empire to undertake the assignment, Von Hoff was introduced to the Ottoman public as a “famous” officer-trainer who worked successfully for many years in training and disciplining the German youth, and was immediately promoted to colonel in the Ottoman army.⁷⁴⁴

Goltz’s ideas not only shaped specifically the experience of the Youth League, but also continued to be influential on the Turkish perspective of military service and “military nation” in the process from the end of the Ottoman Empire through republican Turkey.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴¹ Donson, “War Pedagogy and Youth Culture”, p. 334; Bruno von Mudra, *Goltz Paşa'nın Hatırası ve Hal Tercümesi*, trans. Pertev Demirhan (Istanbul: Kara Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı Yayınları, 1953), p. 29.

⁷⁴² Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany*, p. 512.

⁷⁴³ Von Hoff, “Genç Dernekleri'nin Şimdiye Kadar Teşkilat ve Tevsii”, p. 7.

⁷⁴⁴ Balcıoğlu, “Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri”, p. 201; Sarısan, “Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İhtiyat Kuvveti”, p. 444. The information that I have been able to find about the career of Von Hoff before he came to the Ottoman Empire (and after he left) is actually more limited than I expected. For example, the existing literature (mostly in English) on the German experience of nationalist-paramilitary associations on the eve and during the war hardly mentions his name. It can be guessed that he was rather a man of duty than a theoretician or strategist, and he was a good pupil of Goltz. He was actually on a combatant post on the Western front against the French, not working in the Young Germany League, when he was assigned to the Ottoman Empire in 1916. Von Hoff, “Alman Siperlerine Aid Hakiki Bir Vakaa”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 7 (1 Mart 1334/1 March 1918), p. 9.

⁷⁴⁵ For example, the famous early republican treatise on the necessity of military service, *Askerlik Vazifesi* (The Duty of Military Service), which was written by Afet İnan aiming to popularize the understanding of military nation in the new Turkish nation-state, directly “copied” certain sections of Goltz’s book. See Hasan Ünder, “30’ların Ders Kitaplarından ve Kemalizm’in Kaynaklarından Biri Millet-i Müsellaha ve Medeni Bilgiler”, *Tarih ve Toplum*, 32/192 (December 1999), pp. 48-56.

The Establishment of the Youth League: Its Goals and Mobilizing Discourses

The contents of the law⁷⁴⁶ and regulation⁷⁴⁷ of the Ottoman Youth League give the impression that there were certain continuities and similarities with the objectives previously set by the Strength Association. Like its predecessor the Youth League also aimed to train “the youth of the fatherland to make them strong, proud and obedient” and to “prepare a happy future for the fatherland which would always be able to defend itself” thanks to these trained youth.⁷⁴⁸ On the other hand, as regards the practical process of its establishment and its activities, it can be said that the Ottoman Youth League was a more realistic project, trying to act according to the more immediate necessities of the war by considering the conditions in the Ottoman Empire. It is true that the Youth League was, in a sense, a continuation of a militarist understanding of physical education that had already become noticeable in the Ottoman educational system before the Great War. This militarist approach to physical education took a more intensified form with the coming of boy scouting organizations and establishment of the Strength Association. But while the emphasis on the necessity of a militarized form of physical education to have a masculine youth ever ready for military service continued to motivate the Youth League, the latter was actually conceived rather as a tool of mobilization for than mere training of young boys.

⁷⁴⁶ “Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Tanzim Olunan Kanun Layihası ve Bu Layihanın Muvakkaten Yürürlüğe Konulması”, BOA, MV., 242/45, 13 Cemâziyelâhir 1334/17 April 1916; “Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Kanun-ı Muvakkat”, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 8, 14 Cemâziyelâhir 1334/17 April 1916, pp. 898-900.

⁷⁴⁷ *Genç Dernekleri: Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Teşkili Hakkındaki Talimatname* (Istanbul: n.p., n.d).

⁷⁴⁸ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403, Fihrist 1-3.

Another different characteristic of the Youth League was that the CUP government wanted to keep it under its direct control, trying to establish a more centralized structure for the provincial organization of the league. As Tarık Zafer Tunaya has observed, the CUP government desired the Youth League to be its own militia organization. In this sense, it was seen as a part of the government's effort to penetrate into and take control of deeper levels of society during the war years.⁷⁴⁹ Therefore, it was quite consistent with this political inclination that the Strength League was abolished when the Youth League was formed, thus a possible chaotic situation that would be stemmed from the existence of two different paramilitary associations at the same time was eliminated right at the beginning.⁷⁵⁰

But a more important initial development in terms of the government's effort to control youth associational life was that with the establishment of the Youth League and by the direct intervention of Enver Pasha, all boy scouting clubs in the empire stopped being autonomous organizations and were required to become branches of the Youth League, accepting its leadership, law and regulations. In fact, the boy scouting activities in the Ottoman Empire, which were already confined to some schools in big cities, were virtually halted when the war began.⁷⁵¹ Moreover, with the start of the war, Harold Parfitt, who had been invited by the Ottoman state in mid-1914 to organize and supervise boy scouting activities, had to leave the country because the empire joined the war on the side of the Triple Alliance. And the 262 Ottoman scoutmaster candidates whom he had been training at the Scout Training Camp at Maltepe, Istanbul, volunteered for the Ottoman army.⁷⁵² But while boy

⁷⁴⁹ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 3, pp. 366-367.

⁷⁵⁰ Article 9, "Genç Dernekleri Kanun-ı Muvakkati".

⁷⁵¹ *Scouting in Turkey*, Ankara, n.p., 1940, p. 4.

⁷⁵² Zafer Toprak, "Türkiye'de İzciğin İlk Evresi", p. 22; Tuna, "Galatasaray'da İzcilik", p. 57.

scouting was halted at Muslim schools, various boy scouting clubs of Ottoman Armenian and Greek communities remained unaffected when the war began, and, apparently, it was particularly their activities that alarmed the CUP control effort in 1916. Their activities were described as “uncontrolled” by Enver Pasha, who warned the ministries of the Interior and Education to prevent such actions.⁷⁵³ Even as early as 24 June 1914, the Ottoman government expressed annoyance when an Armenian boy scouting club in Kadıköy, Istanbul, practiced some military drills in its activities, carried banners with Armenian statements on them, and scoutmasters gave commands in Armenian. The Interior Ministry decided to ban the activities of the club by claiming that such drills could only be practiced with the permission of the War Ministry and this permission could be given if only such activities were carried out to prepare their members for military service in the Ottoman army.⁷⁵⁴

The Ottoman Youth League planned to gather “all [male] Ottoman subjects” from the age of 12 to the minimum age of military service into their activities.⁷⁵⁵ The temporary law for the league made it clear that all male Ottomans of the specified ages, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, were supposed to participate in the activities carried out by local branches.⁷⁵⁶ But, it is apparent that young people who joined the Youth League were overwhelmingly Muslims. The available documents about the association and its activities almost never mention any non-Muslim participation, nor

⁷⁵³ Sarısamam, “Osmanlı Güç Dernekleri”, p. 833.

⁷⁵⁴ BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M., 14/25, 5 Şa’ban 1332/24 June 1914.

⁷⁵⁵ According to the Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914, the minimum age for actual military service was 20 (one must have completed his twenty years of age to become eligible for military service). But the same law also stipulated that those who were nineteen and twenty years old could be conscripted in time of war; and this provision was actually put into practice soon after the Ottoman Empire entered the war. “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, pp. 662-704. Moreover, this provision was revised on 29 April 1915 and the minimum age for military service was further reduced; this new revision stated that those who completed their eighteen and nineteen years of age could be conscripted in time of war. “16 Cemâziyelâhir 1332 Tarihli Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatının 2, 3, 4, 5. Maddelerine Muaddel Kanun-ı Muvakkat”, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 7, 14 Cemâziyelâhir 1333/29 April 1915, p. 589.

⁷⁵⁶ Article 2, “Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Kanun-ı Muvakkat”.

do they contain any point that would hint that this was particularly desired by the Ottoman authorities.⁷⁵⁷ This situation was related to both political preferences of the government and practical conditions in the middle of the war. By 1916 the nationalist tendencies of the CUP government became more dominant, and the participation of non-Muslim Ottoman groups in such activities was not particularly desired, if not rejected overtly. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the non-Muslim population, particularly the Armenians were forced to leave Anatolia or subjected to massacres during their deportation; therefore, in the case of the Armenians, there were not that many boys in the Anatolian provinces to participate in the Youth League in the later half of the war.

Besides the general objective stated in the law, regulation and declarations to increase the centralist structure and control function of the Youth League, another concept that received a particular emphasis in the process of establishment and activities of the Youth League was obedience. According to the perspective that characterized this process, the ideal Ottoman young man was supposed to be “obedient” to the authorities. “Getting used to act according to order and behave in an orderly way and to obey orders” was one of the major improvements that the Youth League expected from its young participants.⁷⁵⁸ Obedience was also one of the major topics which were discussed frequently in the monthly journal of the league.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁷ The only example that I could find in this respect was about some Greek schoolboys practicing drills in a local branch of the Youth League in Istanbul. See Selim Sırrı, “Genç Dernekleri ve Yanlış Telakkiler”, p. 4.

⁷⁵⁸ “Teşkilat, Maksad ve Gaye”, *Genç Dernekleri*, p. 6.

⁷⁵⁹ The Ottoman Youth League took written communication very seriously. It published a monthly journal, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, the first issue of which appeared on 1 September 1917 and its first twelve issues were published regularly; the number of total issues was 26, the last one being published on 1 July 1920. Moreover, the league also occasionally published some pamphlets about various subjects such as to introduce its aim and activities to the public, to give basic information about health issues, and to propagandize the Ottoman war cause. On the other hand, being aware that the majority of the population was illiterate, the league also gave importance to “oral communication”, encouraging its members, especially in rural areas, to communicate its aim and the need to participate in its activities through mouth to mouth interactions. For such emphases on the

But what was meant by obedience, especially in the essays of the Youth League's General Inspector Von Hoff and its Inspector of the Public Schools Selim Sırrı [Tarcan], the most prolific writers of the journal, was not a "blindfold" submission to the authority, but a deliberate awareness of one's duties and, thus, a "voluntary" conformity to it: "Young people should not understand obeying orders as some kind of absolute submission, but should accept it voluntarily by appreciating the necessity of obedience."⁷⁶⁰ Moreover, this obedience was supposed to emerge within a framework of social solidarity to be based on a strict division of labor similar to the one in the military according to the ranks.⁷⁶¹

The organization of the Youth League divided its targeted population, namely the young boys from the age of 12 to 20, into two different categories. The first category included the youth between the ages 12 and 17, and this category of organization was called *Gürbüz Derneği* (literally, "the association for the healthy children"); the second category included youth from the age of 17 to the age of military service (which was theoretically 20, but was reduced up to 18 in the course of the war), and this organization was called *Dinç Derneği* (literally, "the association for the vigorous youth"). The training of the youth was also programmed according to these categories. Each category would receive a different kind of education that was thought to be appropriate for the age span of its participants. While the *Gürbüz* category aimed to train the younger schooled and unschooled boys at the age of primary and secondary education in a longer term program, the *Dinç* section was planned according to more immediate needs and conditions of the war, and aimed to

importance and usefulness of oral communication and the need to get contribution from local people in this respect, see, for example, "Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Teşkilatının Ehemmiyet-i Azimesi", *Genç Dernekleri*, p. 11.

⁷⁶⁰ Selim Sırrı, "Genç Dernekleri ve Yanlış Telakkiler", p. 6.

⁷⁶¹ Selim Sırrı, "Genç Dernekleri'nde Terbiye-i Ahlâkiye, I", "Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası", no. 2 (1 Teşrinievvel 1333/1 October 1917), pp. 9-10.

train its targeted population primarily for military service which actually awaited them very soon.⁷⁶² And since the overwhelming majority of Ottoman Muslim youth in this category was unschooled, the program of this section almost entirely targeted peasant boys. That the *Dinç* section directly focused on military service preparation was also evident in the procedure that the guides who gave training courses in this category consisted entirely of army officers. Moreover, the direction and supervision of local branches were assigned to corps commanders and chiefs of recruiting office branches in their regions. The guides of the *Gürbüz* section, on the other hand, mainly consisted of public school teachers and other civilians assigned by local administrators, not necessarily of officers.⁷⁶³

Since the *Dinç* section was virtually seen as a preparation station for military service, guiding of its participants, namely the boys at the age of 17 and older, by army officers was given a particular emphasis and supervision. For example, when the *Dinç* section of the Eskişehir branch employed civilians as guides, the Youth League Inspectorate severely warned the head of the Eskişehir recruiting office to make the branch employ army officers for this task.⁷⁶⁴

The task to keep records of young people who were required to attend the activities of the Youth League was assigned to village and neighborhood headmen (*muhtar*) who not only needed to prepare regular lists of eligible young boys living in

⁷⁶² Von Hoff, "Alman Dinçleri Hidmet-i Askeriyeye Nasıl Hazırlanıyorlar?", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 5 (1 Kanunisanı 1334/1 January 1918): 9-11.

⁷⁶³ "Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Tanzim Olunan Kanun Layihası"; "Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Kanun-ı Muvakkat". It is important to note that the Youth League increasingly attributed an educational role to army officers and saw them as "governesses of the youth", who would be useful in "educating and training the youth" even "after the war". See Von Hoff, "Zabit, Gençlerin Mürebbisi Olarak", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 7 (1 Mart 1334/1 March 1918): 1-2.

⁷⁶⁴ Balcıoğlu, "Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri", p. 206.

their administrative units, but also to make sure that they attended the activities.⁷⁶⁵ Having been disappointed at the beginning of his assignment in the empire when he could not find even the most basic statistical data about the young population, Inspector General of the League Von Hoff attributed a great importance to this task. He sometimes complained about the inefficiency and slowness of gathering statistical data about the youth and keeping their regular records, and he even published a short essay discussing the necessity and importance of statistics in recognizing, thus administering, the population.⁷⁶⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, the function of *muhtars* as main agents of the central state in provinces had already been enhanced by the application of the universal conscription system and also by the declaration of general mobilization at the beginning of the war, both of which required regular demographic record keeping and monitoring at the level of village and neighborhood units. This task of keeping records of and monitoring young people in local units further increased the responsibility and authority of village and neighborhood *muhtars* in Ottoman society.

The Manpower Problem

As has been noted above, the *Dinç* section of the Youth League was taken particularly seriously by both the league itself and the Ottoman military. This was no coincidence, because one of the league's major objectives was to supply as many ready-to-fight men as possible in a very short time for the army in the middle of an

⁷⁶⁵ “Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Tanzim Olunan Kanun Layihası”; “Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Kanun-1 Muvakkat”; BOA, DH.UMVM., 141/7, 2 Zilkâde 1334/31 August 1916; BOA, DH.UMVM., 145/118, 29 Rebîulâhir 1335/22 February 1917.

⁷⁶⁶ Von Hoff, “Nüfusun İstatistiği”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 3 (1 Teşrinisani 1333/1 November 1917), pp. 8-9. Moreover, Von Hoff also demanded the preparation of an administrative yearbook (*salname*) showing the administrative division of the empire in detail to the smallest village, which would be useful in keeping records of and monitoring eligible young people. See BOA, DH.UMVM., 144/26, 12 Rebûlevvel 1335/6 January 1917.

ongoing war. However, this preparation process that the Youth League was expected to undertake was not all about practicing military drills and providing its participants with military abilities. To convince young men to join and fight in a bloody and prolonged war such as the Great War was equally significant and needed. It is a widely accepted view among Ottoman historians that besides insufficient communications-transportation infrastructure of the empire, the other gravest problem that faced the Ottomans during Great War, and remained very hard to solve throughout it, was lack of enough manpower in the army.⁷⁶⁷ And it is also important to emphasize that this inadequacy did not stem only from casualties on the battlefield, but was a more general problem involving various aspects. An almost equally important factor that affected this situation was constant troubles hampered the permanent mobilization of men for the front. The extent of the Ottoman conscription system had been considerably increased by the Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914 and the declaration of general mobilization on 3 August 1914. But, as discussed in Chapter 3, the system did not function efficiently enough in practice and its success was only partial and limited to certain regions touched by the modernization efforts of the central state.

A second serious problem in mobilizing men for war was resistance on the part of young men of military age to enlistment. It became increasingly difficult for the Ottoman authorities during the war to enlist new men. As the “short war” expectation quickly faded away and the duration of military service virtually became undetermined that nobody could tell when it would end, harsh living conditions in the Ottoman countryside, where the labor force of each male member of peasant families was critical for survival, increasingly undermined the credibility of the

⁷⁶⁷ Zürcher, “Little Mehmet in the Desert”, p. 232.

conscription system. While the Ottoman military did not have hard time mobilizing targeted number of men when the mobilization was declared, draft evading became a serious problem as the war became prolonged. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, living conditions were not so good for soldiers on the battlefield either, and desertions increasingly became a serious and alarming issue for the Ottomans. Moreover, the Ottomans were not successful in creating an efficient propaganda mechanism during the war to mobilize popular sentiments, a mechanism that could keep war enthusiasm of the individual soldier alive throughout the war. A militarist ideological disposition, which was symbolized and also actually inspired by Goltz's ideas in his *The Nation in Arms (Millet-i Müsellaha)* was not absent in Ottoman society before and during the war, but it can be argued that it largely remained to be confined to elitist circles and pro-CUP army officers. Voluntary patriotic associations such as the Navy League and the National Defense Association aimed to popularize the nation-in-arms ideology vertically and horizontally at all social levels through various militarization campaigns that received remarkable popular participation, but this dynamism was mainly limited to the urban middle-class milieu.

The response of the Ottoman rural population, which was the major manpower resource of the Ottoman military, to the requirements of the conscription system during the war was not standard. Especially when conscription considerably overburdened their lives and seemed in conflict with their own expectations, peasants did not hesitate to show resistance to enlistment. It can be argued, as Eugene Weber does, that at such times, “conscription was seen not as a duty owed to some larger community or nation, but as a heavy tribute exacted by an oppressive and alien state”⁷⁶⁸ This reluctance for military service is clearly seen in some official

⁷⁶⁸ Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 295.

documents too. For example, in a telegram that was sent to all provinces and sub-provinces on 25 January 1916, the Interior Ministry complained about “apathy in mobilizing and transferring men of military age” and urged local administrators to spend more effort to overcome this problem; the ministry used a threatening tone in its language, warning that careless local administrators in this respect would be punished.⁷⁶⁹

Therefore, by establishing the Youth League Ottomans authorities not only aimed to train young boys for military service and to propagate their war cause especially in rural areas, but also tried to overcome reluctance and resistance to conscription. In fact, in a report that was sent by Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] as the commander of the Seventh Army in Aleppo to the deputy commander in chief Enver Pasha on 20 September 1917 about the general military situation, all the major issues concerning the mobilization of manpower in the Ottoman army that the Youth League targeted to solve were summarized:

Compared to the initial phases of the war, the army is currently quite weak. The available personnel of many corps were only one-fifth of what is actually needed. We are not able to mobilize manpower resources of the country to supply our needs... Let me present an example to reveal the general situation of our strength: fifty percent of the 59th Division with its existing battalions each having a thousand personnel, which was sent to me to undertake the world's most difficult tasks, consists of very weak men who cannot even stand on their feet, and the new enlisted and supposedly healthy men include untrained children at the ages of 17 to 20 and good-for-nothing men at the ages of 45 to 55.⁷⁷⁰

In the above quotation and in the literature produced by the Youth League, weakness not only meant untrained and militarily incapable soldiers, but also often referred to exhausted and unhealthy bodies. The latter was a remarkably serious

⁷⁶⁹ BOA, DH. ŞFR., 60/116, 19 Rebiülevvel 1334/25 January 1916.

⁷⁷⁰ “20 Eylül 1917 Tarihli Rapor”, *Atatürk'ün Bütün Eserleri, Vol 2: 1915-1919* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1999), p. 121.

problem during the wartime and a major factor undermining the manpower resource of the empire, when contagious diseases killed thousands of people, on the battlefield and home front alike.⁷⁷¹ To raise consciousness for health care and personal hygiene was already a general objective for paramilitary youth associations.⁷⁷² But the specific conditions of the war years also required more direct and practical measures concerning simple health care and hygiene, protection from contagious diseases and curing personal injuries. Therefore, Von Hoff and other writers frequently touched upon health issues in the journal of the Youth League, and underlined the need to educate not only the youth but the entire population about the health issue to better struggle against diseases. Von Hoff called this campaign “the education of the public”, in which he expected contribution from “everybody who is mature and conscious enough to take a responsibility” (*kuvve-i mümeyyize sahibi*), who would be extremely helpful especially in villages for unschooled youth.⁷⁷³ He proposed that “lectures would be given to everybody, including unschooled youth, everywhere in the country to the smallest villages, about basic methods and measures of health care”. For this purpose, the Youth League also published an informative pamphlet, written by Von Hoff,⁷⁷⁴ and it distributed thousands of copies of it throughout the country.⁷⁷⁵ The journal of the league also gave practical health information, such as

⁷⁷¹ See Hikmet Özdemir, *Salgın Hastalıklardan Ölümler, 1914-1918* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2005). The total number of Ottoman soldiers who died of disease during the war was 466,759, while the total number of combat dead and missing was 305,085. Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 240.

⁷⁷² Akın, “*Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar*”, p. 137.

⁷⁷³ Von Hoff, “Kavaid ve Tedabir-i Evveliye-i Sıhhiye”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 2 (1 Teşrinievvel 1333/1 October 1917), p. 1.

⁷⁷⁴ See Von Hoff, *Hıfzıssıhha Kavaidi ve Hastalık, Kaza Vukuunda Yapılacak Tedabir* (Istanbul: Evkaf-ı İslamiye Matbaası, 1334/1918).

⁷⁷⁵ Such pamphlets were given free of charge, as an aid to those who could not afford to buy them. “Genç Derneklerinde Fukara-yı Etfale Muavenet”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 5 (1 Kanunisanı 1334/1 January 1918): 15-16.

how to dress a wound or how to protect from tuberculosis.⁷⁷⁶ Regarding the health issue, Von Hoff also particularly underlined the need for a country to have “healthy and strong mothers” to give birth to and raise healthy children. For this purpose, he proposed to educate young single girls about personal health care and motherhood before they got married.⁷⁷⁷

This last point also reflected the Youth League’s approach to the female population. While similar militaristic associations in Europe, such as the Young Germany League, spent considerable amount of time and energy to mobilize young women, the Ottoman Youth League restricted its relationship with young Ottoman women to the discursive emphasis on the ideal motherhood raising healthy boys for the fatherland. The organization and activities of the league did not include any specific sections for girls. No attempt was made by the league to consider the possibility that girls would turn into soldiers in the case of urgent need. Even projects about getting use of female labor in manual works were lacking in the league’s activities. This situation was actually not quite consistent with the general approach to women in the Ottoman Empire during the war. For example, as has been mentioned earlier, there were attempts (which were even official and organized) to mobilize female labor in Istanbul.⁷⁷⁸ Moreover, authorities even formed “women labor battalions” in various regions such as Çukurova to work in agriculture.⁷⁷⁹ The Youth League’s relative indifference to young women can be attributed to the strong

⁷⁷⁶ For example, see Von Hoff, “Mevad-ı Tedbiriye ile Sıhhiye Hidematı”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 4 (1 Kanunievvel 1333/1 December 1917): 15; Adnan Fuad, “Tükrük de Kü’ul Gibi Vereme Yatak Hazırlar”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 4 (1 Kanunievvel 1333/1 December 1917): 15-16.

⁷⁷⁷ Von Hoff, “Bazı Umumi Terbiye Meselelerine Dair”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 1 (1 Eylül 1333/1 September 1917), p. 12. However, this proposition apparently remained to be a wish, since no pamphlets written or activities undertaken about it.

⁷⁷⁸ See Karakışla, *Women, War and Work in the Ottoman Empire*.

⁷⁷⁹ Toprak, *İttihad - Terakki ve Cihan Harbi*, p. 97.

discourse of masculinity/manliness which characterized its very reason to exist. As has been discussed above, “feminization” was seen as one of the major weaknesses of Ottoman men and the foundation of paramilitary associations was regarded as an attempt to overcome such a weakness. Obviously, it is hard to conceive of any practical project targeting young women within this perspective. Therefore, a much more abstract discourse was adopted regarding women, which assigned them the role of good mother raising healthy and powerful future soldiers of the fatherland.

The Organization at the Local Level: Participation and Resistance

Every provincial and district governor was required to establish a branch of the Youth League in his administrative unit and to give regular reports to the Interior Ministry about its activities and people’s attendance in it.⁷⁸⁰ In fact, this administrative and bureaucratic obligation created a quick mushrooming of local branches at the initial phase, a situation which can also give the impression that there was remarkable enthusiasm and success at the early phase of the establishment of the Youth League in terms of new opening branch numbers. Indeed, from its date of establishment, 17 April 1916, through the middle of July 1917, a total of 706 local branches were opened throughout the empire. Lists of newly opened branches were regularly published in the journal of the league. One of the first impressions that these lists reveal is that the number of branches did not distribute evenly throughout the country. While there were very few or even no branches in the regions that were under occupation and near or within the actual battle zones, some local units stand out with large numbers, such as the province of Bursa/Hüdavendigâr’s sub-provinces Karesi with 114 branches and Kütahya with 105 branches. Another impression is that

⁷⁸⁰ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403, Fihrist 1-3; BOA, DH.UMVM., 121/34, 8 Ramazan 1334/9 July 1916.

there were very few branches in local units outside Anatolia, such as Basra, Baghdad, Hijaz, Beirut, Aleppo and Syria, where the majority of population was Arab.⁷⁸¹ The journal sometimes gave information about local branches by using an apparently exaggerated language of success. For example, some news about the Youth League organization in Eskişehir, a district of Bursa, stated that authorities in Eskişehir achieved establishing branches in every corner of the sub-province, including even the smallest towns.⁷⁸²

On the other hand, it would be highly misleading to take this relatively high number of local branches, which was actually the result of the bureaucratic obligation mentioned above, as a criterion of success about how local people responded to these organizations. It is evident in correspondence between the Interior Ministry and local administrative units about the establishment of the Youth League that opening a local branch did not necessarily mean carrying out efficient activities. First of all, it should be noted that even the bureaucratic obligation could not produce any local branches in some units. For example, though it was not an occupied region or nearby a frontline, there were no branches in the Antalya/Teke, a sub-province of Konya, from the beginning until mid-July 1917. Apparently, this situation in Teke began to change only after the governor was changed and when the Interior Ministry sent warnings. The establishment of branches could begin when the new governor Fettin Bey took office in late 1917.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸¹ *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no 1 (1 Eylül 1333/1 September 1917): 14-15; Toprak, "İttihat ve Terakki'nin Paramiliter Gençlik Örgütleri", p. 112; Sarısamancıoğlu, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda İhtiyat Kuvveti", p. 447.

⁷⁸² "Genç Dernekleri Postası", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 2 (1 Teşrinievvel 1333/1 October 1917): 14.

⁷⁸³ "Genç Dernekleri Postası", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 7 (1 Mart 1334/1 March 1918): 16.

Secondly, despite relative enthusiasm and dynamism in a few regions, Ottoman authorities time and time again expressed discontent about the general process and complained about its slowness and inefficiency. For example, after receiving warnings from the War Ministry and Enver Pasha himself,⁷⁸⁴ the Interior Ministry needed to warn all governors in June 1917 that the establishment process of the Youth League “was not taken as seriously as it required in some provinces and totally ignored in others”. Therefore, the Interior Ministry reminded them that local administrators held the chief responsibility for establishing local branches of the Youth League and also urged them that it was essential “to make local people get acquainted with and like this useful organization for the best interest of the country”.⁷⁸⁵

Similarly, Von Hoff, who traveled across Anatolia and made observations during the establishment process of the Youth League, expressed dissatisfaction about the existing situation. He also complained that the process was not progressing fast enough and some local administrators were still negligent about it. Accompanied by Selim Sırrı in these trips, Von Hoff submitted reports about his observations, criticisms and advice on the establishment process of the Youth League to the Interior Ministry.⁷⁸⁶ He often emphasized the need to spend more effort by local administrators in establishing local branches. Another major point which he particularly underlined was the complaint that the *Gürbüz* section of the league was not yet established at all almost anywhere, but all energy was focused on the *Dinç* section. As has been mentioned above, this situation was, of course, related to the immediate demand of the war for new young reinforcements who were already

⁷⁸⁴ BOA, DH.UMVM., 149/40, 5 Şevval 1335/25 July 1917, document no. 4, 6, 10.

⁷⁸⁵ BOA, DH.UMVM., 121/38, 00 Şa’ban 1335/June 1917.

⁷⁸⁶ BOA, DH.UMVM., 150/62, 22 Zilhicce 1335/9 October 1917.

prepared for military service. But Von Hoff pointed to a deficiency in this field too, which was that the existing branches were established almost entirely in provincial centers and did not yet reach out surrounding towns and villages. During these trips, Von Hoff and Selim Sırrı also tried to organize lectures in provincial centers for those who would work as guide trainers, usually selected from school teachers, in local branches of the Youth League. The shortage of guide trainers, who had themselves been trained for this task, to work for local branches was another major problem that hindered the establishment and activities of local branches in many places.⁷⁸⁷ As a practical measure to solve the problem especially for villages, Von Hoff proposed that those who had been trained to work as guide trainers in the Youth League could themselves train other candidates who would be selected and appointed by local administrators.⁷⁸⁸

An important criterion of success could be the number of young men registered with the local branches of the Youth League. But the league officials did not kept regular and accurate records the number of young people who attended the *Gürbüz* and *Dinç* sections. The available statistical data in this respect are fragmentary; only some local branches provided written statistical data about their attendants and even these are for certain periods of time. For example, the chief

⁷⁸⁷ For example, in the report that was sent from Menteşe, a sub-province of the Aydın province, about the establishment process of the Youth League, lack of guide trainers was given as the major reason for not being able to establish branches in villages of the region. BOA, DH.UMVM., 155/69, 1336.Z.6 (12 September 1918).

⁷⁸⁸ BOA, DH.UMVM., 150/62, 1335.Z.22 (9 October 1917). An anecdotal problem that Von Hoff faced during one of his early Anatolian trips actually symbolizes general infrastructural deficiencies that he observed throughout the country, which hampered the establishment process of the Youth League. When he arrived in İzmid, s sub-province of Kastamonu, in the evening on 11 September 1916, he went to the hotel where a reservation had been made for him beforehand. But the receptionist and manager of the hotel said to him that they had received no information and reservation for him, and refused to offer him a room without payment. When Von Hoff called authorities in Istanbul about the problem, it appeared that they really did not inform the hotel on time. Although the mayor of the town immediately tried to fix the problem and the hotel manager apologized to him for this inconvenience, Von Hoff got angry and returned to the train station, where he preferred to sleep that night. BOA, DH.UMVM., 141/30, 13 Zilkâde 1334/11 September 1916.

guide of the Youth League branches in Bursa reported that from the date of establishment to October 1917, more than 8,000 young people regularly attended the activities of the Youth League branches in the provincial center and its vicinity.⁷⁸⁹ According to another set of information, totally 5,168 young people registered with the league in Biga/Çanakkale by 18 June 1917; 4,152 of these consisted of boys between the ages 12 and 16, while 1,016 were above the age of 17.⁷⁹⁰ Similarly, out of the total number 7,184 young people who registered for the branches in Samsun/Canik, a sub-province of Trabzon, 6,225 were in the *Gürbüz* section and only 959 attended the *Dinç* section.⁷⁹¹ Although such numerical figures represent only an incomplete picture, they can still allow us to make some suggestions. For example, the first thing that can be observed is the fact that the number of those who registered with the *Gürbüz* section far exceeded those in the *Dinç* section. This was actually an awkward situation for the league officials because it was the *Dinç* section which was given priority during the war to mobilize the unschooled peasant boys who were near the age of military service.

The lack of administrative efficiency in the establishment process was further increased by a bureaucratic confusion about financial expenses of the Youth League. It became quickly apparent that the financial burden which the Youth League's activities would bring had been estimated much lower at the beginning than they actually caused later. Moreover, it had not been decided at the beginning clearly which governmental institution would fund the league. Since it was officially declared at the beginning that the league would be attached to the War Ministry and would work under its patronage, it must have been supposed that the War Ministry

⁷⁸⁹ Sarısamam, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İhtiyat Kuvveti", p. 449.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ BOA, DH.UMVM., 121/36, 5 Cemâziyelevvel 1335/27 February 1917.

would also be its main financial sponsor. But concerning the payment of some expenses, various disagreements appeared between the War and Interior ministries, which produced polemical correspondence between the two institutions. The War Ministry usually claimed that if civilian officials got involved in any activities of the league, it would be the Interior Ministry's responsibility to pay for the expenses. For example, the War Ministry did not want to pay for transportation and accommodation expenses of guide trainers, claiming that these needed to be paid by "local civilian authority" of the region where guide trainers resided.⁷⁹² There is evidence that the same decision was made for similar other cases and expenses were indeed paid by the Interior Ministry.⁷⁹³ On the other hand, it is also apparent that the Interior Ministry was not content with this situation. The Interior Ministry stated clearly in a correspondence to the War Ministry that although such payments had been made by the former, it was actually the latter's responsibility to undertake them, since the Youth League was directed by the War Ministry.⁷⁹⁴ Even the payment of writing materials used by the league sometimes caused a problem between the two ministries. For example, the Youth League Inspectorate claimed that the Interior Ministry needed to pay for the notebooks which were used to keep records of young people in local units, since it was the Interior Ministry's village and neighborhood headmen who used them.⁷⁹⁵ In some cases, both of the ministries preferred to get financial aid from pro-CUP voluntary-patriotic associations for the Youth League's expenses, instead of paying them themselves or going into polemic among themselves about them. For example, for the expenses of guide trainers of the Edirne

⁷⁹² BOA, DH.UMVM., 143/70, 18 Safer 1335/14 December 1916.

⁷⁹³ BOA, DH.UMVM., 143/82, 23 Safer 1335/19 December 1916.

⁷⁹⁴ BOA, DH.UMVM., 143/95, 27 Safer 1335/23 December 1916.

⁷⁹⁵ BOA, DH.UMVM., 141/84, 26 Zilhicce 1334/24 October 1916; BOA, DH.UMVM., 145/118, 29 Rebûlâhir 1335/22 February 1917.

province, who came to the provincial centre to take training courses to work in the Youth League, were paid largely by the National Defense League.⁷⁹⁶

In fact, bureaucratic inefficiency and financial confusion constituted only one aspect of the deficient evolution of the Ottoman Youth League, and they were actually interested only the state and its institutions. A more serious problem, which concerned state-society relations in the Ottoman Empire, was the reluctance and even sometimes deliberate resistance shown by the targeted young population towards embracing the Youth League and participating in its activities. The Great War as total war required permanent popular support and sacrifice. But as increasingly grave and persistent problems emerged on the home front during the war, which affected human lives in very negative ways, the state's demand for such permanent support and sacrifice also fell on increasingly deaf ears on the part of the public. Therefore, many families on the home front, who could barely earn a living and had to work more than ever to supply their basic needs, were hesitant and unenthusiastic to send their children to the activities of the Youth League which actually gave the impression that the scope of obligatory military service was now extending to cover much younger boys. With the contribution of misunderstanding by the league's many guide officers and trainers in provinces, who thought practicing drills for young boys in the Youth League meant to treat them like real soldiers, many people in rural areas started to believe in rumors that the state wanted to create "an army of children", that "even children under the age of 15 would now be conscripted", and that "all young men were required to participate in a lifelong military service".⁷⁹⁷ These reactions took the form of open resistance in some places. An official of the Youth League

⁷⁹⁶ BOA, DH.UMVM., 141/24, 9 Zilkâde 1334/7 September 1916.

⁷⁹⁷ Sarısamam, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İhtiyat Kuvveti", p. 461, 463.

reported that he heard the following words from a village prayer leader (imam) during one of his inspection trips in Anatolia:

A strange thing happened the day after we founded the local branch of the league. Many mothers raided the *muhtar*'s house with sticks and demanded that the newly founded branch should be abolished. We could hardly calm them down.⁷⁹⁸

Against such rumors and the discouraging effects of the popular suspicion that participating in the Youth League meant a lifelong military service, the Youth League administration needed to make explanations to the public. For example, Selim Sırrı wrote an article in the first issue of the journal of the league to correct “the misunderstandings about the Youth League”, in which he particularly emphasized that no members of the organization, neither him nor Von Hoff, intended to understand and operate the Youth League as some kind of military barracks. He not only warned future trainers of the Youth League about proper ways of training the youth, but also tried to appease the people who tended to regard the participation in the Youth League as some kind of extended military service:

The drills that will be practiced in the Youth League are not the same with those done by soldiers in their barracks. The exercises that we want to teach young men in the Youth League are only to increase their knowledge and appreciation about the future of the military. Otherwise, we are by no means in the intention to force children who did not yet reach the age of military service to practice military exercises.⁷⁹⁹

Some journalists also contributed to this effort to emphasize publicly that the Youth League had been established not to extend military service to younger boys, but to serve for a larger aim which was to create healthy and vigorous young people. For example, Yunus Nadi underlined that “the attachment of the Youth League to the War Ministry” did not necessarily mean that it had been established for military

⁷⁹⁸ Vedat ‘Urfi, “Kuvvetli Bir Gençlik Nasıl Elde Ediliyor?”, *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 19 (1 Kanunievvel 1335/1 December 1919), p. 42.

⁷⁹⁹ Selim Sırrı, “Genç Dernekleri ve Yanlış Telakkiler”, pp. 3-4.

service. He needed to justify the establishment of the Youth League in somewhat apologetic language: “the Youth League actually aims to prepare youth for life; but military service is also a part of national life. Preparation for military service is not the sole objective of the League. Perhaps it is a consequence of its objectives.”⁸⁰⁰

However, such warnings and “corrections” exerted only a very limited influence on the public, especially on people in rural areas. First of all, despite all denials by the Youth League authorities, preparing young boys for active military service was indeed a major part of the league’s activities. It is true that it had not been established solely for this aim, but immediate and pressing needs of the war virtually turned the whole project into a quick preparation station of Ottoman Muslim youth for active service on the battlefield. In fact, this point was also implied in Von Hoff’s above-mentioned complaint that in many provinces of Anatolia all energy had been spent on establishing the *Dinç* section of the league, namely the section for boys at the age of 17 and above, while the *Gürbüz* section had been ignored.⁸⁰¹ Therefore, people’s belief that the Youth League meant to extend military service to younger boys was not only based only on rumors, but also on a clearly observable experience.

Secondly, although the war continuously needed reinforcement troops on the battlefield, the need in Anatolia for men to work in fields for the survival of families could sometimes overweigh the military need to mobilize men for the battlefield. Therefore, it was not easy to gather unschooled peasant boys for the Youth League activities, when their families needed them as vital workforce to survive. In the telegrams that were sent from provinces to the Interior Ministry as answers to the

⁸⁰⁰ Quoted in Sarısan, “Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda İhtiyat Kuvveti”, p. 462; *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 3 Kanunievvel 1332/16 December 1916.

⁸⁰¹ BOA, DH.UMVM., 150/62, 22 Zilhicce 1335/9 October 1917.

circular order asking for progress reports on the Youth League organization in local units”, this situation was one of the major problems frequently mentioned. For instance, in the telegram which was sent from İzmir on 4 February 1917, it was stated that, especially in the sub-provinces of Tire, Bozdoğan and Sarayköy, authorities were having serious difficulty gathering “unschooled” children in the age category of the *Gürbüz* section for training in the Youth League.⁸⁰² In the report which was sent from Kütahya on 27 January 1917, it was straightforwardly stated that “since eligible young boys in villages [were] busy with agricultural work” and “because no officers [were] available” in the town centre to be sent to these villages to train these boys”, no branches of the Youth League could be established in the villages of the region.⁸⁰³ The telegram that was sent from Konya on 11 February 1917 emphasized more directly the relation between the lack of manpower and the difficulty that families had subsisting themselves. It was stated in the telegram that “since their fathers and other guardians [were] under arms, unschooled young boys [had] to work to supply the needs of their own households, and only few of them [were] able to attend” the activities of the Youth League.⁸⁰⁴

Although participation in and regular attendance to the activities of the Youth League were compulsory for all eligible schooled and unschooled Ottoman young males, there were serious problems in maintaining a sufficient number of participation and regular attendance to the league due to various problems. As the problem of nonattendance and even escapes during trainings reached significant levels, remarkable confusion emerged on the part of authorities on how to cope with it. Although the Temporary Law of the Youth League stipulated that all eligible

⁸⁰² BOA, DH.UMVM., 146/109, 30 Cemâziyelevvel 1335/24 March 1917, document no. 4.

⁸⁰³ BOA, DH.UMVM., 146/109, 30 Cemâziyelevvel 1335/24 March 1917, document no. 9.

⁸⁰⁴ BOA, DH.UMVM., 146/109, 30 Cemâziyelevvel 1335/24 March 1917, document no. 16.

Ottoman young boys were required to participate in the Youth League trainings,⁸⁰⁵ it did not mention anything about what sorts of sanctions would be applied to those who never appeared and who did not attend regularly without having a valid excuse. Therefore, to the questions coming from provinces about what legal action needed to be taken for this problem, the War and Interior ministries had no ready and clear answers. Instead of immediately applying a legal action, the ministries preferred more practical measures and advised local authorities to get help from the gendarmerie; those boys who did not attend the trainings would be taken from their homes by gendarmes who would accompany them to the local branch of the league.

However, while this measure was evidently taken in many places, it caused other problems; this time the number of escapes during training increased remarkably.⁸⁰⁶ On the other hand, as the authorities in Karahisar-ı Sâhib (Afyon) complained, “it was not possible to gather absentees with the help of the gendarmerie for every single training day”; as a result, local authorities asked for advice on possible forms of more forceful punishments.⁸⁰⁷ Then, it was considered if the 74th article of the Temporary Law of General Provincial Administration could be applied and absentees could be punishable by a fine.⁸⁰⁸ But the Interior Ministry concluded that it was not legally proper to extend the provincial administration law to cover the functions and duties determined for the Youth League; therefore, this possibility was

⁸⁰⁵ Article 2 of the Temporary Law of the Youth League stated that all Ottoman youths, who were at the ages determined in the law and regulations, were obliged to attend the trainings of the Youth League. This obligation lasted until the date when one was drafted for his actual military service. Only those who were determined not healthy enough to participate in these trainings and those who were abroad would be exempted. See “Genç Dernekleri Hakkında Kanun-ı Muvakkat”.

⁸⁰⁶ Sarısamam, “Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İhtiyat Kuvveti”, p. 464.

⁸⁰⁷ BOA, DH.UMVM., 149/44, 9 Şevval 1335/29 July 1917.

⁸⁰⁸ “İdare-i Umumiye-i Vilayat Kanun-ı Muvakkatı”, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 5, 17 Rebiulâhir 1331/26 March 1913, pp. 186-216. In short, the 74th article of this law stipulated that those who broke or breached provincial administration laws would be punished by a fine from 1 lira to 5 liras.

given up.⁸⁰⁹ Again, practical measures were recommended instead of legal sanctions in this respect. Besides insistence on getting help from the gendarmerie, it was also recommended that local administrative authorities, local notables, enlightened and elder people could act like an advice committee, giving influential advice (*vesaya-yi müessire*) to the parents of those boys who did not attend training of the Youth League.⁸¹⁰ In this way, all influential people at the local level could contribute to permanent mobilization efforts of the Ottoman state.

The vicious cycle between the shortage of workforce in agriculture and the urgent need for provisions during the war years distressed the Ottoman army to a significant extent. When and where the Ottoman armed forces had difficulty supplying food for their personnel, army commanders themselves could approve and sometimes even request that peasant boys be excused from attending the activities of the Youth League. If peasant boys' existence in fields seemed more necessary and useful for feeding the army than their existence in the Youth League, their nonattendance could easily be condoned. In a telegram that was sent to the Interior Ministry from Sivas on 24 December 1916, it was explained that "since establishing branches of the Youth League in villages could restrain agricultural harvest and hinder supplying food to the armed forces", this part of the process had been abandoned and instead the organization was established only in town centers.⁸¹¹ Similarly, the telegram that was sent from İzmid on 23 April 1917 expressed that while trainings of the *Dinç* section had been started, they were now been postponed by a decision taken in coordination with the War Ministry in order not to interrupt

⁸⁰⁹ BOA, DH.UMVM., 149/44, 9 Şevval 1335/29 July 1917.

⁸¹⁰ BOA, DH.UMVM., 149/15, 8 Ramazan 1335/28 June 1917.

⁸¹¹ BOA, DH.UMVM., 146/109, 30 Cemâziyelevvel 1335/24 March 1917, document no. 10.

agricultural works.⁸¹² In fact, it is evident from a report submitted by the Youth League Inspectorate to the War Ministry on 23 January 1917 that such individual measures virtually turned into a common practice within a short time. This report stated that if their existence in agricultural works was urgently needed, eligible peasant boys could be excused from training sessions of the Youth League during the war.⁸¹³ Such examples show that militarist objectives of the Ottoman elites had to be modified according to Ottoman socio-economic realities.

Coping with the manpower shortage on the Ottoman home front during the Great War produced both legal regulations which were planned in a long term perspective, and *ad hoc* measures which tried to intervene in problems immediately. Such legal regulations and immediate measures that were made to compensate workforce shortage could sometimes retard other larger objectives such as popularizing the Youth League in rural areas, no matter how useful the latter was for the Ottoman war effort in a longer run. One such early example was the Collective Labor Regulation (*Amele-i Müşterekiyye Talimatnamesi*), which was approved on 17 October 1914 to get more contribution to economic production from those males on the home front who were not obliged to serve in the military. For example, the regulation stipulated that “in every village, all males from the age of 16 to 20, and those above the age of 45, and also those males who were of military age but were excused and living in their villages for any reason, [were] required to work collectively to seed and cultivate the fields of their villages.”⁸¹⁴ Coping with this problem became more critical through the middle of the war. Moreover, the deportation and destruction of the Anatolian Armenian population left behind a

⁸¹² BOA, DH.UMVM., 146/109, 30 Cemâziyelevvel 1335/24 March 1917, document no. 26.

⁸¹³ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403, Fihrist 1-36.

⁸¹⁴ Quoted in Ögün, *Kafkas Cephesi'nin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*, p. 88.

considerable amount of abandoned cultivable lands which remained idle (at least for a while until incoming *muhacirs* were resettled on these lands) because of lack of labor. Under these circumstances, the Temporary Law of Agricultural Obligations (*Mükellefiyet-i Ziraiye Kanun-ı Muvakkati*) was approved on 24 September 1916, which included more extensive applications to get maximum contribution from the available manpower on the home front.⁸¹⁵ However, even this measure proved not to be sufficient, and therefore additional steps needed to be taken. For example, a military order was issued in November 1916 to army commanders required that the army personnel were also to help carry out agricultural works in their regions if it was possible.⁸¹⁶

Where the problem of nonattendance was difficult to solve immediately and where the need for manpower was to be considered urgently, the Youth League Inspectorate also tried to seek for flexible and practical solutions that could be relevant to specific cases, instead of insisting on ultimate decisions. If gathering peasant boys to trainings of the Youth League seemed not possible and easy, the authorities thought that assigning them to other “useful” services in their regions would be equally practical. Von Hoff actually observed during his trips across Anatolia that when it was difficult to establish branches in villages, it was even more difficult and unrealistic to ask boys in these villages to travel to branches in town centers. Such difficulties could also be seen in the reports sent by local branches to the inspectorate of the league. Therefore, he thought that instead of letting them spend their time in vain, these boys could still be employed in various home front posts where they could be helpful for the Ottoman mobilization effort. For example,

⁸¹⁵ “Mükellefiyet-i Ziraiye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, *Düstür*, serie II, vol. 8, 20 Zilkâde 1334/18 September 1916, p. 1297.

⁸¹⁶ Ögün, *Kafkas Cephesi'nin I. Dünya Savaşı'ndaki Lojistik Desteği*, p. 93.

he proposed that these boys could provide service in the Red Crescent or Red Cross hospitals nearby their regions, help families in their villages, whose males were in armed forces or disabled in the war, cultivate their fields and transport their harvest, or provide any other possible help needed in military communication zones. In this way, he stated, they could get used to “serve for the fatherland from an early age.”⁸¹⁷

On the other hand, agriculture was not the only sector that was affected negatively by the attendance requirement of the Youth League. A similar situation also existed in various strategic service sectors, such as postal and communications services. For the eligible young people employed in these sectors, authorities asked for exemptions for them from attending trainings of the Youth League, and they were usually excused.⁸¹⁸ In fact, again due to urgent need for workforce and qualified personnel, there was a tendency that such exemptions did not remain individual cases and gradually became a common practice covering employed young people in all service sectors. For example, in a report that was sent to the head of the Fatih (a district in Istanbul) recruiting office by First Lieutenant Mehmed, who was the responsible officer of the *Dinç* section of the Youth League in the district, it was stated that out total 500 young people recorded in the branch by 14 January 1917, “only 30 people” regularly attended trainings, and even many of these regular ones worked in various sectors. For those working young men, whose military service obligations had been postponed because of their official employments,⁸¹⁹ the officer asked for “forgiveness from training” (*talimlerden afvı*) in order not to interrupt their

⁸¹⁷ BOA, DH.UMVM., 149/40, 5 Şevval 1335/25 July 1917, document no. 2, 3.

⁸¹⁸ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403, Fihrist 1-36; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403, Fihrist 1-43.

⁸¹⁹ As has been discussed in Chapter 2, the Ottoman state needed its middle and lower ranking civil servants and technical personnel to continue their works in wartime, whose works were regarded as indispensable. People such as post office clerks and telegram technicians, banks clerks, railway technicians and clerks, accountants, policemen, etc. were temporarily exempted from military service. See Articles 91, 92, “Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkati”, pp. 688-692.

jobs. Moreover, he also requested that excuses or flexibilities be given for those working ones whose workplaces were far from training camps, since they were usually late for job after morning trainings and this caused “daily fee deductions”.⁸²⁰

On the other hand, the decisions made by the Youth League administration on its own about accepting such excuses and offering exemptions to the young men who worked in crucial sectors sometimes received criticism from other governmental institutions. In a correspondence to the Youth League Inspectorate on 8 March 1917, the Ministry of Education, which was more concerned with training of the youth than their employment, needed to warn that such decisions could exert negative effects on the youth and encourage other regular young members of the Youth League to seek for official employments in order to avoid trainings. Thus, the Ministry of Education advised the Youth League Inspectorate that it would be proper to make such decisions of exemptions from the Youth League in coordination with the Interior Ministry.⁸²¹

Another major problem which hindered the process of popularizing the Youth League and paralyzed its activities in many places was the fact that its targeted young population began to be drafted directly as the war urgently needed more reinforcements. As has already been noted above, one of the main objectives of the Youth League was to prepare the youth for military service, both physically and mentally. But as the increasing number of deaths, disabilities and desertions badly undermined the Ottoman military strength on the battlefield, this period of preparation apparently came to be regarded as dispensable by authorities. They

⁸²⁰ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403 , Fihrist 1-42. Apparently, nonattendance of working young men to trainings of paramilitary associations during the war was a common problem in other belligerent countries too. For a similar problem in the Freiburg branch of the Young Germany League, see Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany*, p. 513.

⁸²¹ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1825, Dosya 403, Fihrist 1-46.

continuously needed to reduce the minimum age of military service during the war. Even as early as 29 April 1915, an amendment was made to the Temporary Law for Military Service of 12 May 1914, which reduced the minimum age of conscription age down to 18 (which was originally 20).⁸²² Similar revisions of military service age were also made about the schooled youth. By a decree issued on 3 July 1917, the age of conscription for students began to include those who were born in 1898.⁸²³ Moreover, attending school at the date of conscription would not be accepted as a valid excuse.⁸²⁴ In other words, those young boys at the eligible ages for the *Dinç* category of the Youth League actually began to be conscripted. Therefore, this practice virtually annulled the basis of existence of the *Dinç* section in many places. It is no coincidence that some local authorities mentioned in their progress reports submitted to the Interior Ministry that since eligible youths in their regions had already been conscripted, they had not been able to establish branches of the *Dinç* section.⁸²⁵

The Youth League and the State: Ideology and Politics

Although specific conditions and immediate needs that emerged during the war played considerable role in the shaping of the Ottoman Youth League experience, it actually contained many elements of the CUP government's militarist body

⁸²² "16 Cemâziyelâhir 1332 Tarihli Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-ı Muvakkatının 2, 3, 4, 5. Maddelerine Muaddel Kanun-ı Muvakkat", *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 7, 14 Cemâziyelâhir 1333/29 April 1915, p. 589.

⁸²³ "1316 Tevellüdlilerinden Hizmet-i Maksûre ile Celb Edilecekler Hakkında Kararname", *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 9, 13 Ramazan 1335/3 July 1917, p. 702.

⁸²⁴ "1312-1316 Tevellüdlilerinden Mekâtib-i Sultaniye'nin Sondan Dördüncü Sınıfına Müdâvim Bulunanların Hizmet-i Maksûreye Tabi Tutulmaları Hakkında Kararname", *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 9, 22 Zilkâde 1335/9 September 1917, p. 722.

⁸²⁵ For example, this was the case in Marmaris, a district of the Menteşe sub-province. See BOA, DH.UMVM., 155/69, 6 Zilhicce 1336/12 September 1918.

politics,⁸²⁶ and, in this sense, it was quite a political project. Besides, the discourse which was succinctly formulated in Enver Pasha's above-mentioned statement ("Everybody is a soldier now!") did not represent a natural situation, but revealed a militarist-ideological perspective based on certain political preferences. In addition, the Youth League was an "official" project and had organic ties with the CUP from the beginning; the latter not only supported the league, but also patronized it. In this sense, as the Turkish nationalist disposition of the CUP became more marked by the middle of the war, this disposition also characterized the general perspective of the Youth League. However, while this disposition was evident, it is also hard to say that Youth League officials spent particularly significant amount of energy on nationalist propaganda. The pressing needs of the war led them give the priority to the activities that would produce more immediate results for the war effort. It can be observed that the journal of the league rather focused on more practical objectives such as preparing the youth for military service and propagating physical education than devoting their pages entirely to nationalist writings.

On the other hand, Youth League officials, primarily Von Hoff, always claimed that the Youth League had been completely outside politics. Of course, what they meant by politics had obviously to with a very narrow definition of the concept, which could be described as being an integrated part of a political party. In a language which remarkably echoed the nationalist discourse, they tried to justify themselves by claiming that they only worked to serve the people without having any political agenda. Von Hoff's following words present a perfect example of such justification:

⁸²⁶ Akın, "*Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar*", pp. 94-95.

Training of the nation is a national issue, not political. Therefore, we in the Youth League have nothing to do with politics; we never talk about politics with guide trainers or youths, and we do not work with any political party. We, as a completely neutral association, go after only one goal: To help the nation, to work to educate the nation, and, above all, to train the youths deprived of attending schools.⁸²⁷

However, this discourse itself was political, a characteristic way of making politics in nationalist perspectives. Yet it still implies the existence of a less aggressive nationalist outlook. It is ironic that, albeit a narrow definition of the concept, Von Hoff considered this understanding of politics very seriously and his insistence on keeping always a certain distance from civilian politicians in general and the CUP in particular caused tension between the Youth League administration and the CUP government. The available evidence reveals that the CUP increasingly tended to demand more control in the administration of the Youth League and to intervene more directly in its activities. Such demands faced a remarkable resistance from Von Hoff. As has already been mentioned above, Tunaya has argued that the CUP had imagined the Youth League as a militia organization of its own, which would make a contribution to the CUP's effort to extend its control over and to penetrate deeper levels of Ottoman society. Apparently, the CUP's moves in this direction clashed with Von Hoff's principles to the extent that the latter became *persona non grata* for the leading CUP figures. In late 1917, some leading CUP figures, including Bahaeddin Şakir who was also an active member of the Special Organization and took part in its guerilla missions,⁸²⁸ asked for a meeting with the Youth League administration, in which they discussed about the general situation of

⁸²⁷ Von Hoff, "Mukaddime", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 1 (1 Eylül 1333/1 September 1917), pp. 1-2.

⁸²⁸ Bahaeddin Şakir represented a more aggressive Turkish nationalism in the CUP. He has been described by Hanioglu as "the Stalin of the CUP". M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "The Second Constitutional Period, 1908-1918", in Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 4, p. 75.

the Youth League and made some demands from them regarding both the nationalist perspective and activities of the league. Although the available documents do not reveal the exact contents of this discussion and what specific demands were made, it can be estimated from the consequent developments that the CUP wanted to use the Youth League for party propaganda and to put more pro-CUP people in the its administration.⁸²⁹ The leading role of Bahaeddin Şakir in this discussion suggests that the demands might also have included getting more contribution from the Youth League to the actions of the Special Organization. Rejecting the CUP representatives' demands, Von Hoff made a fierce statement after the meeting, which virtually cut his ties with the government and ended his term in the Ottoman Empire as the inspector of the Youth League:

I am a soldier... Today, the Youth League is an association which directly belongs to the youth. Hence, it must be directed by a military board... If politics gets involved in this organization, its aim completely diverges. This would be murder. I cannot work for a political aim by the order of a civilian committee. If the Committee of Union and Progress insists on its proposal, I leave for Germany tomorrow without tainting the soldier's honor.⁸³⁰

Apparently, Bahaeddin Şakir got extremely angry at this reaction of Von Hoff, and requested from the War Ministry that Von Hoff should be dismissed for the best interest of the Ottoman government. The War Ministry agreed with Bahaeddin Şakir. Consequently, Von Hoff was dismissed from the Youth League and he left the Ottoman Empire for Germany in April 1918, and was re-assigned a military post on the Western Front; Lieutenant Colonel Mustafa Asım was appointed as a deputy inspector of the Youth League.⁸³¹

⁸²⁹ Sarısamam, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İhtiyat Kuvveti", p. 465.

⁸³⁰ Quoted in Balcıoğlu, "Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri", pp. 207-208.

⁸³¹ It is interesting that whereas the journal of the league continued to give information about what Von Hoff was doing after he left the Ottoman Empire, it never mentioned anything about the reasons why he left. See "Genç Dernekleri Postası", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no.12 (1 Ağustos 1334/1 August 1918), p.13.

However, whatever the intention and demands were, it was difficult to realize any change of outlook and objective in the middle of 1918 when the endurance of the Ottomans had already been considerably eroded. From this date on, the performance of the Ottoman armed forces on the battlefield continuously deteriorated and the signs of defeat became increasingly manifest. On the other hand, the Youth League did not stop working immediately when the war ended and the Mudros Armistice signed. Although its activities greatly shrank, it still continued to exist and its journal was published until September 1920.⁸³² But the Youth League of the Armistice Period quickly abandoned the more overt military discourse and objectives; instead, it tended to use a language that almost solely talked about the importance of healthy life and physical education. Perhaps more importantly, the goal of reaching out peasant boys began to receive less emphasis in these years, while the school dimension became dominant again. Finally, the relationship of the Youth League with party politics greatly thinned down during the post-CUP period. In fact, there was a return to Von Hoff's more cautious nationalist perspective in this respect:

The *Dinç* and *Gürbüz* sections of the Youth League, the Ottoman soldiers and officers who work in them and the students who attend their activities are not allowed to get involved in political activities and to become a member of any political party. They spend their time and energy only on their education, training and scouting.⁸³³

⁸³² The last issue (26th) of the journal of the Youth League was published on 1 July 1920.

⁸³³ S., "Vatanın Evlatlarına Muavenet", *Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri Mecmuası*, no. 16 (1 Eylül 1335/1 September 1919), p. 18. An initiative was made during the early republican period to re-establish a youth organization similar to the Ottoman Youth League. But although even a draft law was prepared for this purpose, it did not come into existence. See Mustafa Balcıoğlu, "Osmanlı Genç Dernekleri'nden İnkılap Gençleri Derbekleri'ne", in Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Cumhuriyet'e*, pp. 209-222.

Conclusion

The need to maintain a permanent mobilization for war required the state permeate deeper levels of society and open up new channels between the state and people. The unschooled provincial youth, the illiterate Anatolian Muslim peasant boys, who constituted the backbone of the Ottoman armed forces, represented such a new sphere to be permeated. The paramilitary associations were conceived as a tool that could be used in mobilizing this youth population. The Ottoman Youth League was established in the middle of the war for this purpose. It was, in a sense, a continuation of a militarist understanding of physical education which had already emerged during the Second Constitutional Era and produced examples of militaristic youth associations by the eve of the Great War. But what made it more effective than its predecessors were the immediate needs of the prolonged war, more specifically the need to provide constantly fresh and trained troops for the battlefield.

It has also been argued in this chapter that the relationship that was formed by the Youth League between the state and society was not one-dimensional that was imposed by the state and that the targeted population was not passive in this process. People did not always act according to the demands of the state; they also responded according to their own living conditions and expectations. Such responses, which ranged from voluntary support to reluctance and even open resistance, re-shaped and sometimes modified the objectives and activities of the Youth League at the local level. Particularly the lack of manpower in agriculture and families' dependence on their young members for survival played an important factor in people's attitude to the Youth League. Popular consent and support for the mobilizing effort of the state were not entirely absent, but achieving them required the authorities to take popular

expectations into consideration. Failing to do so could produce resistance to the mobilization. It can be said that there was a tacit contract between the state and the people in this respect. When the state exceeded the limits of the contract, even coercive measures did not always work.

In fact, the state's exceeding the limits of this tacit contract and people's resistance to the permanent military mobilization constituted a much larger issue during the war for Ottoman society. A major consequence of this issue was refusal to continue fighting, which manifested itself in the form of desertions. The problem was so extensive and deep that it haunted not only the battlefield, but also the home front. Therefore, any measure to cope with it necessitated a "total" approach, dealing with the battlefield and the home front at the same time. The next chapter will focus on this issue.

CHAPTER 6

THE LIMITS OF THE OTTOMAN MANPOWER MOBILIZATION: THE PROBLEM OF DESERTION AND ATTEMPTS AT REMOBILIZATION

Although the Ottoman army managed to keep its fighting capacity until the end of the Great War, it increasingly suffered from shortage of manpower. Desertions from the army constituted a major problem in this respect, which reached an alarming level towards the end of the war. Being an intentional rejection to fight and a deliberate decision to avoid military service, desertion is perhaps one of the most direct forms of resistance to military mobilization during the war. Even if military service was obligatory under the system of universal conscription and this obligation was emphasized more by the state during the time of mobilization, there was still a contractual aspect in the relationship between the enlisted man with the state.⁸³⁴

Though being the smaller and restricted partner in this tacit contract, the enlisted man could still have certain expectations: a reasonable supply of basic needs while in service, a consistent belief that he would be fighting in a just war, and a steadily fed hope that the war would not be prolonged and that victory is not far away. Such were the expectations of the Ottoman enlisted men at the beginning of the war. Therefore, it can be argued that a successful military mobilization depended on the state's capacity to live up to this tacit contract throughout the war, but its fulfillment became increasingly more difficult as the war became prolonged and suffering grew. While the reasons of desertion from the Ottoman army were numerous and varied during the war, the act of desertion was a reaction of the enlisted man to the failure of the

⁸³⁴ "Citizens served the army as a representation of the state, and the state as a representation of the sovereign people. Military service thus carried to its conclusion Jean-Jacques Rousseau's logic of the social contract, in that obedience to military authority made the citizen-soldier as free as before, in the sense that he obeyed a source of authority originating in himself and his compatriots". Leonard V. Smith, "Remobilizing the Citizen-Soldier through the French Army Mutinies of 1917", in Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, pp. 152-153.

state authority to meet his expectations; in a sense, desertion was a partial cancellation of this contract by the enlisted man, albeit in a legally forbidden and religiously and culturally disapproved way.

Approaching it both as a military and social issue, this chapter will examine the problem of desertion in the Ottoman army during World War I. While the Ottoman military did not experience large scale military mutinies, such as those in France in 1917,⁸³⁵ I will argue that the great number of desertions (about 17 percent of all men enlisted) was one of the major factors that eroded the Ottoman mobilization effort and war performance. Desertion as a problem has been largely ignored in nationalist Turkish historiography,⁸³⁶ which has either treated it as a minor military problem or usually attributed it to “non-Turkish” Ottoman subjects – Armenians, Greeks and Arabs. In contrast, I will show that the extent of desertion so wide and deserters so diverse that nearly every ethnic or religious group, including Muslim Turks, were represented. In fact, given that Muslim Turks were the majority of both the Ottoman population and the enlisted men in the armed forces, their case is much more significant; therefore, this chapter will mainly focus on them. Furthermore, I will argue that desertion became a major social problem requiring measures on the part of not only the military but also the state authority on the entire

⁸³⁵ See Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁸³⁶ Nationalist Turkish historiography on the Ottoman First World War experience, including the official military history of the war published by the Turkish General Staff, has almost always remained silent on this issue and, except occasional mentioning, never produced an in-depth investigation on it. It can be said that this “ignorance” is greatly related to the nationalist-militarist disposition which has been influential in republican Turkey, also affecting historical studies, particularly those dealing with the periods of the First World War and the War of Independence. Perhaps the only critical intervention into this silence has come from Erik J. Zürcher, whose short but pioneering essays have drawn attention to this highly significant issue. See Zürcher, “Little Mehmet in the Desert”; Zürcher, “Between Death and Desertion”; Erik J. Zürcher, “Osmanlı’nın Son Döneminde Asker Kaçaklığı”, in Özgür Heval Çınar and Çoşkun Üsterci (eds.), *Çarklardaki Kum: Vicdani Red, Düşünsel Kaynaklar ve Deneyimler* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), pp. 59-68 (This essay is also available in English: “Refusing to Serve by Other Means: Desertion in the Late Ottoman Empire”. Available [online]: www.tulp.leidenuniv.nl/content_docs/wap/ejz23.pdf).

home front, which, in turn, opened up new channels for the state to further penetrate into society.

Focusing mainly on the Muslim population of Anatolia, this chapter will first give a general panorama of the size of the desertion problem and then explore the reasons for desertion as explained by military authorities and, where possible, also by deserters themselves. I will argue that the act of desertion could be seen as a form of resistance by the ordinary enlisted man. Even in compulsory form, the universal conscription still relied on a “tacit” contract between the state authority and the enlisted man. Neither the presumed strong military culture condemning desertion nor severe penal laws could prevent desertion from becoming a major problem. The scale of desertion showed the limits of the Ottoman conscription system in total war conditions.

Elaborating on the “lifestyle” of deserters, I will also explore how they survived after they deserted. While many deserters chose to hide near their own villages and received shelter from fellow villagers, many others resorted to brigandage by forming armed bands. Generally formed along ethnic and religious ties, the proliferation of these bands of deserters-turned-brigands, along with other deserters who did not turn brigands but still roamed the countryside, constituted a threat to the state authority as it attempted to maintain order.

In struggling to deal with the problem of desertion, the Ottoman state regularly resorted to punitive measures, but it also attempted to formulate “encouraging” methods to mobilize public support for itself as it sought the collaboration of the local populations against the deserters. The gendarmerie, reorganized in this process, played a key role in this struggle. The state was never completely successful in tackling the issue, but it was able to establish a reinforced

basis of internal security mechanism in Anatolia, which was characterized by nationalist preferences. This internal security mechanism helped the re-mobilization effort during the Turkish Nationalist Struggle of 1919-1922, which resulted in the creation of the Turkish nation-state.

The Extent of the Problem

Technically, desertion means leaving active military service without permission, with the intent of remaining away indefinitely. However, especially when numerical figures are concerned, Ottoman documents and even secondary sources seem to use the term in a broader sense, which also includes those who did not obey the call to service during mobilization, who did not show up at recruiting offices when they reached the age for military duty (i.e., draft evaders), and those soldiers who unilaterally extended their leave. And, perhaps with the intention of covering all these mentioned, both archival documents and secondary sources sometimes use a more general term of “military fugitive” (*asker kaçağı*) instead of “deserter” (*firari*). Therefore, it should be noted that in the Ottoman case statistics on desertions necessarily include all those who “deserted”, that is to say in the larger and all inclusive sense of that term.

Despite some valuable recent efforts to compile and cross-check the available statistical data on the Ottoman Great War experience,⁸³⁷ the existing statistics on desertions are actually still raw and usually provide us with only rounded total numbers in most of the cases. Detailed and specific sets of figures, such as the precise number of desertions of each year of the war, of specific fronts or of specific

⁸³⁷ For example, Edward Erickson’s study is once again worth mentioning in this respect. See Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, especially the tables on the Ottoman casualties in pages 236 to 244.

ethnic-religious groups are greatly lacking. It is not the objective of this chapter to provide detailed statistical data on desertions in the Ottoman army.⁸³⁸ My concern here is to supply the basic statistical data on which my arguments could be based within the framework of the social history of the issue of desertions. In this sense, the statistical data that I give and discuss below actually suffice to show the remarkable extent and seriousness of the desertion problem in the Ottoman case.

The problem of desertion in the Ottoman army intensified remarkably in the second half of the war. İsmet İnönü, a staff officer during the Great War and the second president of the Republic of Turkey, estimated that the number of deserters in the year of 1918 alone was about 300,000; in his words, “this was a very high number that had no other equivalent in our history”.⁸³⁹ The chief of the German military mission in the Ottoman Empire during the war, Liman von Sanders, said in a report, titled “Condition of the Turkish Army Today”, in December 1917 that desertions from the Ottoman army had exceeded all bounds and the army had more than 300,000 desertions at that time.⁸⁴⁰ According to journalist-scholar Ahmed Emin Yalman, who stated that he had access to the official military sources related to the Ottoman casualties during the Great War, desertions reached the number 300,000 at the beginning of 1917, and the aggregate number of deserters amounted to more than 500,000 by the summer of 1918.⁸⁴¹ In another earlier analysis of the Ottoman Great

⁸³⁸ This would actually require an entirely different in-depth and long-term research, and also a permission to get access to all the statistical data available in a scattered way in thousands of documents at the ATASE Archives of the Turkish General Staff.

⁸³⁹ İsmet İnönü, *Hatıralar*, vol. 1, edited by Sebahattin Selek, second edition (Istanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1992), pp. 126-127.

⁸⁴⁰ Von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, p. 190. An Ottoman Foreign Ministry document contains a quotation from the newspaper *La Tribuna de Genève*, dated 23/24 September 1917, which claimed almost the same figure as the total number of desertions in the Ottoman army up to that time. See BOA, HR.SYS., 2441/7, 4 April 1917 The document does not contain any official denial of this claim by the Ottoman government.

⁸⁴¹ Yalman, *Turkey in the Great War*, pp. 261-262.

War experience (published in 1926), French military historian Maurice Larcher presented some basic statistical information on the Ottoman casualties by basing his work on the official Ottoman casualty reports issued by the Ottoman War Ministry in 1919. While he did not provide a specific number for the category of desertions, he gave a total number for a more general casualty category of “the sick, deserters, missing, etc.” (*malades, déserteurs, disparus, etc.*), which amounted to 1,565,000 for the four years of the war.⁸⁴² Given the total number of enlisted men in the Ottoman military throughout the war, which was 2, 873,000 (see Table 2 in Chapter 3),⁸⁴³ the total number of deserters (500,000) amounts to almost one-sixth, or roughly seventeen percent of all the men enlisted during the war.⁸⁴⁴ It is also important to note that compared to other figures of casualties, the problem of desertion came first. It was a major factor that undermined the military performance of the Ottoman armed forces during the war (See Table 9).

As has been discussed above, detailed statistical data on the issue of desertion in the Ottoman army during the Great War are lacking. Although the Turkish General Staff, which keeps all military documents of the war in its own archives, has published a very detailed official history of the war based on original archival documents (this is a multi-volume military history that basically presents events on the major fronts of the war on an annual basis), this history does not supply

⁸⁴² Larcher, *La Guerre Turque dans la Guerre Mondiale*, p. 602. This casualty figure has also practically been confirmed by the Turkish General Staff history of the war: It has given a slightly lower figure as 1,560,000. See *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol.10, p. 510.

⁸⁴³ Ahmed Emin Yalman gave a slightly more inflated number of enlisted men as 2,998,321. See Yalman, *Turkey in the Great War*, p. 252. When dealing with rounded numbers, this figure can also be rounded up to 3,000,000.

⁸⁴⁴ A British military intelligence report claimed as early as July 1915 that the number of deserters from the Ottoman army was up to 20 percent of the total troops. See TNA: PRO WO 157/693, July 1915.

satisfactory statistical information on desertions. Since it is not a thematically organized source, it does not even include a separate chapter on the issue. However,

Table 9
Ottoman Casualties in the Great War⁸⁴⁵

Combat dead and missing	305.085
Died of disease	467.759
Prisoner of War	145.104
Wounded – permanent loss	303.150
Deserters	500.000

some recent historians who have critically examined the available data tend to confirm the above-mentioned figures. Edward Erickson has accepted the figure of 500,000 given by Ahmed Emin Yalman as the total number of deserters from the Ottoman army, although his calculation of the total number of men enlisted during the four years of the war is slightly lower than that of Yalman.⁸⁴⁶ Another confirmation has come from Erik J. Zürcher, who has also compared the Ottoman desertion figures to those of the German army, which suffered 130,000-150,000 desertions during the war; considering that around 13.5 million men were drafted in Germany during the Great War, the proportion of deserters to the total number of

⁸⁴⁵ Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, s. 243. Yücel Yanıkdağ gives a much higher number (220-250,000) for the total number Ottoman POWs held in British and Russian POW camps during the Great War (“‘Ill-Fated Sons of the Nation’”, p. 22). Erickson apparently might not have considered the fact that some of the deserters and missing also became POWs.

⁸⁴⁶ According to Erickson, the total number of men mobilized in the Ottoman Empire during the war is 2,873,000. He reaches this by cross-examining the available sources. Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 243.

drafted men was only about one percent.⁸⁴⁷ This proportion was also around one percent in the British army during the major battles on the Western front.⁸⁴⁸ In terms of actual numbers of desertions, rather than the proportions, the Russian case presented similarity to that of the Ottoman, where 500,000 soldiers had deserted during the first year of war.⁸⁴⁹ Another comparable case was the Italian army. In the Battle of Caporetto in 1917, more than 350,000 men deserted from the Italian army and roamed the countryside.⁸⁵⁰ However, while there are comparable cases, it is quite clear that the extent of the problem in the Ottoman army was quite wide and remarkable.

Although we lack detailed statistical data compiled according to specific years and major fronts, we do have various significant specific examples in this respect, which might be used not only to confirm the gravity of the extent of the problem, but also to make some specific comments that would help us explore various layers of the evolution of the problem than the total numbers could imply. For example, the German consul in Erzurum reported in a telegram on 2 June 1915 that a third of the troops gathered in the camps of the Third Army in Eastern Anatolia had fallen sick and that “another third had deserted on the march to the army”.⁸⁵¹ After the defeat on the Caucasus front against the Russian forces, the Third Army

⁸⁴⁷ Erik J. Zürcher, “Between Death and Desertion”, p. 257. However, the issue of desertion in the German army proportionally increased in the last year of the war, and specific proportions were remarkably high for certain units on certain fronts. For example, the spring offensive of 1918 brought the German soldier to the limits of his endurance. “Up to 10 percent of men deserted in the preparatory stages en route from the eastern front.” See David Englander, “Mutinies and Military Morale”, in Hew Strachan (ed.), *World War I: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 198.

⁸⁴⁸ <http://www.stephen-stratford.co.uk/desertion.htm>.

⁸⁴⁹ In terms of proportions, the Russian case was much lower, considering that from 1914 to 1916, 14.4 million Russian were called to service. See Mark von Hagen, “The First World War, 1914-1918”, in Ronald Grigor Suny (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia, vol. 3: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 96-97.

⁸⁵⁰ Holger H. Herwig, “The German Victories, 1917-1918”, in Strachan (ed.), *World War I*, p. 258.

⁸⁵¹ Von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, p. 50.

alone had about 50,000 deserters by the winter of 1916.⁸⁵² Desertions in the Third Army zone were at such a high level that even the Interior Ministry, complaining about the proliferation of desertion cases (*kesretle firar vakaları*) in this zone, had to warn its local administrators and officials in the region on 18 May 1915 that not only lack of security measures, but also carelessness on their part in providing good camping and resting conditions for the troops could contribute to desertions.⁸⁵³ According to a British military intelligence report dated 29 October 1917, in the mountainous areas of the Hizan district alone, located in the east of Bitlis in Eastern Anatolia, there were about 30,000 deserters at that date; these consisted mostly of ethnic Kurds, who had fought as irregular units in the Ottoman army on the eastern front.⁸⁵⁴ In the last year of the war, Liman von Sanders complained in a telegram that he sent to the German Ambassador Count Bernstorff in Istanbul about poor provisions and logistics in the Ottoman armed forces and said that “the number of Turkish deserters is higher today than that of men under arms”.⁸⁵⁵

Whose Problem?

The extent of desertion was so wide and diverse that almost all ethnic and religious groups living in the empire constituted a part of it. The problem has rarely been mentioned in nationalist Turkish historiography, and when dealt with it has usually been attributed to non-Muslim and “non-Turkish” Ottoman subjects, most prominently the Armenians, Greeks and Arabs.⁸⁵⁶ As it will become evident

⁸⁵² Pomianowski, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküşü*, p. 201.

⁸⁵³ BOA, DH.EUM.KLU., 15/37.

⁸⁵⁴ TNA:PRO WO 106/63. The report, besides describing the situation, discusses possible ways of utilising these deserters for British aims.

⁸⁵⁵ The telegram is dated 20 June 1918. See Von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, p. 243.

⁸⁵⁶ For example, this is the approach of the official history of the war written by the Turkish General Staff, which also adds the Kurds to the view: “Arabs, Kurds and Christian elements did not welcome

throughout this chapter, this view is far from reality. In fact, given that Muslim Turks constituted the majority of both the Ottoman population and enlisted men in the armed forces, their case is much more significant.⁸⁵⁷

This study does not deny the claim that there were non-Muslim and Arab deserters from the Ottoman armed forces during the Great War.⁸⁵⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, what usually characterized the Ottoman non-Muslim groups' reaction to the call to arms was reluctance. From the early moments of the declaration of mobilization onwards, draft-evading became a frequently seen problem. Popular culture of the Ottoman Greeks even coined a specific term for their draft-evaders, "the roof battalions" (*tavan taburları*), which described those who hid in the roofs of their buildings to avoid being caught by Ottoman recruitment authorities.⁸⁵⁹ Cases of

the mobilization. While some deserted, some who were at the border regions and nearby deserts escaped abroad." *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, vol. 1: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Siyasi ve Askeri Hazırlıkları ve Harbe Girişi*, p. 230.

⁸⁵⁷ The available statistical information does not tell us much about the exact proportions of different ethnic-religious groups in the Ottoman army. The official military history of the war that was published by the Turkish General Staff only provides data for particular dates and specific units, which are not comprehensive and consistent. According to the account of the Ottoman armed forces on the Sinai-Palestine front, out of about totally 250,000 troops who served on this front for the four years of the war, only "5 to 6 thousands were Arabs and the rest were Turks". See *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi, vol. 4, part 1: Sina-Filistin Cephesi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979), p. 83. Another set of statistics tallied the potential draftees in six corps zones by using not very specified categories of "Turks" and "non-Turks" (see Chapter 3, Table 5). A very rough projection can be made in this respect by assuming that every ethnic or religious group in the empire was represented in the armed forces according to its proportion in the general population of the empire. In this projection, out of about totally 23 million people in early 1914, the approximate ratios of major groups in the Ottoman armed forces would be as follows: 47 percent Turks and Anatolian Muslims, 37 percent Arabs, 8 percent Ottoman Greeks, 7 percent Armenians and 1 percent Jews. However, it should be remembered that there is still no consensus on the demographic statistics of the non-Muslim groups in the late Ottoman Empire. It should also be remembered that as has been discussed in Chapter 3, the Ottoman conscription system worked better in some regions than others, regardless of the demographic characteristic of those regions. This projection is only a rough estimate. For more details on the demographic statistical data, see Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, pp. 188-189; Eldem, *Harp ve Mütareke Yıllarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Ekonomisi*, p. 4; Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi*, pp. 446-449.

⁸⁵⁸ And at least in some regions and at some dates, these deserters could also constitute the majority, as in the case of Teke/Antalya, a sub-province of Konya, where non-Muslim deserters were reported to be in a higher number than the Muslim ones in mid-1917. See BOA, DH.ŞFR., 78/205, 5 Şevval 1335/25 July 1917.

⁸⁵⁹ Haris Spataris, "*Biz İstanbullular Böyleyiz*": *Fener'den Anılar, 1906-1922*, trans. İro Kaplangı, (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2004), p. 148.

Ottoman Greek draft-evaders and deserters constituted a recurrent section especially in Istanbul newspapers.⁸⁶⁰ There were also various “semi-legal” ways of avoiding service, which were mostly resorted by Ottoman Greeks and Armenians, such as acquiring a passport of a foreign country (most frequently Greece and Russia) or traveling abroad (usually Egypt and the USA) and staying there long enough to evade draft.⁸⁶¹ Another tactic was getting a fake medical report to declare oneself unfit for military service, which, it seems, was quite popular among Ottoman Jews.⁸⁶² There were also documented cases of non-Muslim desertions, as in the case of some Armenians deserting from the Caucasus front, many of whom participated as volunteers in the Russian army.⁸⁶³ Similarly, cases of Arab desertions were not only

⁸⁶⁰ See, for example, “Asker Kaçakları”, *İkdâm*, 8 Ağustos 1330/21 August 1914.

⁸⁶¹ Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844-1918”, p. 89; Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, pp. 145-146.

⁸⁶² Lexander Aaronsohn, *Türk Ordusuyla Filistin’de: Bir Yahudi Askerin I. Dünya Savaşı Notları*, trans. Necmettin Alkan (Istanbul: Selis, 2003), p. 45. Moreover, malingering was also a common method to avoid service during the war. Apparently, feigning mental illness was particularly frequent in this respect. See Liz Behmoaras (ed.), *Mazhar Osman: Kapalı Kutudaki Fırtına*, fourth edition (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2001), p. 178. However, mental illnesses actually constituted a serious problem in the Ottoman army during the war, although Ottoman medical authorities tended to underrate it. On this topic, see Yücel Yanıkdağ, “Ottoman Psychiatry and the Great War,” in *Beiruter Texte und Studien: The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean*, edited by Olaf Farschid, Manfred Kropp, Stephan Dahne (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2006), pp. 163-78.

⁸⁶³ Stefanos Yerasimos, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Ermeni Sorunu*, p. 13. Stanford Shaw says that there were as many as 10,000 Armenian volunteers fighting in the Russian army, about half of whom were Ottoman subjects. Shaw, *Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, pp. 93-105. In fact, it can even be said that this point is “over-documented” in Turkish nationalist historiography to strengthen the position of the Turkish official thesis in the debate of the Armenian question of 1915. See, for example, a recent compilation of documents by the Turkish General Staff, *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri, 1914-1918/Armenian Activities in the Archive Documents, 1914-1918*, 6 vols. (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2005).

mentioned in Turkish sources,⁸⁶⁴ but also in accounts by German officers⁸⁶⁵ and other foreigner participants in the Ottoman army.⁸⁶⁶

On the other hand, whereas such examples of draft-evading and desertion for non-Muslim and non-Turkish groups can certainly be multiplied, easy generalizations should equally be avoided. There are also counter examples that allow us to suggest that the picture is actually more complicated than the one-dimensional observations made in the nationalist versions of Ottoman-Turkish historiography. For example, even after the 1915 deportation and massacres, many Armenian enlisted men continued to fight in the Ottoman army until the end of the war, as in the case of Garabet Haçeryan, a doctor-captain who served on the Dardanelles front; he was even decorated for his distinguished service during the war.⁸⁶⁷ Similarly, a huge subversion of the Arabs in the Ottoman army, as had been expected by the British Arab Bureau, never happened, even after the Sharif Hussein's revolt in 1916. No Arab units of the Ottoman army came over to Hussein.⁸⁶⁸ As David Fromkin has observed, many Arab soldiers continued to demonstrate loyalty not only to Islam but also to the Ottoman government. "A British Intelligence memorandum based on interviews with captured Arabic-speaking officers in prisoner-of-war camps reported that most of the officers actually

⁸⁶⁴ BOA, DH.EUM.KLH., 5/56, 14 Safer 1334/22 December 1915. This point is also mentioned in various memoirs of the soldiers participated in the war. See, for example, Cemil Filmer, *Hatıralar* (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1984), p. 68.

⁸⁶⁵ See, for example, Hans Guhr, *Anadolu'dan Filistin'e Türklerle Omuz Omuz*, trans. Eşref Bengi Özbilen, (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), pp. 144, 211.

⁸⁶⁶ See, for example, the memoirs of Venezuelan fortune soldier/officer Rafael de Nogales, *Four Years beneath the Crescent*, p. 309.

⁸⁶⁷ Dora Sakayan (ed.), *Bir Ermeni Doktorun Yaşadıkları: Garabet Haçeryan'ın İzmir Güncesi*, trans. Atilla Tuygan (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2005). For more about Armenian enlisted men serving on the Dardanelles front, see Çöl, *Bir Erin Anıları*, p. 25.

⁸⁶⁸ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), p. 219.

supported the Young Turks, and that even the minority who did not were ‘unable to square their consciences with a military revolt in the face of the enemy’”.⁸⁶⁹

The issue of desertion and its particularities in each of the above-mentioned groups living in the Ottoman Empire require a separate in-depth research, which is outside the scope of this chapter. This study rather focuses on the Anatolian Muslim population (which included mostly Turkish, but also Kurdish and smaller Laz and Circassian elements) and argues that this section of Ottoman society, which was the backbone of the Ottoman army, constituted a significant part of the desertion problem during the war. Given the lack of detailed statistics on the issue, it is really difficult to determine exactly how many of 500,000 deserters were Anatolian Muslim and how many were other groups. But to determine this is not the goal of this study, nor there would be much point in comparing the desertion ratios of different ethnic and religious groups. By “significant” I only mean that the share of the Anatolian Muslim population in desertions was large enough to create a major social issue out of a military problem. I intend to show that there emerged considerable resistance to military service on the part of the very backbone of the armed forces.

This argument can also be supported by various specific statistical examples. For instance, according to a report on deserters within the province of Aydın covering the dates from the beginning of mobilization (2 August 1914) to June 1916, out of a total of 49,228 deserters the majority was constituted by Muslims, which amounted to 28,950 (See Table 10).

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 209-210. Out of total 57,084 combat dead on the Dardanelles front, 914 were the natives of the Arab provinces. See Veysi Akin, “Çanakkale Şehitleri”, in Mustafa Demir (ed.), *Çanakkale Savaşları Tarihi*, vol. 4 (Istanbul: Değişim Yayınevi, 2008), p. 2346.

Table 10
Deserters in Aydın from 2 August 1914 to June 1916⁸⁷⁰

<i>Grand Total</i>	<i>Deserters within the country who are still fugitive</i>			<i>Deserters who escaped abroad</i>			<i>Deserters who were captured</i>		
	Total	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Total	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Total	Non-Muslim	Muslim
49,238	14,529	3,156	10,571	4,868	4,868	0	29,841	12,552	18,379

Similarly, an interesting example on the deserters and prisoners of war who were captured by the British forces between 31 October 1917 and 24 November 1917 suggests that Arab soldiers (as well as Greeks, Jews and Armenians) serving in the Ottoman Army did not surrender in disproportionate numbers. According to the this British report, out of total 7233 Ottoman prisoners and deserters, 64 percent were Turks, 27 percent were Arabs and 9 percent were Greeks, Armenians and Jews.”⁸⁷¹ According to another British statistics issued from the Egyptian Expeditionary Force just after the war ended, out of total 453 deserters in their hands 297 were Turks, 42 were Arabs, 37 were Greeks, 4 were Jews, and 71 were described as “others” (which probably included mainly Armenians and Kurds).⁸⁷²

On the other hand, the problem of desertion was not confined to privates. Officers sometimes deserted too, even though examples of officer-deserters are not that many. But an interesting example from the province of Aydın shows that officers sometimes not only deserted from the army, but they also joined the armed bands of deserter-brigands.⁸⁷³

⁸⁷⁰ BOA, DH.EUM.6.ŞB., 9/8, 8 Zilkade 1334/6 September 1916. The Province of Aydın included at this date the sub-provinces of İzmir (centre of the province), Aydın, Denizli and Saruhan (Manisa).

⁸⁷¹ Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness*, p. 129.

⁸⁷² *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War (1914-1920)* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1922), p. 633.

⁸⁷³ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 89/185, 19 Şevval 1336/28 July 1918; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 90/27, 26 Şevval 1336/4 August 1918.

Reasons of Desertions: Explained and Implied

In trying to explain the reasons of high number of desertions in the Ottoman army, two main sets of document help us. The first set consists of memoirs-dairies of various middle and high ranking Ottoman officers who participated in the combat and witnessed the actual war conditions. The contents of such writings, which are almost always written and published after the war, vary from person to person. While all of them contain valuable observation and information about various aspects of the war, the memoirs of high ranking officers usually sound like a report or sometimes they take a form of apology and justification of their deeds during the war. Those of middle and lower ranking officers are more spontaneous and present the situation without much filtering. Unfortunately, enlisted private soldiers (including the deserters themselves), nearly all illiterate, left us very few written material in this respect. The second set of documents is more archival and mainly consists of the interrogation reports of captured deserters. I use both Ottoman documents in which captured Ottoman deserters were interrogated by Ottoman authorities, and British documents in which captured or surrendered Ottoman deserters were interrogated by British authorities. As an enemy of the Ottomans, the British view allows us to approach the issue from a different perspective and sometimes helps to fill the gaps in the picture drawn entirely from the Ottoman side. Although such interrogations were put into a written form by the interrogator (not the deserter himself) and the questions asked were chosen again by the interrogating authorities, these documents still provide us the records which came closest to the voice of deserters. Other than these main sets, official correspondence and intelligence reports about the issue (on both Ottoman and British sides) also present significant information.

Among many reasons of desertions, physical and mental exhaustion, because of the lengthened war under dire conditions, stands out as a major one, which is most commonly expressed by deserters in the form of complaining about insufficient food rations, poor clothing and disease. The fact is quite clear that as the attrition of the already meagre resources of the country intensified towards the end of the war, the conditions on the battlefield became less endurable for the soldier. But while this phenomenon is definitely undeniable and there are many examples supporting it, one has to be cautious not to look for an ever-present positive correlation between worsening conditions on the battlefield and desertions. And the evolution of the problem from the beginning of the war to the end sometimes followed a line with ups and downs, rather than a simple straight line. The factor of defeat and hopelessness resulting from the prolongation of the war (or, in other words, the feeling that defeat is unavoidable) should also be taken into consideration in this respect. The general picture suggests that "defeatism" definitely played a major role in increasing desertions, though deserters, who were understandably more concerned with more concrete and direct factors affecting their lives, rarely mentioned it. The available evidence shows that most desertions from the Ottoman army occurred under conditions of defeat on the Caucasus front in 1915 and the Palestine front in 1918. Among the archival and secondary sources that have been studied for this study the fewest examples of desertions appeared on the Dardanelles front in 1915, where the Ottomans were victorious. Though not entirely absent, desertions, at least in the more tightly-control areas of the peninsula, do not appear to have been a significant problem for the Ottoman Army at Gallipoli.⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁷⁴ Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness*, p. 63.

Perhaps related to the defeat factor, the fear of death or getting wounded must certainly have played an important role too, although it was infrequently and indirectly mentioned by deserters. When they had to hint on this, they chose to use a very indirect language to express it. For example, in a British military intelligence report, some deserters stated that “the Turkish armament was inferior to that of the Russians” and they gave this, together with short rations, as the reason for their desertion.⁸⁷⁵

In British military intelligence reports, many captured Ottoman deserters mentioned insufficient food rations and hunger as the main reason of their desertions. The British observed that “bad food and disgust at the war are the reasons always given for desertions”.⁸⁷⁶ In fact, Ottoman military authorities themselves were quite aware that this situation was one of the main problems causing desertions. Ali Fuat Cebesoy, an Ottoman staff officer during the war, stated in a military historical study of the war that many desertions stemmed “not from the lack of patriotism of the Ottoman soldier”, but from unbearable conditions and misery that had become persistent with the prolonged war, and, therefore, “one should not be surprised at the increasing number of desertions under these circumstances”.⁸⁷⁷ Another Ottoman officer, İbrahim Sorguç, who fought on the Palestine front, gave a large coverage in his memoirs to poor food and clothing conditions on the front, which became even worse towards the end of the war. He attributed the reason for the decisive defeat on the Palestine front to these dire conditions. Like Cebesoy, he did not question “the courage and heroism of the Turkish soldier” because of the huge amount of

⁸⁷⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157/703, March-April 1916.

⁸⁷⁶ TNA:PRO WO 157/800, June 1917.

⁸⁷⁷ Ali Fuat Cebesoy, *Büyük Harpte Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun 1916-1917 Yılındaki Vaziyeti: Birsüssebi-Gazze Meydan Muharebesi ve Yirminci Kolordu* (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1938), p. 18.

desertions, but complained that such soldierly qualities could become useless, because a hungry and barefoot soldier would not be able to fight.⁸⁷⁸

This “heroism” or “patriotism” was not given, but actually depended on the endurance level of the soldier facing the actual conditions. It also depended on the continuation of the contractual nature of military service. A few examples demonstrate this situation quite clearly. A deserter on the Dardanelles front, who went to the British side in December 1915, said during his interrogation by the British officers that he deserted because he was tired of the war. He also claimed that their food was insufficient: “Food consisted of a very small loaf, soup, haricot beans, chick peas, fish and grapes.”⁸⁷⁹ On the Mesopotamia front, “an Arab deserter”, who deserted on 25 February 1916, claimed that if he stayed in the service much longer he would have died of hunger⁸⁸⁰, while “a Turkish sergeant”, who deserted from the Palestine front on 25 April 1918, said that the cause of his desertion was bad food.⁸⁸¹ A deserter who surrendered to the British on 9 March 1918 on the same front stated that for five days they had no rations, after which a limited amount of bread was served. He also expressed that “there was some disturbance among the men on this account, and an officer threatened to shoot those who cause[d] it. They used to supplement their rations with any cattle they could commandeer”.⁸⁸²

While there is no shortage of examples of deserters complaining about food shortage on all major fronts and in each year of the war, the intensity of the problem increased remarkably in the second half of the war, particularly during 1918. Poor

⁸⁷⁸ *İbrahim Sorguç'un Anıları, İstiklal Harbi Hatıratı*, edited by Erdoğan Sorguç (İzmir: İzmir Yayıncılık, 1995), pp. 43-44.

⁸⁷⁹ TNA:PRO WO 157/700, December 1915-January 1916.

⁸⁸⁰ TNA:PRO WO 157/703, March-April 1916.

⁸⁸¹ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁸⁸² TNA:PRO WO 157/725, March 1918.

agricultural harvest due to lack of laborforce and seed, and inadequate transportation facilities contributed to the severity of the problem of food shortage on all fronts towards the last year of the war, when the British forces began to have the upper hand in battles against the Ottomans in Palestine. Accordingly, although we do not have exact statistics, the existing examples suggest that the number of desertions in Palestine in 1918 was much higher than that of other years and other fronts .

A comparison between an Ottoman soldier's ration in March 1918 on the Palestine front and his peace-time ration in March 1914 strikingly reveals the extent to which the provisioning situation had deteriorated in the last year of the war. According to a British military intelligence report based on captured Ottoman documents, the Ottoman soldier's peace-time daily ration in March 1914 was as follows:

- 900 grams of bread
- 600 grams of biscuits
- 250 grams of meat
- 150 grams of bulgur (cracked wheat porridge)
- 20 grams of cooking butter
- 20 grams of salt

(Extra rations: Molasses, coffee, tea, bread and curds. These may be replaced by Tahin Helva, a sweetmeat made of sesame and molasses. There was also a generous allowance of fuel and soap.)

However, the average daily ration of the Ottoman soldier on the Palestine front in March 1918 was only 500-600 grams of bread, with a little wheat porridge and perhaps a few vegetables; meat was rarely issued, and in very small quantities. A further comparison of this with the daily ration of the British soldier on the same front in 1918 is still more striking, and presents a good fact about the disadvantageous situation of Ottoman troops in a war of attrition against the enemy.

The daily ration of a British soldier was as follows:

- 336 grams or $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. fresh meat
- 446 grams or 1 lb. bread

112 grams or 4 oz. bacon
84 grams or 3 oz. jam
84 grams or 3 oz. sugar
56 grams or 2 oz. vegetables; with tea, milk, salt, etc., and extra issues.⁸⁸³

Next to the shortage of food, insufficient clothing also played an important role in undermining the Ottoman troops' endurance against dire conditions on the battlefield. The extent of the problem was apparently so wide that not only privates, but also officers and even unit commanders had suffered from it. When soldiers had to fight in extreme cold (as in winter in the Caucasus) or extreme heat (as in the Arabian Desert), the suffering was much more severe. Liman von Sanders complained in 1918 that the clothing of the troops was so bad that many officers under his command wore ragged uniforms, and even some battalion commanders had to wear rawhide sandals (*çarık*) instead of boots.⁸⁸⁴ British military intelligence reports also include some examples of deserters mentioning this problem among their reasons for desertion. "A Turkish soldier" who deserted on 4 March 1918 from the Palestine front, and who had served as an army cook and butcher, stated that there had been no renewals of clothing or boots for many months.⁸⁸⁵ Another deserter, who was interrogated by the British in late February 1918, complained that there had been no boots available to distribute to the troops for the last eleven months, and "yellow hide slippers tied with thongs are issued instead, and worn without socks". He also expressed that there was a great shortage of leather in Istanbul and the price of a single pair of boots increased remarkably.⁸⁸⁶ This shortage seems to have led Ottoman troops to steal from the enemy. An Ottoman prisoner of war under British

⁸⁸³ TNA:PRO WO 157/727, May 1918.

⁸⁸⁴ Von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, p. 243.

⁸⁸⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157/725, March 1918.

⁸⁸⁶ According the information given by him, the price of one pair of boots at this time was 16 *Mecidiyes* (about 3 British Pounds). TNA:PRO WO 157/725, March 1918.

captivity claimed that he saw fifty British prisoners near Nablus in December 1917, who went barefoot, “as the Turks had stolen their boots”.⁸⁸⁷

Poor feeding and clothing conditions, which undermined the immune system of soldiers, contributed to the increase of epidemic diseases among the troops. Casualty figures show that the Ottoman military medical care system had a hard time in coping with such epidemic diseases as dysentery, typhus and malaria. A recent study of disease in the Ottoman army estimated that around 400,000 men died during the war because of contagious diseases. This remarkably high number amounts to about 13 percent of the total men enlisted during the war.⁸⁸⁸ Therefore, not surprisingly, deserters often complained in their interrogations about diseases and lack of medical care. For example, a deserter who escaped from the Kut al-Amara region on the Mesopotamia front said that there was much sickness among the troops on the front.⁸⁸⁹

Bad treatment of enlisted men by their officers was another important factor about which deserters frequently complained. It is understood from deserters’ statements that beating was the most common form of maltreatment in the Ottoman army during the war.⁸⁹⁰ Of course, it is difficult to assess how widespread it was within the army, since there is always the possibility that interrogated deserters tended to exaggerate their sufferings on the front with the intention of benefiting from clemency and good treatment under captivity. But deserters were not the only ones talking about such maltreatments. Various Turkish officers, who fought in the

⁸⁸⁷ TNA:PRO WO 157/725, March 1918.

⁸⁸⁸ Özdemir, *Salgın Hastalıklardan Ölümler, 1914-1918*, pp. 132-153. Ahmed Emin Yalman estimated a higher number of deaths as 466,759, while the Ottoman military hospital records give a slightly lower number as 388,000.

⁸⁸⁹ TNA:PRO WO 157/703, March-April 1916.

⁸⁹⁰ Insensitive handling by superiors was a common problem in other armies too. German and British deserters on the Western Front also often mentioned it as a major factor prompting them to escape. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 113.

war and did not desert, also mentioned this practice in their memoirs. Faik Tonguç, who served on the Caucasus front as a reserve officer, was one of them. He admitted in his memoirs that although he condemned the act of beating as an inhuman and outdated method of discipline before going to the front, the cruelty of war had made him “learn to beat men harshly”. He justified this act by stating that this was the only way to discipline the uneducated and untrained peasant boys, a method which was more effective than lecturing them with a religious discourse.⁸⁹¹

A deserter from the Dardanelles front complained that “soldiers were beaten by their officers on the slightest provocation.”⁸⁹² Although one can guess, as the case of Faik Tonguç suggests, that the Anatolian Muslim peasant soldier was not immune from maltreatment such as beating, the available evidence, mostly from British military intelligence records, shows that non-Muslim and Arab deserters lay much more stress on this problem. In British interrogation reports, some non-Muslim and Arab deserters gave maltreatment as the major reason of their desertions. For example, an Armenian officer, who became a prisoner of war in May 1918, claimed that “every offence committed by an Armenian in the army is harshly dealt with”. He further claimed that Armenians in the Ottoman army “can only be promoted to second lieutenant, except doctors, who are captains, and chemists, who are first lieutenants.”⁸⁹³

Documents, especially those related to the Palestine front in 1918, also demonstrate that the Arab deserters, officers and privates alike, complained about maltreatment even more intensively than the non-Muslim ones. According to an

⁸⁹¹ Tonguç, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Bir Yedek Subayın Anıları*, pp. 107-108. For a similar “transformation” in another reserve officer, see Ögütçü (ed.), *Abdülkadir Kemali Bey'in Anıları*, p. 184.

⁸⁹² TNA:PRO WO 157-700, December 1915, January 1916

⁸⁹³ TNA:PRO WO 157-727, May 1918.

Arab officer, who deserted in April 1918 from on the Palestine front, one of the three major reasons why men deserted was bad treatment by officers (the other ones being the idea that war will never end and shortage of rations).⁸⁹⁴ A prisoner of war, an officer who was captured on 10 March 1918 on the Palestine front (whose ethnic origin is not given), stated that the Arabs were ill-treated, which was generally the cause of their desertion.⁸⁹⁵ An Arab cadet officer, who deserted on 18 April 1918, expressed that “Arab officers in the Turkish Army are badly treated, being passed over in favor of Turks for promotion and command. A Turkish second lieutenant is sometimes put over an Arab Captain.”⁸⁹⁶ Another Arab deserter from the Mesopotamia front claimed that Turks and Arabs were on bad terms, complaining that “the Turks supported their officers whenever there was any friction and maltreated the Arabs who consequently deserted in considerable numbers”.⁸⁹⁷

This last case also suggests that relations among soldiers of different ethnic and religious groups within the Ottoman armed forces might have been as hateful as the treatment coming from superior officers. The diary of an Ottoman medical corporal Ali Rıza (Eti) Efendi, who served on the Caucasus front, presents an interesting example in this respect. He wrote that as Turkish soldiers saw many Armenian volunteers fighting on the enemy side against them and heard stories about the Armenians among their own ranks collaborating with Russians. As a result the hate against the Armenian soldiers reached such a high point that “every day in each battalion, Turkish soldiers shot a few Armenians during fighting, as if it happened

⁸⁹⁴ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁸⁹⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157/725, March 1918.

⁸⁹⁶ TNA:PRO WO 157-727, May 1918.

⁸⁹⁷ TNA:PRO WO 157/703, March-April 1916.

accidentally”.⁸⁹⁸ The same kind of hatred had apparently overwhelmed him too, although his many comments on various aspects of the war could be said to be quite humanist. He straightforwardly expressed that he thought revengefully about poisoning a couple of Armenians in the military hospital where he served.⁸⁹⁹ But, apparently, he did not do it, as he does not mention anything in the diary that would hint that he did so.

Accusations by Arab soldiers against the Ottoman military authorities sometimes took a form of propaganda, to which the Ottomans sometimes needed to respond at an official level. A document in the Ottoman Foreign Ministry archives contains an interesting case in this respect. In 1917, an Arab deserter, who served as an officer in the Ottoman army on the Caucasus front, made a claim in an Egyptian newspaper (*El Kofkat*) that Arabs were maltreated by the Turkish officers. Reportedly, he further claimed that a Turkish officer killed 18 Arab officers, and the Arab division on the front, which had 17,000 men at the beginning, decreased to 300-400 men, as its Arab soldiers were killed by the Turks.⁹⁰⁰ The Ottoman authorities were informed about the news by the Hague consulate, which received it via Reuters. Then the Ottoman General Staff requested the Third Army headquarters to make an investigation about the claim. A response was issued, undersigned by Enver Pasha, condemning that the claim was entirely a lie concocted by the Egyptian newspaper.⁹⁰¹

⁸⁹⁸ “Günde beher taburdan üç beş Ermeniye kaza’ en vuruyorlar”. Ali Rıza (Eti) Efendi, *Harb-i Umumide Hatırat-ı Askeriyem: Eğin’den İtibaren Hatırat-ı Askeriyem*, edited by İ. Gönül Eti and Murat Koraltürk (Istanbul: n.p., 2007), p. 126.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁹⁰⁰ BOA, HR.SYS., 2440/16, 03 September 1917.

⁹⁰¹ BOA, HR.SYS., 2448/17, 13 February 1918.

On the other hand, discrimination regarding maltreatment was not limited to non-Muslim and Arab soldiers. We also encounter Turkish deserters complaining about discrimination against them in favor of German soldiers in the Ottoman army. It is also apparent in British reports that the British authorities took this situation no less seriously than the complaints made by non-Muslim and Arab deserters. “A Turkish sergeant-major”, who deserted on 4 August 1918 from the Palestine front and was described by the British as “educated and intelligent”, stated that “he would be willing to die for his country, but that he considered he had no country left. The Turk is now the slave of the German who takes everything for himself. How can a man have any patriotic feelings left? Neither he nor his three comrades who deserted with him ever intend to return to Turkey.”⁹⁰² The same observation is also supported by an Arab deserter on the same front and year, who was similarly described by the British as “intelligent”; he claimed that “the Turkish troops are quite convinced that the Germans get the best food and treatment”.⁹⁰³ A general comment made by British intelligence officers, which was based on such statements, summarizes the situation succinctly:

The Turkish soldier, even more than the Turkish people at large, dislikes the Germans, as he sees the superior treatment offered by the Turkish Authorities to the German soldiers, and his indignation knows no bounds when he sees that there are no German units fighting side by side with him, while he knows that many Turkish units were decimated while fighting for the Germans in Galicia and Rumania. Quarrels are frequent between German and Turkish soldiers. In Damascus, informant saw Turkish soldiers at the instigation of their own officer attacking the men of a German Transport unit.⁹⁰⁴

However, discrimination also existed in the British attitude towards deserters from the Ottoman army. The available documents show that British authorities chose

⁹⁰² TNA: PRO WO 157-735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁰³ TNA: PRO WO 157-735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁰⁴ TNA:PRO WO 157-727, May 1918

to make two different general categories of deserters, “Turkish deserters” on the one hand, and “Arab, Armenian, Greek and Jewish deserters” (namely “non-Turkish”) on the other. Their treatment of them was not equal. It can be said that they saw the second category of deserters as potentially more “harmless” and more helpful for the British military purposes than the first. A military intelligence report, which formulated a policy regarding the treatment of deserters in the British hands, specified that Turkish deserters were “to be evacuated without exception as prisoners of war”, while “Arab, Armenian, Greek, and Jewish deserters, who are to be examined by Intelligence Corps Officers, and, if inhabitants of Occupied Enemy Territory, and considered harmless, are to be released and allowed to remain in or return to their villages”.⁹⁰⁵ The British also offered the deserters in the second category the choice that if they were willing to work for them, they would be sent to the nearest headquarters of the Egyptian Labour Corps, with a note on their disposal sheet that would expedite their release. Moreover, if a non-Muslim or Arab deserter appeared to be able to provide any useful contribution to units on the battlefield such as working as “a guide or to point out gun positions”, an application would be made to the nearest intelligence corps officer to employ him for such a purpose.⁹⁰⁶ A British comment on prisoners of war demonstrates how the discriminatory attitude of the British towards Turks, Arabs and non-Muslims turned into a biased precautionary measure. This comment, which was actually intelligence advice addressing interrogation officers warned that “Turkish officer prisoners of war seldom give

⁹⁰⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157-722, December 1917

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

information of any real value and may attempt to mislead their captors...Arabs and Christian officer prisoners of war are more likely to give useful information”.⁹⁰⁷

On the other hand, not all the reasons of desertion were related to the conditions on the battlefield. Soldiers were not fighting machines lacking any private relationship with the outside world. On the contrary, they had families and loved ones left behind, whose memories always remained vivid on the front. When the war became prolonged and the duration of being away from home was counted in years, the concern and worry of soldiers about their loved ones could reach an unbearable point. The Ottoman military’s policy of giving leave to the soldier on the front was quite tight during the war. Mentioning that not a single soldier had been granted leave in the first two years of the war, Ali Fuat Cebesoy saw this problem as one of the main reasons of desertions from the Ottoman army.⁹⁰⁸ The view that soldiers’ staying away from their homes for years without even getting any letters from their loved ones undermined their endurance capacity and belief in victory was also shared by other Ottoman commanders.⁹⁰⁹ The leave problem was a source of tension, because “leave was more than just a respite for war-weary troops; it was also a chance to reaffirm their humanity, to express their identities as members of families and coherent communities”.⁹¹⁰ Moreover, when granted, the duration of leave was often not long enough to satisfy the soldiers’ need, as it is obvious from documents

⁹⁰⁷ TNA:PRO WO 157/711, December 1916. An Ottoman document dated 4 July 1914 also states that the British treated the Muslim prisoners of war differently according their ethnic origin. The document says that the British separated Muslim prisoners into groups such as Turkish, Arab and Kurdish, and they sent them to different camps in India. The document claims that the British treated the Turkish prisoners of war badly while they offered faired treatment to the Arabs. See *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 117 (January 2004), document no. 57, p. 159.

⁹⁰⁸ Cebesoy, *Büyük Harpte Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun 1916-1917 Yılındaki Vaziyeti*, p. 18.

⁹⁰⁹ Hüseyin Hüsnu Emir (Erkilet), *Yıldırım* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2002), p. 24.

⁹¹⁰ David Englander, “Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917-1918”, in Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, p. 137.

that a considerable portion of desertions actually consisted of those who overstayed their leaves.⁹¹¹

Especially when soldiers received bad news about their loved ones, desperation and worry could lead them to desert even if they were quite enduring to other dire conditions mentioned above. The overwhelming majority of Ottoman soldiers were illiterate, and correspondence with loved ones was minimal. But there were other channels available for receiving news, such as incoming enlisted men from a soldier's hometown. Soldiers could also get information about their families when they passed through their own provinces or nearby towns during transferring from one front to the other. The case of Sergeant Receb of Ödemiş, who served in the military hospital in Izmir, represents a good example in this respect. He deserted on 18 February 1916, when he received news of his father-in-law's death from patients who had just arrived at the hospital from his hometown of Ödemiş (a district of Aydın). When he was captured and interrogated, he stated that he deserted because the news saddened him too much and he became worried about his children who had been under the care of his father-in-law.⁹¹² Similarly, Private Ömer of Yalvaç (a district of Konya), who overstayed his leave, mentioned the death of his mother as the reason of his desertion.⁹¹³

The Deserter and His "Life-Style"

How did a deserter survive after deserting? What kinds of difficulties awaited him as a deserter? Was there a specific life-style that a deserter adapted to haphazardly?

⁹¹¹ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 79/50, 17 Şevval 1335.

⁹¹² ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-1; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-7.

⁹¹³ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-73.

How did civilians react to deserters when they faced them? Was a deserter a complete outcast in Ottoman society? Since the voice of the Ottoman deserter hardly left a documentary trail, we need to compile answers to such questions from other people's comments. Interrogation records, the only channel which gives us limited direct access to the deserter's voice, focus almost entirely on the act of deserting and largely omit the experiences of the deserter afterwards. Therefore, they are not very helpful in drawing a picture about the life of a deserter. Any picture that could be taken from them will be quite incomplete, since they deal with the captured deserters. There were many deserters who did not get captured, and some captured ones also spent quite a long time as fugitives before they surrendered to or were caught by authorities. Official documents of both military and civilian authorities, which approached the issue as a security problem, are the only available sources in this respect. But interestingly, beneath the official discourse in treating the issue of desertion, they also contain many significant details about the practical aspects of the matter.

The first impression one gets from these documents is that the major problem connected to desertion was brigandage (*şekâvet*). This is no surprise, for deserters have always been “natural material for banditry” in all societies.⁹¹⁴ Desertion and brigandage during the Great War were so intertwined that Ottoman documents almost always mention these two words together, as if they were synonymous.⁹¹⁵ For a deserter running away from the law and with no chance of getting steady work to provide for himself, brigandage was really the only alternative for survival. Yet,

⁹¹⁴ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, revised edition (New York: The New Press, 2000), p. 38.

⁹¹⁵ There is no shortage of such documents about deserter-brigands in the Ottoman archives. Here is a little selection: BOA, DH.EUM.3.Şb., 6/7, 23 Receb 1333/6 June 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.3.Şb., 20 Şa'ban 1333/3 July 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.3.Şb., 9/46, 19 Zilhicce 1333/28 October 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.3.Şb., 9/47, 21 Zilhicce 1333/30 October 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.3.Şb., 2 Zilkâde 1334/21 August 1916; BOA, DH.EUM.5.Şb., 23/13, 8 Cemâziyelâhir 1334/12 April 1916; BOA, DH.EUM.5.Şb., 32/2, 2 Rebûlevvel 1335/27 December 1916.

while they were closely related, the official perspective on crime always made a difference between desertion and brigandage. A deserter's status was still seen as more redeemable than that of a brigand. First, a Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Vükela*) decision made it clear on 21 April 1918 that desertion was purely a military-legal matter. Even if one committed crimes of both desertion and brigandage, he was first to be tried or indicted at a court martial for desertion, and only then he was to be sent to a judicial civil court to be tried for brigandage.⁹¹⁶ While the act of desertion was never regarded as a lighter crime and at times subjected to summary justice, a deserter, if he did not commit murder, was still seen as a soldier and sometimes could be granted amnesty (as will be discussed below), which meant that he was re-enlisted. Documents imply that the extent of the problem of brigandage was quite large during the war years, which further increased in 1918. A telegram that was sent by the Interior Minister Talat Pasha to all local administrative units on 1 June 1918 complained that, the murders committed by bands of deserter-brigands were occurring in almost every corner of the country, and requested that such crimes should be regularly reported to the ministry.⁹¹⁷ Next to murder, the more routine crimes committed by such bands consisted of pillaging and robbing villagers and townsmen. These took place either in a direct form by using brute force, or via threat.⁹¹⁸ Deserter-brigands extorted from local people not only basic needs such as food and clothing, but also money and other valuables such as jewelry.⁹¹⁹ Local people suffered so much from such abuses at some places that they even considered leaving their villages for more secure places. Some villagers around Bozdoğan, a

⁹¹⁶ BOA, MV., 211/181, 9 Receb 1336/21 April 1918.

⁹¹⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 88/3, 21 Şa'ban 1336/1 June 1918.

⁹¹⁸ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 79/17, 13 Şevval 1335/2 August 1917.

⁹¹⁹ See, for example, BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 32/2, 2 Rebîulevvel 1335/27 December 1916; BOA, DH.ŞFR., 79/17, 13 Şevval 1335/2 August 1917.

district of Aydın, petitioned the government to prevent further “evil acts” (*şer olayları*) committed by the deserter-brigands in the area, and they migrated to the town centre to protect themselves.⁹²⁰

The pillaging of peasants’ harvest concerned the authorities not just as a security issue, but as a major threat to the collection of the *aşar* tax, which was crucial for provisioning the army. A telegram sent by Talat Pasha to Kütahya 31 July 1917 mentioned that the Interior Ministry received a report from the Finance Ministry complaining about abuses caused by bands of deserter-brigands, who not only robbed both the poor and rich, but also made the collection of the *aşar* tax almost impossible. Therefore, the telegram required the local authority to take serious measures as soon as possible to prevent the activities of these bands.⁹²¹

Brigandage was not an activity that was done individually. Whether they were deserters or not, brigands usually composed groups called bands (*çete*), whose number of members varied from a few people to hundreds. Even when documents mention individual names of deserter-brigands rather than bands, they are usually the leaders of such bands. How did a group of deserters gather in a band? It can be said that the major factor in this process was the common ethnic-religious background. The available documents show that most of such bands, or at least the ones that were relatively larger and gave the authorities a hard time, were usually, if not exclusively, ethnically homogeneous groups. Deserters did not always found new bands for brigandage, but they joined those already in existence, whose chiefs they knew through common ethnic ties; these chiefs may or may not have been deserters themselves. Mountainous regions of Anatolia provided shelter for these bands. For example: Şahin Bey was a brigand chief of Albanian origin, who led a band of about

⁹²⁰ BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 14/31, 18 Şa’ban 1334/20 June 1916.

⁹²¹ BOA, DH.ŞFR, 78/262, 11 Şevval 1335/31 July 1917.

60 Albanian horsemen around Bandırma, a district of Bursa/Hüdavendigâr, a province where apparently other Albanian deserter bands also concentrated.⁹²² Halil İbrahim was a “Turkish” band leader near Ödemiş, who headed a band of 80-120 Turks.⁹²³ Kadir the Donkey Rider (*Eşekçi*) was another Turkish brigand chief, who had about 20-30 men in the Bandırma region. Kadri Efe was a Circassian band leader in the same region, who had considerable influence among his fellow countrymen and headed about 80 horsemen.

Some bands might have been ethnically mixed, but still religiously homogeneous, as in the case of the band of Ali Bey, an Albanian, heading a band of 70-80 Circassians and Albanians. Non-Muslim deserters also formed their own bands. For example, “the Brother of Topal Agop” was an Armenian chief hiding in the Amanos Mountain (*Gâvur Dağı*) in the Cilicia region, who led a band of 20-25 Armenians.⁹²⁴ Estaveri was a Greek band leader, who deserted from the army in the Central Black Sea region when mobilization was declared, and came to Adapazarı, a district of İzmit, with his friend Apostol, where, besides brigandage, they discouraged the local Greek male population from joining the army.⁹²⁵

Deserter-brigands were usually associated with mountainous areas that provided good shelter for fugitives running away from government control. This

⁹²² BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 14/52, 23 Ramazan 1334/24 July 1916. In fact, there was a long-established network of brigandage and paramilitary activity in the South Marmara region. Muslim Albanians and Circassians constituted main manpower pool of the bands in the region. Deserters continued to feed such bands in the region. Authorities were not always in conflict with such bands in this region, as they sometimes sought to cooperate with them in mobilizing support from the local population. These bands also turned into potential “patriots” during the early stages of the Turkish National Struggle after the Mudros Armistice. The leaders of the nationalist resistance in Anatolia sought to get their involvement in the resistance against the Greek invasion. The post-armistice Istanbul government also tried to mobilize them against the nationalists. See. Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 55-80.

⁹²³ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹²⁴ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹²⁵ BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 13/15, 11 Receb 1333/25 May 1915.

impression is also supported by many documents talking about deserter bands. However, this is an incomplete picture, because deserters also chose urban and suburban areas to hide and live in, which were usually their hometowns or places near them. For example, correspondence between the Istanbul governorship and the Interior Ministry shows that deserters also sought refuge in and around big cities. The correspondence, which was dated 9 May 1916, mentioned that some 265 deserters were concentrated in Beykoz (a Bosphorous village, now a suburb of Istanbul).⁹²⁶ Similarly, upon a report received from the Mosul judicial inspector (*adliye müfettişi*), the Interior Ministry sent a telegram to Mosul on 17 June 1915, urging the local authority to take necessary steps against deserters, who took refuge not only in the villages but also in the towns of the province.⁹²⁷ Medical Corporal Ali Rıza also mentioned that during the fighting on the Caucasus front, one could see many deserters, most of whom were Armenians, wandering in the city of Kars.⁹²⁸ On the other hand, it must also be emphasized that the problem of desertion did not concern exclusively the land forces. It is true that a great majority of desertions was from the land forces which constituted an overwhelmingly greater part of the Ottoman army compared to the much smaller navy.⁹²⁹ But we have examples showing that desertions also took place in the navy.⁹³⁰

Generally, bands of deserters intimidated local populations across the country, but sometimes deserters themselves could fall prey to brigands. Especially

⁹²⁶ BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 13/55, 1334.B.06.

⁹²⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 54/41, 1333.Ş.4.

⁹²⁸ Ali Rıza Efendi, *Harb-i Umumide Hatırat-ı Askeriyem*, p. 48. Kars was under Russian control at this time.

⁹²⁹ According to Erickson's estimates, the number of total men mobilized for the Ottoman navy was 15,000, while it was 2,608,000 for the army. Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 243.

⁹³⁰ See, for example, BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 15/13, 27 Şa'ban 1333/10 July 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 24/43, 28 Receb 1334/31 May 1916.

when deserters tried to find their way in unfamiliar lands with no arms, they became easy victims in the hands of brigands. A decree by the Bitlis court martial, approved by the sultan on 2 January 1915, presents an interesting case in this respect. The court martial sentenced several brigands to ten years of hard labor (*küreğe konmak*) for robbing deserters. The brigands Ali Kahya bin Hüseyin, Feto bin Ahmed, Hamid bin Said, Mirza bin Şenco and Salih bin Mamo, who were residents of Kulp (a district of Bitlis) and most likely Kurdish, established bands to rob deserters in their region.⁹³¹ Cases of deserters who were robbed also seem to have been frequent on the Sinai-Palestine front, where they became easy prey to bands of Bedouins. This situation also attracted the attention of the British, who observed that “the Turkish soldiers on the Sinai front would desert easily, in spite of the distance and hardship of the Palestine-Anatolia road, if they did not fear the existence of the Bedouin robbers. The wounded Turk, who is forgotten by the Red-Crescent soldiers and remains helpless on the battlefield, will almost certainly be visited by Bedouin robbers.”⁹³²

Many deserters carried off their arms and ammunition, and, therefore, posed a threat to both local people and authorities. Their arms were usually the best of their kinds available in the country, since they were the ones actually used by the army.⁹³³ This also increased the level of their threat. In a telegram sent to the Interior Ministry on 9 July 1916, the governor of Hüdâvendigâr complained that the Albanian deserter bands, particularly the one headed by the above mentioned Ali Bey, had newer and much more effective arms (Mauser rifles) than the ones owned by the local gendarme

⁹³¹ BOA, İ.HB., 164/1333 S-054, 23 Safer 1333/10 January 1915.

⁹³² TNA:PRO WO 157-735, April-September 1918.

⁹³³ Moreover, another way of getting arms and ammunition was smuggling them, which was a method often used by brigand bands in Anatolia before the war, particularly by those in the Aegean region. See Olcay Pullukçuoğlu Yapucu, *Modernleşme Sürecinde Bir Sancak: Aydın* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2007), p. 200. But smuggling must have become very hard during the war years.

units, and requested at least fifty new Mauser rifles.⁹³⁴ Similarly, an Interior Ministry report on the problem of desertion in Pozantı (a sub-district of Adana) expressed that the guns owned by deserters had a longer range than the ones owned by the local gendarmes. The report warned that if deserters were to be caught in this region, this could only be done by providing better guns for the local gendarmes.⁹³⁵ An Ottoman deserter in British hands on the Palestine front, who was a native of İzmir, said during his interrogation that when he was on leave in his hometown a few months ago, the mountains in that district were full of deserters, both officers and enlisted men, who were “well armed and with machine-guns”.⁹³⁶

Besides disrupting the collection of the *aşar* tax, another major problem caused by such armed bands of deserters to the authorities was hindering of recruitment. In doing this, their intention was apparently to use the potential conscripts for their own manpower. Apparently, such bands acted as if they were military units seeking to fill their ranks with newly enlisted men. A British military intelligence report expressed in April 1916 that in the mountainous region around Karaman (a district of Konya), “a large body of deserters has been terrorizing the country, robbing the Turkish population and preventing recruiting”. The report also said that this activity caused the Ottoman authorities much anxiety.⁹³⁷ Concerning deserters with arms, an interesting statement was made by an officer deserter in British hands in 1918: “if a deserter returns to his village in Asia Minor with his rifle and ammunition, he is told to take to the hills, as ‘he will be required in the future’. If

⁹³⁴ TNA:PRO DHEUM.3.ŞB., 14/52, 23 Ramazan 1334/24 July 1916.

⁹³⁵ BOA, DHEUM.VRK.,16/51, 16 Şevval 1334/16 August 1916.

⁹³⁶ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹³⁷ TNA:PRO WO 157/703, March-April 1916.

he arrives without his rifle and ammunition, he is sent back to his unit and told to bring them away with him next time he deserts.”⁹³⁸

Was the relationship between deserters and local populations always in the context of brigandage? Were all deserters brigands? Were deserters always seen as a source of evil by local populations? Did local people always side with authorities in struggling with deserter-brigands? How did local people respond when a deserter came to his own village or hometown? Did local people provide shelter or support for deserters? At popular levels, was there hatred or sympathy against deserters?

Erik Zürcher has asserted that Ottoman deserters “would stay as guests in the villages they moved through” and “the population often sympathised with them”. He has also argued that “this is perhaps the most important difference with the situation in the European countries during World War I.”⁹³⁹ While I can only cautiously support Zürcher’s argument because of the limited nature of the available archival documents, I can still assert that the relationship between deserters and local people was more complex than a simple antagonism which the official discourse wished to represent. There are various cases and reports which strongly imply that deserters sometimes received shelter, support and even encouragement from local people. But, it is equally important to underline that it is not easy to discern how much of this actually stemmed from sympathy and how much from fear, for local civilians were usually helpless against armed bands of deserter-brigands. Sympathy and fear on the part of civilians towards deserter-brigands could often intertwine, because, as Hobsbawm has observed, “where there is no regular or effective machinery for the maintenance of public order” (and this was often the case in the Anatolian countryside during the war) “there is not much point in appealing to the authorities

⁹³⁸ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹³⁹ Zürcher, “Refusing to Serve by Other Means”.

for protection.”⁹⁴⁰ In some cases, the local populace might have also benefited financially from this relationship as deserters sometimes paid for the help and services they received. On the other hand, it should also be emphasized that, as will be discussed later, the intensification of the problem also brought some new factors to the dialogue between the state and local people, in which the former tried to re-mobilize the latter to capture deserters by using various new sanctions and incentives such as the threat of migration, harsh punishment, money rewards, or status promotion with decorations.

A military report, which was written from the commander of the 37th Caucasus Division to the II Caucasus Corps headquarters on 20 June 1917, implies that the support that deserters received on the home front was a serious problem and alarmed the Ottoman military authorities. The report complained that desertions, which “had increasingly become a chronic trouble threatening the general performance of the army”, were supported by some people in the rear regions. The division commander demanded harsh punishment for such people who aided the deserters.⁹⁴¹

Some deserters could go directly to their villages and stay there for a long time till their presence became known. It was the deserters’ very own household that provided shelter and support in these cases. Such examples suggest that both deserters’ families and fellow villagers either sympathized with their situation or preferred to condone it. For instance, a deserter by the name of Ahmed, son of Hasan, who deserted from the Muş mobile gendarme battalion, said in his interrogation statement on 7 December 1916 that he deserted because he was sick, and he went home in his village, where he stayed for as long as six months, until he

⁹⁴⁰ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, pp. 96-97.

⁹⁴¹ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2880, Dosya 323, Fihrist 3.

was caught by the gendarmes.⁹⁴² In another interesting case, private Şakir, son of İmamoğlu Hüseyin from the Şarkıkaraağaç (a district of Konya) deserted three times and, at each time, he insistently went to his village. But each time, he stayed about ten days, a significantly shorter time period compared to that of the above-mentioned Ahmed. According to his statement on 27 November 1916, in his first two desertions, his uncle informed the gendarmerie and turned him in to government; the last time, he surrendered on his own to benefit from the sultan's amnesty issued for all deserters.⁹⁴³

Civilian support for deserters did not only come from ordinary people, but sometimes from local administrative officials as well. For example, a village *muhtar* in Siird, Hacı Ahmed bin Osman, was sentenced on 20 April 1915 to three years' hard labor for "facilitating desertions of enlisted men".⁹⁴⁴ Since village *muhtars* were actually key and primary local officials who were to provide the state with the most helpful and direct information in capturing deserters, their support for deserters seems to have alarmed the authorities. The reasons for providing support to deserters by such people in charge as village *muhtars* usually included having a kinship or tribal tie with deserters, or they benefited financially. In another case, a resident of Konya, Hacı Mustafa, informed the War Ministry by a telegram that a sub-district director (*nahiye müdürü*) in the province, by the name of Tursun Ağa, let deserters free in return for a certain amount of money (300 liras a month) from them.⁹⁴⁵ Sometimes such bribes for freedom were given not directly by deserters, but by their relatives or patrons. For example, Hacı Adem from Silvan, a district of Diyarbekir,

⁹⁴² ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2325, Dosya 82, Fihrist 1-4.

⁹⁴³ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-110.

⁹⁴⁴ BOA, İHB., 168/1333 C-018, 5 Cemâziyelâhir 1333/20 April 1915.

⁹⁴⁵ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 87/180, 7 Şa'ban 1336/18 May 1918.

was accused of bribing the gendarmes to free deserters. The court found him guilty and sentenced him to three years' imprisonment for this crime on 26 February 1916; the related document does not mention what ties he had with the deserters in question.⁹⁴⁶ A more serious case in this respect took place in Kangal, a district of Sivas. Danecioğlu Veli, who was from the Ceviz village of the district, was accused not only of bribing the local gendarme unit commander for giving up pursuing the deserters in his village, but also of giving a false statement so as to hide deserters who were hiding in the village. Three more people of the same village, Süleyman, Mustafa and Bektaş, were also accused of giving false statements for the same purpose. They were all found guilty. While Danecioğlu Veli was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, each of the rest was imprisoned for one month.⁹⁴⁷

Turkish writer Bekir Eliçin's novel, *Onlar Savaşırken* [While They Fight], presents a very interesting example of a village *muhtar*, Alâettin Efendi, who exploited deserters hiding in his village for his pecuniary interests. The novel focuses on desertion as a social issue in an Anatolian village milieu during the ten-year war period from the end of the Balkan War through the Great War to the end of the Independence War. The story takes place in the Genezin village of Avanos, a district of Ankara. The village is also where the writer was born in 1912 and raised, and the novel includes many valuable documentary points on desertion. Alâettin Efendi forced two village households, one for hiding a husband and the other for hiding a son deserter, to give bribes in return for not reporting the deserters to the gendarmerie. These bribes could be in various forms, such as paper money, jewelry and sometimes sexual favors provided by the deserters' wives. The *muhtar* even formed a small band under his control, composed of a few deserters, which he used

⁹⁴⁶ BOA, İ.HB., 168/1333 C-42, 11 Cemâziyelâhir 1333/20 April 1915.

⁹⁴⁷ BOA, İ.HB., 169/1333 B-003, 2 Receb 1333/16 May 1915.

for brigandage and as a force of threat. Turning desertion into business, Alâettin Efendi worked with and received support from a local notable, Mehmet Efendi, and from the chief of the recruiting office in Avanos. This triangle of interest among a village *muhtar*, a local notable and a government official seems to have been what made business activities out of deserters last almost without interruption throughout the ten-year war period.⁹⁴⁸

Exploiting deserters for money was not limited to civil administrators and military commanders. There were also others who saw helping deserters as an economic opportunity and, thus, tried to turn it into a business. The boatman Topaloğlu Hüseyin from Rize, a sub-province of Trabzon, was one of them. He was accused of smuggling deserters with his boat from the Black Sea coast of Anatolia to the coast of Caucasus in return for money. The Tbilisi consulate general informed the Ottoman Foreign Ministry that Topaloğlu Hüseyin carried about twenty armed deserters on his boat from the Eastern Black Sea region to the city of Sokhumi on the Caucasus coast, who sold their arms there. The consulate also informed that the activity zone of the skipper covered the whole Black Sea coast from Canik/Samsun, a sub-province of Trabzon, to the east. Upon this information, the Interior Ministry sent a telegram to Trabzon and Canik on 3 August 1914, and requested urgent measures to be taken concerning this case.⁹⁴⁹

Bribery was used not only to free those who deserted from the army, but also to evade the draft. It seems that a considerable number of men resorted to bribery to avoid enlistment. When an economically better-off person, who did not want to

⁹⁴⁸ Bekir Eliçin, *Onlar Savaşırken* (Istanbul: Okar Yayınları, 1978). For a comment on the novel from an economic history point of view, see Korkut Boratav, "Anadolu Köyünde Savaş ve Yıkım: Bekir Eliçin'in Romanının Öğrettikleri ve Düşündürdükleri", *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 15-16 (Fall-Winter 1982), pp. 61-75.

⁹⁴⁹ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 43/159, 11 Ramazan 1332/3 August 1914.

serve, faced a government official inclining to abuse his post for economic benefit, money could provide a safer or “semi-legal” way of escaping the army. A British military intelligence report on the Palestine front stated in March 1918 that keeping away from military service in this way had “assumed extraordinary proportions.”⁹⁵⁰ And although we do not have exact statistics, the available documents suggest that non-Muslim Ottomans, mostly Armenians and Greeks, used this method quite often, perhaps proportionally more frequently than the others, when the opportunity arose. For example, the same British report mentions an Armenian in Istanbul, who managed to stay away from military service by continually paying a certain amount of money (20 piasters) a month to the recruiting officer for exemption.⁹⁵¹ Another Armenian, who had been hiding from military service in a village of Hama, a sub-province in Syria, explained to the British that deserters were quite safe in that particular village, since each of them paid a certain amount of money (130 piastres) a year to the Turkish sergeant in command of the local gendarme unit. Claiming that it was the same in all the villages round about, he gave an interesting example: “At one place, for instance, about thirty miles south-west of Hama there is a Greek village with a population of about 500. As the inhabitants are rich enough to bribe the recruiting officials, they have only produced one recruit since the beginning of the war.”⁹⁵²

In some cases, bribery also helped deserters go abroad, as in the case of some Ottoman Greek deserters, who bribed the Ottoman officials to get on board an Italian ferry (the *Milano*) at the Istanbul port to travel to Salonica.⁹⁵³ In fact, as has been

⁹⁵⁰ TNA:PRO WO 157/725, March 1918.

⁹⁵¹ TNA:PRO WO 157/725, March 1918.

⁹⁵² TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁵³ BOA, DH.EUM.KLU., 2/44, 10 Zilkâde 1332/30 September 1914.

mentioned above, going abroad or hiding in a foreign country had been a common way of avoiding enlistment both before and during the war. Of course, it can easily be surmised that this option was available only to those who were economically better-off, and those who at least had ties with people abroad. Therefore, it can be suggested that urban middle class and non-Muslim Ottoman deserters might have been more inclined to resort to this means than the others, as the available documents already imply.

Encouragement for Desertion

Desertion was not always the result of a spontaneous decision taken by an individual soldier on his own. There were sometimes external and planned efforts that aimed to urge soldiers to make that decision. As far as the Ottoman army is concerned, such efforts, which can be called the propaganda for desertion, had both a domestic and foreign sources. By foreign I mean the propaganda activities designed and carried out by the enemy forces on the front throughout the war. The propaganda of the British intelligence forces to encourage desertions from the Ottoman forces on the Mesopotamia and Sinai-Palestine fronts presents an important case in this respect, which will be analyzed here. Although they were in a less organized form (and are also less documented), Ottoman authorities also had to deal with domestic groups encouraging desertion, which were undertaken by the empire's own subjects. The available examples suggest that, at the domestic level, it was mostly the nationalist elements of non-Muslim groups that applied such propaganda methods according to their own nationalist agendas. Of course, due to the limited nature of the available

evidence, it is difficult to understand the exact extent of this type of domestic and separatist propaganda. Furthermore, it is also difficult to make generalizations in this respect. Still, the available examples hint that the nationalist elements of the Ottoman Greeks and Armenians were relatively prominent in the domestic propaganda for desertion. Moreover, the state's deep concern for such cases implies that domestic propaganda might have been effective on soldiers from particular religious-ethnic background, at least among those who were already hesitant to enlist and to fight, or had become so in the process of fighting.

For example, Sergeant Vangel Foti was an Ottoman Greek enlisted man who alarmed the Ottoman authorities by his propaganda activities in the army, aiming to urge about fifty non-Muslim soldiers (who were most likely fellow Greeks) in his unit to desert with their arms and ammunition. Apparently, he was partially successful, since fifteen of these soldiers, including himself, deserted, and this act made Ottoman authorities to take urgent measures against this case.⁹⁵⁴ Similarly, Estaveri and Apostol were Ottoman Greek deserter-brigands, who not only deserted from the Ottoman army, but also worked to encourage other Ottoman Greek enlisted men to do the same.⁹⁵⁵ Ispiro of Ioannina was another Ottoman Greek accused of encouraging enlisted Ottoman Greeks to desert; Ispiro died as he was being taken to court martial to be tried for his actions.⁹⁵⁶ Encouragement for desertion among the Ottoman Greeks was sometimes carried out by Greek residents of the empire, who held Greek citizenship. For example, Tanash was a "subject of Greece" residing in Istanbul, who was accused of helping many enlisted Ottoman Greeks to desert. Ottoman authorities decided to deport him from Istanbul to "a proper inner region

⁹⁵⁴ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 42/100, 28 Receb 1332/22 June 1914.

⁹⁵⁵ BOA, DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 13/15, 11 Receb 1333/25 May 1915.

⁹⁵⁶ BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 15/4, 24 Şevval 1334/23 August 1916. The reason of his death is not mentioned in the document.

having no access to the coast”.⁹⁵⁷ This propaganda could also take a more organized form, as in the case of Apostol, a medical doctor in a western Black Sea town, Zonguldak, a district of Bolu. He was accused of being a member of the Greek nationalist organization Ethniki Etairia, which the Ottomans described as “an association of mischief”; he was accused of encouraging the local Greek men of military age not to enlist when the mobilization was declared. He was captured and court martialed.⁹⁵⁸ Similar examples of propaganda activities for desertion are also existent for the Ottoman Armenians.⁹⁵⁹

The enemy propaganda for desertion was better-planned and, apparently, regarded as part of the military campaign on a particular front. Moreover, it primarily targeted the Muslim and Turkish soldiers. The British forces in the Middle East established a modern system of military intelligence against the Ottomans during the war. They effectively used a sophisticated network of intelligence, consisting of various means such as British and native agents, interrogation of deserters and prisoners of war, air reconnaissance and wireless interception.⁹⁶⁰ Especially in the second half of the war, as the Ottoman military power became more vulnerable and the British became more aware of the deteriorating conditions in the Ottoman ranks, encouraging desertions became a particular focus of propaganda efforts carried out by the British military intelligence. By using propaganda pamphlets, leaflets, photographs (which were usually dropped from planes) and also rumors, the British deliberately tried to exploit the major weaknesses of the Ottoman soldier, though they were careful in using a language that would not directly hurt the dignity of the

⁹⁵⁷ BOA, DH.EUM.ECB., 7/57, 29 Safer 1335/25 December 1916.

⁹⁵⁸ BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 1/27, 29 Ramazan 1332/21 August 1914.

⁹⁵⁹ See, for example, BOA, DH.ŞFR., 79/58, 17 Şevval 1335/6 August 1917.

⁹⁶⁰ See Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

Ottoman soldier.⁹⁶¹ They propagated that there was no hope for the Ottomans to win the war and, therefore, no point in suffering from poor food and clothing conditions that haunted them on the front. Desertion to the British side was also presented to the Ottoman soldier as an easy and reasonable way of going back home, to the loved ones. But a significant point which they particularly underlined in their propaganda was that it was quite safe to desert to the British side, since the British did not kill or torture their prisoners of war; on the contrary, they claimed that they treated them quite well. For this purpose, the British prepared leaflets containing concocted statements by Ottoman prisoners of war in British camps, who stated that they received good treatment in captivity and advised their friends that it was quite safe and reasonable to desert to the British side. For example, on 9 July 1917, the British distributed such a leaflet entitled, “To My Turkish Soldier Friends”, allegedly signed by an Ottoman soldier by the name of Mehmed Hilmi, who stated:

Brothers, I deserted and took refuge to the British side. The British took me and my friends into their custody and treated us very well. My friends...you are destroying yourself in the desert in vain. Take refuge with the British. I swear that they are ready to offer anything that a refugee soldier and officer would need.⁹⁶²

Similarly, a British military intelligence report dated 26 April 1918 stated that “the pictures dropped by our aeroplanes representing abundant food and comforts in Prisoners’ Camps in Egypt” appealed very strongly to Ottoman soldiers’ feelings.⁹⁶³ Of course, how the British treated their prisoners of war would be a completely separate topic of study, which is beyond our concern here.⁹⁶⁴ But apparently, given

⁹⁶¹ Servet Avşar, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda İngiliz Propagandası* (Ankara: Kim Yayınları, 2004), pp. 258-264.

⁹⁶² Quoted in Avşar, *İngiliz Propagandası*, p. 260. For a few more examples of such leaflets see *Ibid.*, pp. 316-323.

⁹⁶³ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁶⁴ For a recent study on the Ottoman prisoners of war in the First World War, see Yanıkdağ, “‘Ill-fated’ Sons of the ‘Nation’: Ottoman Prisoners of War in Russia and Egypt, 1914-1922”. Also see,

the high number of desertions in the last year of the war, the contents of the British propaganda for encouraging desertions from the Ottoman army did achieve certain effect on the Ottoman troops.

In fact, the British military intelligence was quite careful and sensitive in measuring the effect of their propaganda on the enemy. A statistical report on the Palestine front in 1918 about the number of Ottoman deserters who ran away to the British side reveals that from May through September of that year, the number of Ottoman desertions to the British side had increased noticeably since the previous year. While the number of deserters for the entire month of September 1917 was just 73, it had already reached 69 in the first week of the same month in 1918. Having emphasized that “at least 80 percent of enemy prisoners of war interrogated have either seen or heard of our leaflets and are acquainted with the gist of their contents”, the report described this numerical increase as “an appreciation of the effect of propaganda on enemy desertion”.⁹⁶⁵ This feeling of appreciation was further supported by the statements of deserters. For example, an Ottoman officer deserter stated that the British propaganda leaflets had an “excellent effect” on the Ottoman soldiers, obviously including him. Another Ottoman deserter expressed that a soldier in his company picked up one of the British propaganda leaflets and handed it to his section commander, who showed it to the men; “this helped them to make up their minds to desert”.⁹⁶⁶

Interrogations of deserters apparently fostered the belief of the British that the propagation of good treatment of prisoners of war in the British hands would appeal

Yücel Yanıkdağ, “I. Dünya Savaşı’nda Tıbbi Oryantalizm ve İngiliz Doktorlar”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 153 (September 2006), pp. 26-33; Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Ana Ben Ölmedim: Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Türk Esirleri* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2001).

⁹⁶⁵ TNA:PRO, WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

to enemy soldiers and encourage them to desert. For example, an Armenian deserter from the Palestine front stated that “many more Armenians, Greeks, Arabs would desert from the Turkish Army, but for the fear of ill-treatment by the British.”⁹⁶⁷ The point that many Ottoman soldiers feared deserting because they thought the British killed or maimed prisoners of war was emphasized by other deserters too, and the British military intelligence regarded such stories as the enemy counter-propaganda carried out deliberately by the Ottoman and German officers to prevent their men to desert.⁹⁶⁸ This was also confirmed by two Greek deserters from the Ottoman army on the Palestine front, who told the British that the troops were now beginning to “disbelieve stories told them by their officers”, that the British killed their prisoners.⁹⁶⁹ Such statements by deserters led the British military intelligence to believe that their propaganda for enemy desertion was quite influential. In fact, some severe Ottoman counter measures on the Palestine front against this propaganda also implied that British propaganda materials were indeed influential. For instance, Ottoman unit commanders issued orders that any man found with such propaganda materials in possession, which were sometimes described as a “poisonous paper”, was to be flogged or even shot.⁹⁷⁰

British propaganda leaflets on the Palestine front were usually bilingual, written in both Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, and a special appeal was made to the Arabs.⁹⁷¹ Since most of the Ottoman troops were illiterate, the British also abundantly used propaganda photographs and drawings.⁹⁷² On the other hand, some

⁹⁶⁷ TNA:PRO, WO 157/725, March 1918.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid.; TNA:PRO, WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁶⁹ TNA:PRO, WO 157/728, June 1918.

⁹⁷⁰ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁷¹ TNA:PRO WO 157/727, May 1918.

⁹⁷² For two examples of such propaganda leaflets, see Appendix D.17 and D.18.

examples suggest that being illiterate did not always prevent someone to get acquainted with the contents of such leaflets. They could sometimes still be effective on illiterate men, when a literate soldier read it out loud to the men in his unit, as in the case of “a Turkish deserter” who stated that he was influenced by a British pamphlet when “some of his comrades told him of the contents” of it.⁹⁷³

One of the major themes in these propaganda materials was the British claims of well-treatment of Ottoman prisoners of war. There were also some photographs showing Ottoman soldiers in the British camps performing freely their religious duties altogether at specific places of worship.⁹⁷⁴ Moreover, the claim that the Ottomans were actually controlled by the Germans and that German soldiers in the Ottoman army were in a privileged position was constantly exploited by British propaganda. An interesting example in this respect was an illustrated leaflet showing, as explained by a British report, “the Turkish cow being milked by a German, Enver Pasha bowing before the Kaiser, emaciated Turkish soldiers before their capture and the improvement in their condition in our prisoners of war camps”.⁹⁷⁵ Indeed, this theme was seemingly as influential as the one that the prisoners of war were treated well. For example, an Ottoman deserter, who was described by the British as “an intelligent Turkish sergeant,” stated that he heard of a propaganda leaflet describing the undesirable “manner in which German troops in Turkey treated the Turks, and obtaining the command of the country”. He also said that “if the men of his regiment could all see this pamphlet, they would desert”.⁹⁷⁶

⁹⁷³ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁷⁴ Avşar, *İngiliz Propagandası*, p. 259.

⁹⁷⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

⁹⁷⁶ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

Measures against Desertions and Attempts at Re-mobilizing Deserters

The problem of desertion posed a double challenge to the state authority. First of all, the act of desertion was rejection of one of the main means of existence of the modern state, namely the universal conscription system. Compulsory military service was, in a sense, a daily plebiscite between society and the state, through which the authority of the state was “made” to approve on the part of society. The constant participation of society in this plebiscite was considered vitally significant for the legitimacy of the state. This was also true for the Ottoman state in the post-Tanzimat era, and the problem of desertion was not merely regarded as a military issue, but also a threat to its legitimacy from the state’s point of view. Secondly, the armed bands of deserter-brigands roaming on the home front, disregarding and attacking civilian authorities and security forces created an extensive internal security problem. The CUP government’s reassuring its authority over the people, at least in the context of Anatolia, depended on coping with this problem successfully.

Therefore, as the extent of the problem of desertion widened and became alarming, Ottoman authorities needed to take urgent measures against it. These measures consisted of two parts, which included both preventive and punitive methods. The first part involved immediate measures taken on the battlefield, some examples of which have already been mentioned above. These were mostly military measures aimed at preventing the soldier on duty from deserting. The target of such measures was the soldier himself, the very actor of desertion. The second part was more extensive and involved military measures as well as various social, administrative and legal arrangements. These measures also affected civilians. They not only required action by military officers, but also brought new roles to be played

by local administrators and domestic security forces. It can be argued that coping with the problem of desertion introduced a new dimension into the relationship between the Ottoman state and society. The state now needed to permeate deeper levels of society for security purposes, to capture deserters and to end abuses they caused. But it would also expect more contribution and collaboration from society to solve the problem that threatened the manpower source of the army. In a sense, this meant a re-mobilization for popular support for the army, though in a narrower scale. And while legal sanctions, punishment threats and actual punishments were an integral aspect of all of these measures, the state formulated incentives and amnesties too.

As far as military law is concerned, the Ottoman military had as severe legal sanctions against desertion as any other belligerent country in the Great War. Although the practice of its implementation was quite complicated (as will be discussed below), the law was quite simple and tough. According to the second article of the Ottoman military law, the punishment for desertion was the death penalty.⁹⁷⁷ But it became obvious during the war that legal sanctions and intimidation by death penalty were not always sufficient to keep soldiers in their ranks until the end of the war. Moreover, punishment usually concerned those who already escaped service, while a more immediate need was to keep them fighting. Therefore, the Ottoman military needed to take more effective preventive measures. These included newer set of restrictions, but the state also attempted to increase troop morale as it aimed to deter them from deserting.

As various British military intelligence reports also noted, Ottoman officers often lectured their soldiers about being a good soldier and exhorted them not to

⁹⁷⁷ “Askeri Ceza Kanununa Müzeyyel Kanun-ı Muvakkat”, 24 Temmuz 1330/6 August 1914, *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 6, p. 981.

desert.⁹⁷⁸ For example, an Ottoman military order, which was captured by the British on the Mesopotamia front, stated that “officers, when off duty, are to devote themselves to raising the morale of their men.”⁹⁷⁹ Such lectures not only re-emphasized the already prevalent beliefs that desertion was forbidden by religion⁹⁸⁰ and regarded as betrayal to both the sultan and fatherland, but also included counter-propaganda themes such as those already noted above that the British ill-treated their prisoners of war, killing and torturing them. Similar lectures were also given by the religious functionaries of the army, namely the battalion prayer leaders (*tabur imami*). Moreover, sometimes special preachers were sent from the War Ministry to the units on the battlefield. Attending such organized lectures were obligatory for the troops.⁹⁸¹

From time to time, more immediate measures could be added to such lectures, like the one happened in May 1918 on the Palestine front, when all the money that the troops had were collected from them. The idea was that “the tendency to desert would be checked by removing their means of subsistence”.⁹⁸² But removing a soldier’s means of subsistence did not always produce desirable results, and sometimes even backfired, as in the case of captured deserters Şakir and Kâmil, who stated in their interrogations that they deserted because they ran out of their

⁹⁷⁸ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-August 1918. Other sources also mention that lectures of “Ottoman patriotism” were occasionally given to soldiers in the Ottoman army during the war. See, for example, Güliz Beşe Erginsoy (ed.), *Dedem Hüseyin Atf Beşe: Bir Cemiyet-i Osmaniye Askerinin Savaş Hatıratı* (Istanbul: Varlık, 2004), p. 175.

⁹⁷⁹ TNA:PRO WO 157/785, March 1916.

⁹⁸⁰ One of the frequently referred sources in this respect was the al-Anfal sura (verses 15-16) of the Quran: “O you who believe! When you encounter in battle those who disbelieve, do not turn your backs on them in flight. For whoever turns his back on them on the day of such an engagement – except that it be tactical maneuvering to fight again or joining another troop of believers (or taking up a position against another enemy host) – has indeed incurred God’s condemnation, and his final refuge is the Fire; how evil a destination to arrive at!” It is quoted, for example, in İzmirli İsmail Hakkı, *Gazilere Armağan*, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁸¹ Sami Yengin, *Drama’dan Sina-Filistin’e Savaş Günlüğü (1917-1918)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2007), p. 79.

⁹⁸² TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

allowances and had no money left.⁹⁸³ Desertions also occurred when the means of subsistence of a soldier's family was removed. This particularly happened in the case of those families which did not have any other adult male to get support from than the one enlisted in the army. As explained in Chapter 3, the Ottoman state treated such families in a distinct social category (*muinsiz aile*) that needed assistance, and provided them with a monthly income. Interruptions in payments of this income apparently caused many desertions, as an Interior Ministry document stated. Therefore, the Interior Ministry took a severe measure in October 1916, ordering that those who were responsible for such interruptions would be treated as criminals contributing to desertions and sent to court martial.⁹⁸⁴

Preventive and punitive measures sometimes also affected soldiers' families. In fact, various practices show that, when they saw it necessary and thought it would serve the solution, Ottoman authorities tended to treat soldiers' families as an element of the army and to subject them to the military law. And this was so in both positive and negative respects. For example, the Interior Ministry declared in October 1915 that those criminals who harmed and abused soldiers' families were immediately to be sent to courts martial, and this would apply to the families of both dead and living soldiers.⁹⁸⁵ But military measures concerning soldiers' families were not always protective, but sometimes punitive, especially when the family member in the army avoided conscription or deserted.⁹⁸⁶ For example, as desertions reached an

⁹⁸³ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-110; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-115. When their routine provisions became irregular and scarce, the soldiers could purchase their basic needs such as bread, cheese, etc., from villagers or small town grocers nearby their camps. This practice of buying things with one's own money seems to have been quite common in the Ottoman army. For some interesting examples, see Ali Rıza Efendi, *Harb-i Umumide Hatırat-ı Askeriyem*.

⁹⁸⁴ BOA, DH.UVM., 124/42, 5 Muharrem 1335/1 November 1916.

⁹⁸⁵ BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 9/47, 21 Zilhicce 1333/30 October 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.MTK., 79/34, 16 Safer 1333/3 January 1915. Also see ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1562, Dosya 14 A.

⁹⁸⁶ Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. 1, p. 169.

alarming level in his military zone as early as September 1914, the commander of XII Corps in Mosul, Fahreddin Bey, ordered that male relatives of deserters, such as fathers, uncles and brothers, were to be enlisted instead of them. Moreover, he also reported that this measure was effective, but not effective enough to stop the problem entirely.⁹⁸⁷

Another measure which targeted deserters' families was forced migration (*teb'id*) and confiscation of properties. The Ottoman state at times resorted to this method and forced some deserters' families to leave their villages and towns for different places determined by the authorities. The places where such families had to migrate were usually less desirable and also strategically less important regions of the empire. Moreover, the properties of deserters' families were also sometimes confiscated. But the available documents concerning this point do not make it clear exactly when the state chose to implement such measures, how it determined the places to be migrated to, and how widespread these measures were; there was no standard in this respect. The available examples show that they were applied to both Muslim and non-Muslim deserters' families.⁹⁸⁸ However, as the reaction of the Ottoman Greeks in Ayvalık (a district of Hüdavendigâr) to this measure implies, it could be a more effective form of intimidation on non-Muslims. Ottoman authorities made a declaration concerning the Ottoman Greek population of Ayvalık on 27 January 1916 that, families of the Greek deserters, if they did not show up at recruiting offices within a specified time, would be deported to another place. This decision initially stirred up "a general reaction" among the public, but as the

⁹⁸⁷ *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 84 (March 1984), document no. 1977, p. 43.

⁹⁸⁸ BOA, DH.UMVM., 124/116, 5 Receb 1335/27 April 1917; BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 12/51, 11 Cemâziyelevvel 1334/6 March 1916. On the other hand, the Interior Ministry stated in telegram sent to Diyarbakir that local civilian officials were not authorized to decide such a punishment and that only the military commanders were authorized to make this decision. See BOA, DH.ŞFR., 91/266, 24 Zilhicce 1336/30 September 1918.

religious leaders of the region sent telegrams to the state and the government of Greece also made requested the authorities not to apply it, the Ottoman state decided to “postpone” it; accordingly, the reaction eased.⁹⁸⁹

As understood from an Interior Ministry announcement made on 22 April 1917, forced migration could also be applied to those who provided shelter and support for deserters.⁹⁹⁰ There are also examples about more brutal measures taken against deserters’ families from time to time, such as burning the house of a deserter’s family if he would not be captured for a long time.⁹⁹¹ Apparently, such severe methods were mostly used by the militia forces of the Special Organization.⁹⁹² The preventive measure against desertions that concerned deserters’ families seemingly created a considerable effect on the Ottoman soldiers. An Ottoman deserter in the British hands stated that “the chief consideration which prevents the Turks from deserting is the fear of reprisals against their families”.⁹⁹³

In some extreme cases, authorities could blame an entire village for providing shelter for deserters and, accordingly, want to exile the whole village as a punishment. An interesting case in this respect occurred in the Kabakdağı village of Bolaman, a sub-district of Ordu (a district of Trabzon)—interesting in the sense it exemplifies how the line between support for and resistance against mobilization could often get blurred at the local level, and how local people could provide shelter for deserters because of local ethnic identities while they also participated in

⁹⁸⁹ BOA, DH.EUM.3.ŞB., 12/51, 11 Cemâziyelevvel 1334/6 March 1916. For more information on forced migration of the Ottoman Greeks during the war, see Akçam, “*Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur*”, pp. 120-131.

⁹⁹⁰ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 76/243-47, 6 Şa’ban 1335/28 May 1917.

⁹⁹¹ BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb., 4/47, 23 Rebîulevvel 1333/8 February 1915; BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb., 4/88, 9 Rebîulâhir 1333/24 February 1915.

⁹⁹² Özel, “Çürüksulu Ali Paşa ve Ailesi Üzerine Biyografik Notlar”, p. 125

⁹⁹³ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-September 1918.

mobilization. This was a Circassian village consisting of about 1,200 people who were resettled in this place after they had to immigrate from Çürüksü (formerly an Ottoman district in Batumi) when the latter was occupied by Russia in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1876-1878. Apparently, the Third Army Command threatened the village of exiling them to interior regions for “disregarding the orders of authorities and providing support for brigands and deserters.”⁹⁹⁴ In fact, the villagers were blamed for providing shelter particularly for fellow Circassians, especially for a person called Hamdi the Circassian (*Çerkes Hamdi*) who was a famous deserter-brigand in the region who managed to escape from authorities for several times.⁹⁹⁵ Upon hearing the threat of exile and the news that the Third Army Command was planning to send a squad of gendarmes to the village, the villagers sent a telegram to the War Ministry on 19 November 1917 asking for annulment of any decisions taken for their deportation. In the telegram, Mahmud and Murad, who were the imam and *muhtar* of the village respectively, informed the War Ministry of this threat and denied the accusations on behalf of all the villagers. They stated that they had actually supported the mobilization from the beginning by “sending two hundred young men to the war, most of whom became martyrs and some became POWs.”⁹⁹⁶ When the War Ministry requested an explanation from the Third Army Command about this issue, the latter explained that while they really made such an accusation against this particular village, the threat of deportation was not true. The Third Army Command also explained that the villagers reacted this way because they became uncomfortable when the Third Army Command stationed a gendarme squad in the village to control their relations with brigands; their real concern, so was explained

⁹⁹⁴ “*Emr-i hükümete karşı lakayd ve eşkiyayı ve firarileri himaye ettiklerinden...*”, ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2909, Dosya 451, Fihrist 3-6

⁹⁹⁵ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2909, Dosya 451, Fihrist 3-3.

⁹⁹⁶ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2909, Dosya 451, Fihrist 3.

by the command, was to remove this squad from their village.⁹⁹⁷ As a result, apparently the villagers were not deported, but the gendarme squad remained in the village.

Measures against desertions did not always work with intimidation and punishment. On the contrary, it involved a considerable deal of incentives and rewards, aiming to get collaboration from society. This collaboration was not only wished, but sometimes also needed, since the available gendarmerie forces sometimes did not suffice to cope with the problem. This was apparently the case in the Third Army zone in mid-1915. In a telegram that was sent by Enver Pasha to the Third Army Command on 20 April 1915, Enver Pasha underlined the point that where the gendarmerie was not sufficient and the use of regular military forces impractical, it would be useful to resort to the help of the local people in capturing the deserters in the region. He proposed that if a person from the local people turns a deserter (“whether Muslim or non-Muslim) over to the authorities, he would be rewarded with no less than a *lira*.⁹⁹⁸ Moreover, the Interior Ministry declared on 19 September 1916 that those people who were helpful in capturing brigands and deserters would be granted cash rewards.⁹⁹⁹ The Interior Ministry had already announced in 1915 that those who informed on deserters would be rewarded.¹⁰⁰⁰ Any civilian who captured a deserter was promised a reward of no less than one Ottoman *lira*, as in the case of a peasant Hulusi from Kal’a-i Sultaniye on 14 June 1915.¹⁰⁰¹ Similar rewards were also granted to local administrators and members of domestic security forces. For example, Hürrem Sükuti Efendi was a section chief in the police

⁹⁹⁷ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2909, Dosya 452, Fihrist 3-6.

⁹⁹⁸ *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, no. 83 (March 1983), document no. 1907, p. 91.

⁹⁹⁹ BOA, DH.EUM.VRK., 22/101, 21 Zilkâde 1334/19 September 1916.

¹⁰⁰⁰ BOA, DH.EUM.MTK., 80/54, 28 Şevval 1333/8 September 1915.

¹⁰⁰¹ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2293, Dosya: 38, Fihrist :5.

department of Kastamonu, who was rewarded with an extra salary for his effective service in capturing deserters.¹⁰⁰²

The available examples show that the cash rewards were paid from the state's secret funds (*tahsisat-ı mestûre*).¹⁰⁰³ However, rewards were not always granted in the form of money. As a common practice which the Ottoman state had often employed to increase loyalty to its authority and to mobilize popular support for its causes, medals and decorations were granted for this purpose too. İsmail, a sergeant-major in the gendarme battalion of Karbala in Iraq, and Şevket Bey, a deputy officer and the commander of the gendarme unit of Zile (a district of Sivas) were just two examples in this respect, whose services in capturing deserters in their areas were appreciated by the state with granting them decorations.¹⁰⁰⁴

Gendarmes were the most commonly rewarded and decorated of those state employees who were recognized for their exceptional service in pursuing and capturing deserters. As is apparent from an Interior Ministry telegram sent by the minister Talat Pasha to the War Ministry on 14 November 1917, the state made a special effort to reward gendarmes for this purpose, thinking that rewards would increase their success in halting the problem of desertion.¹⁰⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰² BOA, DH.EUM.MH., 155/33, 9 Şa'ban 1335/31 May 1917.

¹⁰⁰³ BOA, DH.EUM.MH., 116/86, 10 Rebîulevvel 1334/16 January 1916.

¹⁰⁰⁴ BOA, DH.EUM.KLU., 3/16, 21 Zilkâde 1332/11 October 1914; BOA, DH.KMS., 44-2/2, 7 Ramazan 1335/27 June 1917.

¹⁰⁰⁵ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2293, Dosya 38, Fihrist 20, 20-01; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2293, Dosya 38, Fihrist 20-06.

Punishment and Persuasion

In terms of legal regulations, the Ottoman military law imposed as severe punishments for the crime of desertion as any other belligerent country's military law did during the Great War.¹⁰⁰⁶ According to the second article of the temporary appendix law added to the Military Penal Law on 6 August 1914, desertion was to be punished with death:

Those who desert during the mobilization from military service or from the recruitment centers or on their way to their divisions or duties will be executed in case they do not return until the end of the seventh day from the end of the day they deserted.¹⁰⁰⁷

Although the act of abandoning service was defined as the crime of desertion only after seven days, the law also imposed punishment on those who returned within seven days. In this case, for each day a soldier spent on desertion, he was to be sentenced to one month's hard labor after the demobilization of soldiers of his age category; if he was returned to service within seven days after being captured by the authorities, the punishment was increased to two months for each day.¹⁰⁰⁸

Legal cases concerning military crimes and desertions were to be dealt with by courts martial.¹⁰⁰⁹ Only courts martial were authorized to impose the death penalty on deserters.¹⁰¹⁰ Although as a routine procedure death penalties were subject to the approval of the Chamber of Deputies, wartime justice often turned into a "summary justice", and many decisions were actually made and executed by *ad hoc*

¹⁰⁰⁶ Military law of every belligerent country during the war imposed death penalty on desertion, though they varied in details. See, for, example, the Italian army regulation on desertion dated 21 April 1918. Its English translation is in TNA:PRO WO 106/813.

¹⁰⁰⁷ "Askeri Ceza Kanununa Müzeyyel Kanun-ı Muvakkat", *Düstür*, series II, vol. 6, p. 981.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁹ BOA, MV., 211/181, 9 Receb 1336/20 April 1918.

¹⁰¹⁰ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 64/219, 3 Şa'ban 1334/5 June 1916.

courts martial formed within military units on the battlefield by the unit commanders. In fact, the Ottoman Military Penal Law allowed this after the mobilization. Another temporary appendix law added to the Military Penal Law on 12 November 1914 stipulated that a superior officer was entitled to use his gun against his inferiors and men under his command under such conditions as when he needed to make them obey his orders or to stop deserters.¹⁰¹¹ Moreover, the gendarmes, who were responsible for pursuing and capturing deserters, were also ordered to shoot deserters “without hesitation” if they did not obey the call to halt and surrender.¹⁰¹²

It is difficult to estimate how many Ottoman deserters were executed during the Great War, since the available statistical data on this issue are lacking. As in the other belligerent countries during the war,¹⁰¹³ executions of deserters were regarded by the Ottoman military primarily as exemplary punishments to deter potential deserters in the army and reestablish discipline among the troops. Some officers apparently thought that such executions would also raise troop morale,¹⁰¹⁴ although this point is much less emphasized in the available documents. What is much more emphasized in these documents is the point that the threat of death penalty would increase discipline among the troops and persuade them not to desert. Executions were usually in the form of shooting deserters by a firing squad, and they were carried out openly, in the presence of all the soldiers of the unit (usually the

¹⁰¹¹ “Askeri Ceza Kanununa Müzeyyel Kanun-ı Muvakkat”, 30 Teşrinievvel 1330/12 November 1914, *Düstür*, series II, vol. 6, p. 1390.

¹⁰¹² BOA, DH.ŞFR., 49/241, 24 Rebülevvel 1333/9 February 1915.

¹⁰¹³ For example, Alan Forrest has stated that “in World War I, the French Army was more prone than its neighbors to shoot deserters as an example to others. Faced with mutinies and mass desertions, especially in 1917, the military turned to repression to re-impose the authority of the officers and, through them, the authority of the state”. See Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters*, p. 5. For a comparative analysis of the German and British cases of desertions and the differences between the two cases, also see Christoph Jahr, *Gewöhnliche soldaten: Desertion und Deserteure im deutschen und britischen Heer, 1914-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998).

¹⁰¹⁴ Ergün Göze (ed.), *Rusya’da Üç Esaret Yılı: Bir Türk Subayının Hatıraları, Anlatan Ahmet Göze* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1989), pp. 51-52.

battalion) from which the convicted soldier deserted.¹⁰¹⁵ Although the trial and execution of a deserter was a military procedure to be carried out within the military, there are also examples showing that some executions were deliberately carried out publicly in civilian presence. It seems that this method was used when authorities wanted to intimidate the potential deserters. For example, a telegram which was sent by the Interior Ministry to all governors on 27 May 1916 required that a few of the captured deserters were to be executed by hanging in their own localities.¹⁰¹⁶ A similar but more specific telegram was also sent to all governors on 21 October 1917, requiring that those who deserted more than once and were also involved in brigandage were to be executed nearby their hometowns or villages.¹⁰¹⁷ These examples suggest that executions of deserters were used to reestablish discipline and obedience not only in the military, but also at a more general level in society. More specifically, they were also used to deter those civilians who provided support for deserters.

On the other hand, evidence suggests that Ottoman authorities were not always so strict in implementing the military law. In many cases, authorities did not always rush to execute the law even if the death penalty was decreed. As the shortage of manpower became more alarming, the death penalty for desertion was begun to be seen as the ultimate measure to be resorted only in really desperate cases. Sometimes it was delayed, or other times entirely annulled by amnesties.¹⁰¹⁸ Although summary

¹⁰¹⁵ Güneş N. Ege-Akter (ed.), *Babamın Emanetleri: Ragıp Nurettin Ege'nin Birinci Cihan Harbi Günlükleri ve Harbin Sonrası Hatıratı* (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2006), p. 149; Erginsoy (ed.), *Bir Cemiyet-i Osmaniye Askerinin Savaş Hatıratı*, pp. 192, 200, 205-206; Yengin, *Drama'dan Sina-Filistin'e Savaş Günlüğü*, p. 10; Göze, *Bir Türk Subayının Hatıraları*, pp. 51-52; Sunata, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Anılarım*, p. 445.

¹⁰¹⁶ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 64/137, 24 Receb 1334/27 May 1916.

¹⁰¹⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR., 80/208, 5 Muharrem 1336/21 October 1917.

¹⁰¹⁸ This situation was also observed by the Dutch embassy as early as May 1916, which reported that "the army has replaced prison sentences with corporal punishment in the field in order not to deplete the strength of the army further". See Zürcher, "Little Mehmet in the Desert", p. 234.

justice and executions on the battlefield and under actual combat conditions never disappeared entirely until the end of the war,¹⁰¹⁹ there was always a possibility for a deserter to be re-employed as a soldier if he reported himself and turned himself in to the authorities.

Moreover, thanks to the amnesties, death sentences of many convicted deserters were reversed and changed to hard labor after they expressed regret in written statements. In such statements of regret, a more or less standard content is apparent. The accused confessed that they deserted despite their awareness of its penalty under the military law. They also gave reasons for their desertions, which usually involved private matters such as the death or illness of a family member, or illness of the deserter himself; reasons such as poor rations and other unendurable conditions were almost entirely never mentioned in such statements. Interestingly, claiming to have “acted out of ignorance” (*bir cahillik ettim*), deserters usually stated that their act was not a deliberate decision. The duration of hard labor punishment was determined as one month for each day a deserter spent away from his unit; and even in these cases, the modified punishment was to be imposed after demobilization.¹⁰²⁰ However, if a pardoned soldier deserted once again, he was almost certainly executed. Again as an effect of intimidation for the potential deserters, the news of such executions was also published in the newspapers.¹⁰²¹

¹⁰¹⁹ TNA:PRO WO 157/785, March 1916.

¹⁰²⁰ For various examples of the convicted deserters (including non-Muslims) stating their regret and asking for pardoning, see ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2321, Dosya 66, Fihrist 1-28; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-7, 10; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, 1-74, 75; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-111; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-116; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 69, Fihrist 3-3; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2321, Dosya 66, Fihrist 1-34, 35; ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2322, Dosya 71, Fihrist 1-140, 142.

¹⁰²¹ “Saliben İdam”, *İkdâm*, 22 Mart 1331/4 April 1915; “Fırar İnfazı”, *İkdâm*, 21 June 1915; “İdam”, *İkdâm*, 16 Kanunisanı 1333/16 January 1918; “İdam”, *İkdâm*, 24 Mayıs 1334/24 May 1918; “İdam”, *Tanin*, 24 Mayıs 1334/24 May 1918.

What is more interesting and needs to be underlined regarding the punishment of deserters is that many cases of desertion actually never came to court martials; they were usually handled by unit commanders using their own “practical” methods of punishment. Especially when less serious cases were concerned, such as when a deserter who was captured right at the moment of his desertion or only a few days after the act near the front line, unit commanders often chose not to make such cases a legal matter to be tried at a court martial, and instead resorted to more immediate and “minor” forms of punishment. Beating and bastinado (*falaka*) in the presence of other soldiers were very common in this respect.¹⁰²² There were other forms of punishment too, such as the deployment of the captured deserter at the most dangerous sector of the front line.¹⁰²³ Moreover, there were also some other practices within military units meant to create ethical pressure on those who were not enthusiastic fighters. For example, prayer leaders of battalions refused to administer burial services for those soldiers who committed suicide.¹⁰²⁴

On the other hand, when methods of intimidation and punishment were not realistic and desirable, and when the state had no channel of interaction with deserters, another interesting measure that was applied by the Ottoman state was to form groups of intermediaries. These intermediaries would talk to deserters directly, conveying to them the expectations of the state and, more importantly, advise them to do the right thing according to those expectations.¹⁰²⁵ Such groups were called “advisory commissions” (*heyet-i nasiha*), which usually included members from the ulema, religious people in charge such as prayer leaders, local notables and

¹⁰²² Ege-Akter, *Ragıp Nurettin Ege'nin Birinci Cihan Harbi Günlükleri*, pp. 128, 149.

¹⁰²³ Ibid, pp. 39-40; Göze, *Bir Türk Subayının Hatıraları*, p. 52.

¹⁰²⁴ Süleyman Nuri, *Uyanan Esirler*, pp. 92-93.

¹⁰²⁵ BOA, DH.KMS., 49-1/18, 25 Muharrem 1337/31 October 1918.

government officials. It seems that the role of religious discourse and men of religion, especially those from the lower ranks such as village prayer leaders, was regarded as particularly significant in such advice committees, which were also used by the state to increase the enthusiasm for military service among young boys of military age and those enlisting for the army.¹⁰²⁶

Attempts at Restoring the Order on the Home Front: Reorganization of the Ottoman Gendarmerie during the War

The gendarmerie was the primary law enforcement force which was responsible for domestic security during the war, especially in the provinces. Pursuing and capturing deserters and brigands constituted a main part of this responsibility. The gendarmerie in the Ottoman Empire was not simply a provincial security force. It sometimes acted like an agent of “the citizen influencing and the citizen mobilizing state”,¹⁰²⁷ and helped local populations cope with natural disasters and to carry out public works. The gendarmerie was one of the main institutions that made the Ottoman state visible outside its center; “it can be called a major infrastructural apparatus of the Ottoman state in its efforts to extend central governmental authority to distant provinces.”¹⁰²⁸ Besides its monitoring role, the gendarmerie also functioned as a major medium to legitimize the state authority in the periphery and helped the central government elite to infiltrate local power networks.¹⁰²⁹ Therefore, the increasing number of deserters

¹⁰²⁶ BOA, DH.İD., 180/52, 10 Receb 1332/4 June 1914. On the uses of advice committees after the armistice, see Mevlüt Çelebi, *Heyet-i Nasiha: Anadolu ve Rumeli Nasihat Heyetleri* (Izmir: Akademi Kitabevi, 1992).

¹⁰²⁷ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 83.

¹⁰²⁸ Nadir Özbek, “Policing the Countryside: Gendarmes of the Late 19th-Century Ottoman Empire (1876-1908), *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2008), p. 48.

¹⁰²⁹ Nadir Özbek, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda İç Güvenlik, Siyaset ve Devlet, 1876-1909”, *Türklük Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 16 (published separately), Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, 2004, p. 85.

and, therefore, brigands, posed a major challenge to this dual role of the gendarmerie. The problem of desertions not only undermined the public order in provinces, but also threatened the legitimacy of the central authority in the eyes of local populations. Accordingly, dealing with the problem involved more comprehensive measures of reorganizing the power of the gendarmerie, since the extent of desertions rapidly exceeded the limits of an isolated security issue. In this respect, restoring order by eradicating the desertion problem would mean restoring the legitimacy of the central state.

In fact, the Ottoman gendarmerie had already been reorganized after the 1908 Revolution, and it had been reinforced with the establishment of mobile gendarme battalions to be used mainly against bands of brigands, which particularly haunted the Balkan provinces of the empire.¹⁰³⁰ Soon after the revolution, all gendarme units throughout the empire were brought under the authority of the newly-established General Command of the Gendarmerie (*Umum Jandarma Kumandanlığı*). According to the Temporary Law for the Gendarmerie (*Jandarma muvakkat kanunu*) dated 10 February 1912, the Command was dependent on both the War and the Interior ministries. Since the commanding officers of gendarme units were to be appointed from the army ranks (its armed personnel was to constitute of volunteers and, in case this did not suffice, also of enlisted men), the affairs regarding their training, discipline and promotion were to be governed by the War Ministry. In all other respects, the gendarmerie was the law enforcement force under the authority of the Interior Ministry.¹⁰³¹ However, the limits of this dual attachment were not clear, and

¹⁰³⁰ Halim Alyot, *Türkiye'de Zabıta: Tarihi Gelişim ve Bugünkü Durum* (Ankara: Kanaat Basımevi, 1947), pp. 268-277.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid., p. 283. "Jandarmanın veza'if ve teşkilat-ı esasiyesiyle cihet-i merbutiyeti hakkında kararname", 25 Zilhicce 1335-13 Teşrin-i evvel 1333/13 October 1917, *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 9, no. 323, pp. 757-759.

whether the gendarmerie was part of the civil administration or of the military was a disputed point.¹⁰³² Although the gendarmerie regulation was rearranged in 1917 and the authority of the Interior Ministry over the gendarmerie corps was strengthened,¹⁰³³ this matter always remained vague; and, in practice, the gendarmerie was more connected to the War Ministry.

According to the gendarmerie regulation that was in use through 1917, two-thirds of gendarme recruits and half of gendarme officers were to be put under the command of the War Ministry during the time of mobilization.¹⁰³⁴ However, whereas the number of men enlisted in the gendarmerie remarkably increased during the war years (see Table 11), this stipulation still created a major manpower problem in the domestic security forces as the war became prolonged. The practice of transferring gendarme personnel to the battlefield considerably diminished the amount of gendarme force available to maintain public order on the home front. Although the transferred gendarmes reinforced the Ottoman troops on the battlefield, some saw this as an imprudent decision “taken under the illusion that the war would not last long”, which not only deprived the home front of sufficient security forces to defend itself against increasing crimes such as banditry, but also actually contributed to weakening of the army as the available gendarmes did not suffice to pursue and capture the large numbers of deserters during the war.¹⁰³⁵ Some high ranking

¹⁰³² Local gendarme commanders usually did not obey local administrators. For an example of such a conflict, see BOA, DH.İD., 138-2/21, 7 Cemâziyelevvel 1330/24 April 1912.

¹⁰³³ Kemerdere, “Büyük Harpten Evvelki ve Sonraki Jandarmanın Ödevleri Arasında Bir Mukayese ve Jandarma Tarihçesi Hakkında Birkaç Söz”, p. 43; Alyot, *Türkiye’de Zabıta*, pp. 288-306.

¹⁰³⁴ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 1487, Dosya 2/27, Fihrist 1-6; Alyot, *Türkiye’de Zabıta*, p. 286; Necdet Koparan, *Türk Jandarma Teşkilatı, 1908-1923* (master’s thesis, Ankara University, 2007), appendix 1.

¹⁰³⁵ Nurettin Hünel, “Jandarmanın İlk Teşkilinden Bugüne kadar Muhtelif Bakımdan Geçirdiği Safahatı Kısaca Tetkik ve Mütalaa”, *Jandarma Mecmuası*, no. 66 (1942), p. 28; A. Rifat Kemerdere, “Büyük Harpten Evvelki ve Sonraki Jandarmanın Ödevleri Arasında Bir Mukayese ve Jandarma Tarihçesi Hakkında Birkaç Söz”, *Jandarma Mecmuası*, no. 43, pp. 42-43.

commanders directly attributed the problem of desertion and the state's inability to cope with it to this practice.¹⁰³⁶

Table 11
Number of Men Enlisted in the Ottoman Gendarmerie
(1879, 1912 and 1914–1918)¹⁰³⁷

Total number of men enlisted between 1914 and 1918	250,000
in 1912	32,441
in 1879	26,507

To cope with both the manpower problem within the gendarmerie and the disorder on the home front, the Ottoman state had to take additional measures during the war years. For example, several infantry regiments were transferred from various fronts to the home front, to be used as mobile gendarme battalions against bands of deserter-brigands. But since such infantry units were usually unfamiliar with the regions they were assigned to and untrained for domestic security purposes, their performance was far below the desired level. Besides, their provisioning became an additional burden on civilian populations and made life more difficult for them.¹⁰³⁸

With regard to the effective use of the gendarmerie corps in coping with the problem of desertion, more serious measures were needed to be taken as of 1916, when the problem had reached an alarming level. The General Command of Gendarmerie formed new units which were to be used exclusively in pursuing and capturing deserters. In an order issued by the Command on 19 June 1916 to all gendarme divisions, it was announced that within gendarme units in every province

¹⁰³⁶ Aziz Samih İlater, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Kafkas Cephesi Hatıraları*, p. 22

¹⁰³⁷ Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 243; Özbek, "Policing the Countryside", p. 51; *Jandarma Evamir Mecmuası*, no. 14 (15 Kanunievvel 1328/28 December 1912), p. 3; Koparan, "Türk Jandarma Teşkilatı, 1908-1923", appendix 12.

¹⁰³⁸ Hünelp, "Jandarmanın İlk Teşkilinden Bugüne kadar Muhtelif Bakımdan Geçirdiği Safahatı Kısaca Tetkik ve Mütalaa", p. 37.

and sub-province, special pursuit forces should be formed with the most qualified gendarme personnel who had proven themselves physically strong in long pursuit actions under hard conditions and were skilled at shooting. These forces would be called “the pursuit squads” (*tâkib müfrezeleri*) and armed with *Martini* and *Mauser* rifles and sufficient ammunition. The order made it clear that these were exclusively to be used against deserters and brigands, and they should not become involved in ordinary local issues.¹⁰³⁹

The plan that was specified by the above-mentioned order about the distribution of new rifles and ammunition to be used by these forces presents us significant hints about the general state of the desertion problem in the middle of the war (See Table 12).

Tablo 12
The Plan of Arming the Pursuit Squads, (19 June 1916)¹⁰⁴⁰

<i>Province and Sub-province</i>	<i>Rifles (Mauzer)</i>	<i>Ammunition (in caissons)</i>
Aydın	300	54
Ankara	200	36
Konya	100	18
Edirne	100	18
Kastamonu	85	14
Muğla	60	10
Antalya	60	10
Hüdavendigâr	51	9
Dersaadet	50	9
İzmit	50	9
Karahisar-ı Sahib	30	5
Kayseri	30	5
Niğde	30	5
Kütahya	25	5
Bolu	25	5
Çatalca	25	4
Eskişehir	20	4

¹⁰³⁹ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2293, Dosya 38, Fihrist 20, 20-01.

¹⁰⁴⁰ ATASE, BDH, Klasör 2293, Dosya 38, Fihrist 20.

The plan immediately implies that the new formation within the gendarmerie actually targeted only the Anatolian provinces, excluding the eastern Black Sea and northeastern Anatolian ones which were under the Russian occupation at this time. Combat zones and the almost entire Arab provinces were also excluded. It suggests that Ottoman authorities considered that coping with the problem of desertion was mainly an Anatolian issue. Two explanations can be made in this respect. First, given that the majority of the Ottoman army was constituted by Anatolian Muslims and also given that most of the deserters usually tended to go and hide nearby their towns and villages, this overwhelming focus on Anatolia is not that surprising. But this is only one aspect of the picture. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, the plan reveals an area where the infrastructural power of the Ottoman state could be sufficiently effective compared to other regions still theoretically under its control at this time. The Ottoman gendarmerie organization was not powerful enough to penetrate every corner of the empire; because of lack of manpower and logistics as well as poor transportation and communications infrastructure, it was effective only in the regions relatively close to the center and where the population (namely Muslim Turkish) resonated well with the CUP government's nationalist modern state perspective. The state did not form any squads in the Kurdish-populated southeastern Anatolian provinces either. The likely main reason for this is the largely ineffective level of the Ottoman conscription system in these regions. As already discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, the Ottoman state was never able to achieve an efficient recruitment in the tribal Kurdish (and also Arab) populated regions after the mobilization was declared, mainly because of lack of a modern census system and poor infrastructure; instead they tried to gather irregular troops and tribal "volunteer" units from these

regions. Pursuing and capturing deserters under these circumstances were quite difficult, and accordingly, forming pursuit squads for that purpose was unrealistic.

Given the fact that more rifles and ammunition (namely larger squads) were needed in the regions where the problem of deserter-brigands was mounting, the number of new rifles and caissons which were planned to be distributed to the newly formed pursuit squads in the Anatolian provinces also give us an idea about the areas with a heavy concentration of deserters. It can be observed from the plan that more deserters concentrated in the central and mid-western Anatolian provinces than the other regions. The province of Aydın occupies a prominent position in this respect.¹⁰⁴¹ One likely reason of this prominence is the specific topographic layout of the province; Aydın's mountains and forests provided natural shelters for deserters. But more importantly, the fact that brigandage had already been in the fabric of the province during the nineteenth century and the deserters of the Great War found already established bands of brigands in this region to join must also have played a major role in this prominence. As the agricultural system of the province integrated with European capitalism, more and more small peasantry became landless and poor, and this situation constituted a pool of manpower that could be exploited by brigandage. The relatively high population of the region also contributed to this prominence. On the other hand, the existence of a relatively rich agricultural and commercial life in the region also provided deserter-brigands more opportunities for survival, opportunities which could be exploited by use of arms.¹⁰⁴² The existence of

¹⁰⁴¹ This distribution was also confirmed by a British military intelligence observation made in July 1915 that a greater number of Ottoman deserters, both Muslims and Christians, were deserting to "the *vilayets* of Karput, Adana, Brussa (Hüdavendigâr), Aiden (Aydın), Angora (Ankara) and Syria". See TNA:PRO WO 157/693, July 1915.

¹⁰⁴² On the social history of brigandage in the Aegean region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Sabri Yetkin, *Ege'de Eşkîyalar*, third edition (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2003). Yetkin's approach to the issue of brigandage has highly been influenced by a Hobsbawmian "social banditry" perspective, which sometimes goes as far as attributing a romantic dimension to it. A

an extensive brigand life in this region even constituted its own popular culture, which created mythical brigand characters on whom many half fictional and factual stories were told.¹⁰⁴³

The formation of new gendarme units exacerbated the manpower problem in the Ottoman mobilization effort. The gendarmerie faced this problem even before the war, as early as February 1914; and the immediate solution that had been proposed to cope with this problem was resorting to volunteers where the enlisted men did not suffice to complete the required personnel number of the gendarme units.¹⁰⁴⁴ In fact, the Regulation for the Personnel Recruitment of the Gendarmerie dated 1914 already allowed that when the existing number of personnel was not enough to carry out pursuit missions against the brigands, volunteers (no more than ten percent of the existing number of personnel) could be recruited from among the local population to be employed in such missions.¹⁰⁴⁵ Reliance on volunteers also continued during the Great War, and the same preferences of the state in accepting volunteers from certain social groups, which has been discussed in Chapter 4, were at work here as well. Perhaps it can be further argued that Ottoman authorities attempted more overtly at “Turkification” of the gendarmerie as the main internal security force and they were more “careful” in making sure not to employ ethnic Armenians and Greeks. For example, the War Ministry issued a warning as early as at the beginning of the war,

more recent study on Aydın in the late Ottoman Empire tries to look at the issue from a more critical and balanced perspective. See Yapucu, *Modernleşme Sürecinde Bir Sancak: Aydın*, pp. 169-210. On the other hand, it should also be noted that Eric Hobsbawm himself has also presented a more critical overview of his social banditry perspective in a long introduction which he wrote for the new edition of his classical book in 2000. See Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, introduction.

¹⁰⁴³ For a literary reconstruction of the life of the famous brigand leader Çakırcalı Efe, who lived in the Aydın region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, by a famous modern Turkish writer, see Yaşar Kemal, *Çakırcalı Efe*, seventh edition (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008).

¹⁰⁴⁴ BOA, DH.EUM.EMN., 55/18, 29 Rabiülevvel 1332/25 February 1914.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Jandarma Efradının Suret-i Tedarikine dair Nizamname* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Askeriye, 1330/1914), pp. 7-8.

which stated: “if there are any Armenians enlisted in the mobile or central gendarme units, they should be excluded from the active service, and the same procedure should also be applied to the Greek enlisted men”.¹⁰⁴⁶

The Amnesties for Deserters

As has been mentioned above, the shortage of manpower was a major reason for why the domestic security forces were unable to cope with the problem of desertion. In an attempt to overcome the manpower problem, Ottoman authorities designed an interesting method towards the end of the war, which would not only contribute to the solution of the manpower problem in the gendarmerie, but also be used as an effective means of convincing deserters to surrender and get back to service for the Ottoman state. Based on the advice of the General Command of the Gendarmerie, the Interior Ministry circulated an announcement to all local administrative units on 21 September 1918, stating that the deserters surrendering of their own will could be enlisted as gendarmes if they met the necessary criteria for eligibility. The announcement specified the necessary criteria for eligibility as follows: i) the surrendered deserter should have enlisted in the army when the mobilization was declared and committed the act of desertion afterwards; ii) the deserter should by no means have become a brigand or had contact with brigands; iii) it should be ascertained whether the deserter would be useful as a gendarme in pursuing brigands and capturing deserters; iv) local authorities and gendarme commanders, who would make the decision, should agree on the point that employing the deserter as a

¹⁰⁴⁶ “*Seyyar veya merkez jandarma birliklerinde kullanılmak üzere silah altına alınmış Ermeniler varsa hizmet verilmemesi, Rumlar hakkında da aynı işlemin yapılması...*” See *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi*, vol. 10, p. 206.

gendarme would be suitable; v) the deserter should be physically fit to become a gendarme.¹⁰⁴⁷

Issuing such an announcement and offering such an option to deserters not only point to the fact that the manpower shortage in the Ottoman armed forces was at an alarming level towards the end of the war, but, perhaps more importantly, also show that in times of urgent need, the state regarded the deserter as someone whose soldierly qualities could still be restored and who could be put back in service, provided that he did not commit a grave crime of “un-military” nature, such as banditry, which would make that restoration very difficult, ethically and legally (it might not be altogether impossible, but it would require a different kind of amnesty and an entirely different announcement). Employing former bands of deserters in the pursuit squads against other deserters who had not surrendered was particularly used to pursue non-Muslim deserters, and the available examples suggest that they were particularly intimidating for the non-Muslim deserters.¹⁰⁴⁸

In fact, the practice of employing former deserters in the ranks of the gendarmerie can be considered within the larger context of amnesties issued by the state several times during the war to return Ottoman deserters back to service. As the large number of desertions exacerbated the already deteriorating manpower shortage of the armed forces, the state no longer insisted on punishing deserters; instead, it chose to act in a pragmatic way and tried to gain them back. When the manpower need was pressing and the state’s ability to pursue and capture the large amount of

¹⁰⁴⁷ BOA, DH.UMVM., 124/182, 15 Zilhicce 1336/21 September 1918. In fact, it is difficult to say that this method was entirely “original”. Similar methods and tactics to make brigands comply with the state authority and to use them as an already armed force in the service of the state can also be found in the Ottoman Empire in earlier periods. For example, thanks to an amnesty issued during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, many brigands in the province of Aydın entered into the service of the state and joined the army. See Yapucu, *Modernleşme Sürecinde Bir Sancak: Aydın*, s. 206.

¹⁰⁴⁸ For an example of the use of former Muslim deserters against non-Muslim deserters, see Sotiriou, *Farewell to Anatolia*, p. 80.

deserters was not at a satisfactory level, pardoning, not punishing, was conceived as a more effective means to give a second chance to those who deserted.

Three amnesties (*afv-ı 'âli*) were issued by sultan for deserters during the Great War. In fact, the first of these amnesties came as early as the declaration of mobilization. A temporary appendix to the Military Penal Law, which was issued on 6 August 1914, specified that while any enlisted man who deserted from his rank as of the mobilization would be punished with the death penalty, all the existing deserters, draft evaders and also those who still did not have birth records and thus were unregistered in recruiting offices would be pardoned if they surrendered to the closest recruiting office in their regions within a specified time after the law was announced in all regions. The specified time was initially announced as three days for those who were in the country, ten days for those who were abroad.¹⁰⁴⁹ But since the authorities thought that many existing deserters and draft evaders in rural areas either did not understand the scope of the amnesty or could not hear the news on time due to communication problems, it was extended to fifteen days for those in the country, with further explanations in newspapers emphasizing that the amnesty really pardoned all previous misdeeds concerning avoiding military service.¹⁰⁵⁰ The main aim of this pardon was to remobilize those who had deserted during the Balkan War.

The second amnesty was issued on 28 June 1915,¹⁰⁵¹ when it was realized that the war would last longer than it was expected at the beginning. It came at a time when the Ottoman armed forces had been suffering heavy losses on the Caucasus and Dardanelles fronts; desertions had also become increasingly common during 1915. The amnesty law not only declared that all the deserters and draft evaders would be

¹⁰⁴⁹ “Askeri ceza kanununa müzeyyel kanun-ı muvakkat”, p. 981.

¹⁰⁵⁰ “Bakaya Askeriye Hakkında Bir İzah”, *İkdâm*, 14 Ağustos 1330/27 August 1914.

¹⁰⁵¹ BOA, DH.UMVM., 123/116, 18 Ramazan 1333/30 July 1915.

pardoned by the sultan if they surrendered within thirty days from the announcement of the law in all regions, but also expressed that the amnesty would also cover those soldiers who had been already convicted and jailed. Furthermore, civilians who were convicted for providing support for deserters were also pardoned.¹⁰⁵²

The third amnesty was issued towards the end of the war, on 15 July 1918, when the problem of manpower shortage was at its peak. When the amnesty was issued, it was announced that it was granted on the occasion of the accession of Sultan Mehmed Vahideddin (Mehmed VI), who came to the throne on 4 July 1918, after the death of Sultan Mehmed Reşad (Mehmed V) on 3 July. Issuing amnesties on such occasions existed in Ottoman state tradition, but in this case actual war conditions were much more important than the tradition in that decision. Similar to the previous amnesty, this one also declared that all the deserters would be pardoned if they reported personally to the nearest recruiting office in their regions (if abroad, to the nearest Ottoman consul) within a fortnight of the announcement of the amnesty. It was also declared that the amnesty would extend to all crimes committed by deserters during the period of their desertion, but with a significant exception. The amnesty would not apply to those who committed crimes of treason (*hıyanet-i harbiye*) and who deserted to the enemy side.¹⁰⁵³ The last point, which was absent in the previous amnesties, points to the increasing desertions to the British side on the Palestine front in the last year of the war and suggests that the Ottomans took the issue very seriously. The Chamber of Deputies later added that the amnesty would

¹⁰⁵² “Askeri ceza kanununa müzeyyel 14 Ramazan 1332 tarihli kanun-ı muvakkatda mu’ayyen cürümlerle maznûn ve mevkûf ve mahkûm olanlar hakkında afv-ı ‘âlî kanun-ı muvakkati”, 15 Haziran 1331/28 June 1915, *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 7, , p. 630; BOA, DH.UMVM., 123/116, 8 Ramazan 1333/20 July 1915.

¹⁰⁵³ “Fırar, davete ‘adem-i icâbet ve tecâvüz-ü müddet cerâ’imini ikâ’ eden küçük zabitan ve onbaşı ve neferatın cülûs-u hümayûn münasebetiyle ‘afvları hakkında kararname”, 15 Temmuz 1334/15 July 1918, *Düstûr*, series II, vol. 10, p. 553; *İkdâm*, 19 Temmuz 1334/19 July 1918; “Askerlik Ceraimi hakkında Afv”, *Tanin*, 19 Temmuz 1334/19 July 1918.

also include civilians who assisted deserters, but this would be valid on the condition that the deserters in question surrendered.¹⁰⁵⁴

Manpower Problems at the End of the Great War and Afterwards

As to the question of whether these amnesties were effective or not, it is clear that they had significant repercussions at least in the Anatolian landscape. Especially the last amnesty, the scope of which was larger, apparently produced a greater influence on deserters. The extensive reception of this amnesty by deserters was also observed by British military intelligence. British authorities confirmed that general satisfaction had been expressed by the Ottoman state at the successful results of the amnesty:

“From the end of the first week in August onwards, all the papers contain, almost daily, announcements of the surrender of notorious brigands and their bands in various parts of Asia Minor, particularly in the *Vilayet* of Brussa [Bursa].”¹⁰⁵⁵

However, at a general level, despite the attempts at reorganizing the gendarmerie to cope with the problem of desertion, the available documents do not hint at any substantial success on the part of the Ottoman gendarmerie in eradicating the problem. Moreover, although many incentives were offered both local officials and civilians to encourage them for collaboration with the state in this goal, the result was still far away from the desired level. In spite of partial success, the problem of desertions continued to climb through the end of the war. When the Ottomans surrendered and signed the Mudros Armistice on 30 October 1918, the total number

¹⁰⁵⁴ BOA, MV., 212/128, 4 Zilkâde 1336/11 August 1918.

¹⁰⁵⁵ TNA:PRO WO 157/735, April-August 1918, “September 25, 1918: Political and Economic Intelligence Summary, Press Supplement, No 2”.

of the men under arms was 1,095,000.¹⁰⁵⁶ But, as has been mentioned above, the number of deserters reached almost half of this number at the same time.

The problem of desertion continued in Anatolia after the Great War. The end of the Great War did not mean the end of war in Anatolia, as a Turkish resistance emerged in the face of Entente and Greek occupation of the region. This resistance increasingly turned into a larger scale “national struggle” directed from a newly formed political leadership in Ankara. The National Struggle attempted to re-establish the Turkish army under its authority, even though the majority of the troops had been demobilized with the Mudros Armistice.¹⁰⁵⁷ The restructuring of the Turkish army by the Ankara government re-initiated a mobilization and recommenced conscription in Anatolia by its own authority. But at the earlier stages, this initiative had great difficulty recruiting men in Anatolia. The Ankara government’s new call to arms after the demobilization order of the Ottoman state created confusion among the eligible men who had already grown tired of war, and many chose not to comply with it. This situation created an additional mass of deserters in Anatolia, where there were already a considerable number of deserters at the end of the Great War.¹⁰⁵⁸ Tackling the problem of desertion in Anatolia and re-establishing a functional recruitment system constituted the main priority of the National Struggle in the process of creating a standing army.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, pp.. 242-243.

¹⁰⁵⁷ The Ottoman government in Istanbul issued an ordinance for the demobilization on 5 November 1918. But its implementation was never smooth. Some Ottoman commanders resisted it and refused to demobilize the troops under their command. But still a considerable number of soldiers were demobilized, and the total number of men in the Ottoman army after the Armistice, which was now conceived primarily and only an internal security force, declined to as low as around 100,000. See Zekeriya Türkmen, *Mütareke Döneminde Ordunun Durumu ve Yeniden Yapılanması (1918-1920)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2001), pp. 71-79.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Mevlüt Bozdemir, *Türk Ordusunun Tarihsel Kanakları* (Ankara: A.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1982), p. 103; Avcioğlu, *Milli Kurtuluş Tarihi*, vol. 3, pp.. 970-982.

In its effort to cope with the problem of desertion, the Ankara government issued the Law on Deserters” on 11 September 1920 and established the Independence Tribunals (*İstiklâl Mahkemeleri*), which acted like courts martial with nearly unlimited authority.¹⁰⁵⁹ The Ankara government applied very strict measures against deserters, the main symbol of which was the death penalty that was readily given by the Independence Tribunals. Between 1920 and 1922, they decreed about 1,500 death penalties for deserters.¹⁰⁶⁰

However, while the problem of desertion posed a major challenge to the Turkish National Struggle and the Ankara government applied strict measures against deserters, it should be noted that the security forces of the Ankara government, which were actually the continuation of the Anatolian provincial gendarmerie that had been reorganized during the Great War, were more successful in pursuing and capturing deserters. The fact that the Independence Tribunals decreed so many death penalties also implied that more deserters were captured and brought to court. The problem never ceased completely, but after an initial period of confusion, the Ankara government was able to establish its own relatively effective conscription system and gendarmerie to carryout recruitment. In this respect, it is worth noting that the number of troops in the Turkish standing army was raised to 78,000 within 28 days before the Battle of Sakarya (23 August-13 September 1921); that number was 23,000 in previous months. Moreover, while the number of deserters in the Western Front zone (namely the Aegean region) was 30,809 in June

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ergün Aybars, *İstiklâl Mahkemeleri: Yakın Tarihimizin Gerçekleri*, second edition (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1998), pp. 23, 34-36, 52-53; Rıdvan Akın, *TBMM Devleti (1920-1923)* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), pp. 164-196.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Aybars, *İstiklâl Mahkemeleri*, p. 165. This number is even more remarkable when it is compared to the total number of death penalties given to deserters in Germany and Britain throughout the Great War. While the British courts martials decreed totally 269 death penalties, the German courts martials gave only 18 death penalties during the four years of the war. The Turkish National Struggle experience really stands out in this respect. On the numbers of death penalties for deserters in Germany and Britain, see Jahr, *Gewöhnliche soldaten*, p. 18.

1921, it was reduced to 4,400 in the month of August of the same year—a remarkable feat.¹⁰⁶¹

This relative success of the Ankara government in remobilizing the Anatolian population for another military venture sequel to the Great War owed great deal to the Ottoman state's reorganization effort of both the recruitment system and gendarmerie in Anatolia. In this sense, there was considerable continuation between the mobilization effort during the Great War and the re-mobilization during the National Struggle period. The infrastructure of the latter was actually prepared during the former. It can be said that the process which resulted in the creation of the Turkish nation-state actually began during the Great War. Of course, the details of this continuation require another in-depth archival research.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the limits of Ottoman mobilization during the Great War and analyzed the problem of desertion as the ultimate form of resistance from the people to the state's war effort. It has been shown that the extent of the problem was so wide that it constituted a major factor which undermined the Ottoman war performance on the battlefield. Moreover, while nearly every ethnic or religious group of the empire was represented in the problem, the significant majority of the problem constituted of Anatolian Muslims and Turks, which formed the main manpower pool of the Ottoman armed forces. While there were many specific reasons for individual acts of desertion, it has been argued that at the general level the problem of desertion could be considered as a one-sided termination of the tacit

□ *Aybars, İstiklal Mahkemeleri*, pp.. 33, 147.

contract between the state authority and the enlisted man regarding the compulsory military service. Factors such as constantly deteriorating living conditions on the battlefield, the disappearance of hope for victory, feeling betrayed by the authorities, bad treatment by commanders or unbearable physical and mental exhaustion played an important role in this termination. This chapter also elaborated on the “lifestyle” of deserters and tried to explore how they survived after they deserted.

Another important contention here is that the problem of desertion did not remain merely a military issue to be dealt with by only military authorities, but also became a major social problem requiring measures on the part of the state authority in general. The effort of coping with the problem opened up new channels for the state to further penetrate into society. The state used both punitive and rewarding measures to get the collaboration of local civilians and re-mobilize deserters. An important part of this process was the re-organization of the gendarmerie as the main internal security force in the provincial Anatolia. While all these measures and re-organization effort produced only a little success in dealing with the problem during the Great War, they prepared a reinforced infrastructure for the re-mobilization of the Anatolian population during the National Struggle period which culminated in the creation of the Turkish nation-state.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have focused on the Ottoman mobilization of manpower during the First World War. As in all the belligerent countries, the total character of the war effort in the Ottoman Empire led to constant interaction between the battlefield and the home front. The successful and permanent mobilization of men also required the state to have more control and penetration capacity over society. The requirements of a large-scale and permanent mobilization effort pushed the state to become more centralized, more authoritarian and also more nationalist in this process. At the same time, I have tried to demonstrate that as the state became more dependent on people for the war effort, social actors produced responses to the demands of the state. Social actors' own expectations and priorities vis-à-vis those of the state came to play a determining role in their responses to the mobilization. This interaction constituted a kind of tacit social contract between the state and people under wartime conditions. Based on how their own expectations and priorities matched up with state policies, these responses constituted a wide spectrum ranging from voluntary support to open resistance. In turn, the state responded by revising its mobilization policies and reformulating new mechanisms of control at the local level. In examining the Ottoman mobilization of manpower from various aspects, my aim has been twofold: while I explored how the CUP-dominated Ottoman state tried to cope with the challenges of permanent mobilization of men for the war effort in particular, I showed how this process re-shaped state-society relations in Anatolia in general.

I have shown that the outbreak of the war was received with a certain enthusiasm in Ottoman society, but that this enthusiasm was actually a result of an

organized attempt carried out by a collaborative effort of both the CUP government and pro-CUP, mostly middle-class and urban Muslim-Turkish social groups. This coalition dominated the Ottoman public sphere through their semi-official voluntary associations, which functioned to muffle any dissenting voices against the pro-war policies of the CUP government. Censorship and martial law also contributed to this muffling process. The declaration of mobilization and the call to arms took place in such a social milieu, and, as a result the state did not face any major political reaction. An extensive oral propaganda and a proto-nationalist religious discourse helped spread the call to arms more efficiently to provincial Anatolia.

In order to maximize the available manpower potential for the war effort, the Ottoman state had to “re-occupy” Anatolia: the success of any manpower mobilization was dependent on a more efficient penetration of provincial Anatolia. The actual process of the mobilization required a well-established conscription system that worked efficiently at the local level. While reforming the conscription system had already started just after the Balkan defeat, the scale of mobilization during the Great War necessitated an almost entire overhaul of the existing system. This process involved the reestablishment of the conscription system at the local level through recruiting office branches in the districts, which worked in collaboration with local civilian authorities and local notables in order to maximize the available manpower. However, infrastructural deficiencies marked this process and the implementation of the system was practically impossible in certain regions such as Kurdish and tribal regions in eastern and southeastern Anatolia where demographic control mechanisms were weak. The Ottoman state tried to cope with the shortcomings of the conscription system by combining old imperial ways of recruitment with modern conscription methods and by creating alternative

recruitment categories such as volunteer units. Volunteers from Kurdish-populated regions played an important role in compensating for the insufficiency of the conscription system, as did volunteer units comprised of certain Muslim groups recently re-settled in Anatolia, such as the *muhacirs*, Circassians and Laz. While prisoner volunteers allowed Ottoman authorities to carry out more informal military actions that were improper for the regular units, religious volunteer units were used as a propaganda tool, along with their manpower contribution. The formation of these units also helped to create new bonds between the state and such Muslim Anatolian groups.

Furthermore, the prolongation of the war demanded increasingly more enlisted men on the battlefield, and this required a permanent mobilization on the home front. The Ottoman state responded to this challenge by forming an extensive framework of paramilitary youth organizations in provincial Anatolia, which sought to convince unschooled peasant boys to support the mobilization policies of the CUP government and, more practically, to physically prepare them for the actual war before they reached the age of military service. In this sense, local branches of the Ottoman Youth League were conceived of as agents of the state authority at the provincial level which would greatly help state authorities in the regimentation and militarization of the home front during the war.

However, in all these attempts in particular and throughout the mobilization effort in general, the participation of people in the war effort was not always at the level demanded by the state. Perhaps more importantly than infrastructural deficiencies, a major problem was reluctance and resistance on the part of people against the requirements of the mobilization. It is true that the state's call to arms sometimes received voluntary support from pro-CUP social groups and those who

considered such volunteerism as a way of promoting their social, economic and political status in society. It is also true that oral and written propaganda, and other mobilizing mechanisms such as peer pressure and local cultural traditions, convinced many people to join the war effort. And since military service was compulsory, many people complied with the law. But especially as the war became prolonged and the conditions of military service increasingly deteriorated, many people openly resisted the state's call to arms. In fact, as we have seen in the case of desertions, many people who initially supported and fully participated in the mobilization could turn into open resisters if their expectations were not realized during course of the war. As I have argued, under wartime conditions, the state's constant demands and increasing dependence on people led to the formation of a reciprocal relationship between the state and the people who were targets of its mobilization policies. I have called this reciprocity a tacit contract, in which the state continued to assert its claims and tried to increase its control capacity. At the same time, the target population responded in various ways which made the state continually revise its policies.

As provisioning the basic needs of people and maintaining their belief in a just war and victory became more and more difficult, this tacit contract was largely shaken. The surge of resistance against the mobilization was indicated by the mounting number of desertions. The problem of desertion revealed the limits of the Ottoman mobilization of manpower. While deserters came from every ethnic and religious group, the majority were from the very backbone of the Ottoman military, namely Anatolian Muslims. The extent of the problem was so wide that it turned into a major social issue on the homefront. Bands of deserter-brigands became prominent elements in rural Anatolia, intervening in social life and disrupting state authority.

Therefore, military measures were not sufficient to cope with the problem; it was also considered an internal security issue, and more extensive and intensive measures needed to be taken on the homefront. Such measures involved both punitive and incentive methods, and state authorities sought to collaborate with local people in dealing with the problem. As the main instrument of internal security in provincial Anatolia, the gendarmerie was greatly re-structured in this process. In terms of the human dimension, local gendarme forces were filled mainly by Anatolian Muslim elements, most prominently by Turks. Desperately in need of manpower in the armed forces, the state sometimes also needed to compromise with deserters, reducing the punishment they were given and sometimes offering full pardons to restore deserters to the army again.

In the case of both voluntary support and resistance, this tacit contract was mainly between the CUP-dominated Ottoman state and the Anatolian Muslim population. The Anatolian Muslim population not only constituted the main source of manpower in the Ottoman armed forces, it was also the demographic base behind the CUP government's nationalist perspective. From a pragmatic stance, the CUP-dominated state wanted to include non-Muslim Anatolians in the manpower mobilization. However, it never let them into the tacit contract entered into with Muslim populations in order to prevent them from expressing their expectations and producing responses to state policies. The Ottoman conscription system had a discriminatory character towards non-Muslims and they were largely employed in the unarmed service from the beginning of the war. The widespread reluctance among Anatolian non-Muslims to participate in the war effort, and their resistance in the form of draft-evading and desertion consolidated the CUP government's distrust towards them. The collaboration between the state and Anatolian Muslim groups

during the war functioned to further marginalize these “distrusted” elements at the social level. Moreover, even when that collaboration was absent and Anatolian Muslim groups showed resistance, the state’s control measures and attempts at remobilization still privileged the Anatolian Muslim population and more specifically the Turkish element, while they further marginalized non-Muslim groups.

The Ottoman conscription system was always incomplete, the Ottoman war effort ended in a defeat, and the Ottoman Empire practically dissolved at the end of the war. But the Ottoman mobilization of manpower achieved certain objectives and played a major role in reshaping Anatolia’s social infrastructure that was inherited by the Turkish National Struggle of 1919-1922. First of all, despite major difficulties, the Ottomans continued to supply enlisted men for the battlefield until the end of the war. Secondly, in coping with the limits of its control capacity at the local level across provincial Anatolia, the state tried to reestablish a reinforced internal security mechanism which facilitated a remobilization of manpower during the National Struggle period. And, thirdly, as a major factor in reshaping state-society relations in Anatolia, the process of manpower mobilization contributed to the nationalist homogenization of the Anatolian demography and played an important role in creating the human foundation of the Turkish nation-state. Many historians think the Ottoman/Turkish Great War actually ended not in 1918, but in 1922; the National Struggle was an extension in the Anatolian context. I would revise this assertion and suggest that the Turkish National Struggle actually began during the Great War.

As more and more in-depth studies on other aspects of the Ottoman mobilization experience during the Great War become available, the points that have been discussed in this dissertation will certainly be approached from a broader and

more multi-dimensional perspective. Manpower mobilization was only one dimension of the general mobilization process. Even in this specific field I have only focused on the Anatolian geography and Muslim population. In order to see a more complete picture, we need to have in-depth analyses on how the mobilization of manpower was implemented and received in other geographies and populations of the Ottoman Empire during the Great War. However, as more and more research is conducted in other fields of the Ottoman general mobilization experience, such as economic and agricultural mobilization, provisioning, mobilization of women, et cetera, our understanding of the social history of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War will benefit greatly.

Such a broadening in our perspective will surely shed more light on the transition from the end of the Ottoman Empire to the emergence of the Turkish nation-state in Anatolia. But equally importantly, approaching the Ottoman Great War experience from geographically and demographically more diverse and larger angles will help us to better understand the reshaping of the Middle East at the end of the Ottoman era. Last, but definitely not least, such a broadening will also contribute remarkably to the attempt at integrating the Ottoman Great War experience into the world history of the War.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Religious Decree (*fetva-yı şerife*) for Holy War

If several enemies unite against Islam, if the countries of Islam are sacked, if the Moslem populations are massacred or made captive; and if in this case the Padishah in conformity with the sacred words of the Koran proclaims the Holy War, is participation in this war a duty for all Moslems, old and young, cavalry and infantry? Must the Mohammedans of all countries of Islam hasten with their bodies and possessions to the *Djat*? [Note: Jihad, Holy War.]

Answer: "Yes."

The Moslem subjects of Russia, of France, of England and of all the countries that side with them in their land and sea attacks dealt against the Caliphate for the purpose of annihilating Islam, must these subjects, too, take part in the holy War against the respective governments from which they depend?

Answer : "Yes."

Those who at a time when all Moslems are summoned to fight, avoid the struggle and refuse to join in the Holy War, are they exposed to the wrath of God, to great misfortunes, and to the deserved punishment?

Answer : "Yes."

If the Moslem subjects of the said countries should take up arms against the government of Islam, would they commit an unpardonable sin, even if they had been driven to the war by threats of extermination uttered against themselves and their families?

Answer : "Yes."

The Moslems who in the present war are under England, France, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro and those who give aid to these countries by waging war against Germany and Austria, allies of Turkey, do they deserve to be punished by the wrath of God as being the cause of harm and damage to the Caliphate and to Islam?

Answer: "Yes."

Source: *Source Records of the Great War, Vol. III*, ed. by Charles F. Horne (Indianapolis: The American Legion, 1931).

APPENDIX B: Imperial Declaration by Sultan Mehmed V

To my army! To my navy!

Immediately after the war between the Great Powers began, I called you to arms in order to be able in case of trouble to protect the existence of empire and country from any assault on the part of our enemies, who are only awaiting the chance to attack us suddenly and unexpectedly as they have always done.

While we were thus in a state of armed neutrality, a part of the Russian fleet, which was going to lay mines at the entrance of the straits of the Black Sea, suddenly opened fire against a squadron of our own fleet at the time engaged in manoeuvres.

While we were expecting reparation from Russia for this unjustified attack, contrary to international law, the empire just named, as well as its allies, recalled their ambassadors and severed diplomatic relations with our country.

The fleets of England and France have bombarded the straits of the Dardanelles, and the British fleet has shelled the harbour of Akbah on the Red Sea.

In the face of such successive proofs of wanton hostility we have been forced to abandon the peaceful attitude for which we always strove, and now in common with our allies, Germany and Austria, we turn to arms in order to safeguard our lawful interests.

The Russian Empire during the last three hundred years has caused our country to suffer many losses in territory, and when we finally arose to that sentiment of awakening and regeneration which would increase our national welfare and our power, the Russian Empire made every effort to destroy our attempts, either with war or with numerous machinations and intrigues.

Russia, England, and France never for a moment ceased harbouring ill-will against our Caliphate, to which millions of Mussulmans, suffering under the tyranny of foreign dominations, are religiously and whole-heartedly devoted, and it was always these powers that started every misfortune that came upon us.

Therefore, in this mighty struggle which now we are undertaking, we once for all will put an end to the attacks made from one side against the Caliphate, and from the other against the existence of our country.

The wounds inflicted, with the help of the Almighty, by my fleet in the Black Sea, and by my army in the Dardanelles, in Akbah, and on the Caucasian frontiers against our enemies, have strengthened in us the conviction that our sacred struggle for a right cause will triumph. The fact, moreover, that today the countries and armies of our enemies are being crushed under the heels of our allies is a good sign, making our conviction as regards final success still stronger.

My heroes! My soldiers!

In this sacred war and struggle, which we began against the enemies who have undermined our religion and our holy fatherland, never for a single moment cease from strenuous effort and from self-abnegation.

Throw yourselves against the enemy as lions, bearing in mind that the very existence of our empire, and of 300,000,000 Moslems whom I have summoned by sacred Fetva to a supreme struggle, depend on your victory.

The hearty wishes and prayers of 300,000,000 innocent and tortured faithful, whose faces are turned in ecstasy and devotion to the Lord of the universe in the mosques and the shrine of the Kaabah, are with you.

My children! My soldiers!

No army in the history of the world was ever honoured with a duty as sacred and as great as is yours. By fulfilling it, show that you are the worthy descendants of the Ottoman Armies that in the past made the world tremble, and make it impossible for any foe of our faith and country to tread on our ground, and disturb the peace of the sacred soil of Yemen, where the inspiring tomb of our prophet lies. Prove beyond doubt to the enemies of the country that there exist an Ottoman army and navy which know how to defend their faith, their country and their military honour, and how to defy death for their sovereign.

Right and loyalty are on our side, and hatred and tyranny on the side of our enemies, and therefore there is no doubt that the Divine help and assistance of the just God and the moral support of our glorious Prophet will be on our side to encourage us. I feel convinced that from this struggle we shall emerge as an empire that has made good the losses of the past and is once more glorious and powerful.

Do not forget that you are brothers in arms of the strongest and bravest armies of the world, with whom we now are fighting shoulder to shoulder. Let those of you who are to die a martyr's death be messengers of victory to those who have gone before us, and let the victory be sacred and the sword be sharp of those of you who are to remain in life.

MEHMED REŞAD

Source: *Source Records of the Great War, Vol. III*, ed. by Charles F. Horne (Indianapolis: The American Legion, 1931).

APPENDIX C: The Organization of Ottoman Recruiting Offices in 1914

<i>Army Corps Recruiting Office Zones</i>	<i>Divisional Recruiting Office Sectors</i>	<i>Recruiting Office Branches in the Districts</i>
I Corps (Istanbul)	1. Division (Konya)	Konya, Sille, Beyşehir, Seydişehir, Bozkır, Karaman, Ermenak, Ereğli, Aksaray, Ürgüp, Nevşehir, Şereflikoçhisar.
	2. Division (Eskişehir)	Bilecik, Söğüt, Eskişehir, Seyitgazi, Kütahya, Tavşanlı, Emet, Afyonkarahisar, Sandıklı, Bolvadin, Sincanlı, Kırşehir, Ilgın.
	3. Division (İzmit)	İzmit, Karamürsel, Adapazarı, Geyve, Taraklı, Düzce, Bolu, Gerede, Eğreyli, Devrek, Çaycuma, Bartın.
II Corps (Edirne)	4. Division (Edirne)	Edirne, Karaağaç, Dimetoka, Uzunköprü, Kırkkilise, Babaeski, Lüleburgaz, Vize, Çorlu, Tekirdağ, Hayrabolu, Malkara, Keşan.
	5. Division (Fatih)	Fatih, Eyüp, Aksaray, Süleymaniye, Sultanahmet, Kılıçali, Hırkaîşerif, Kocamustafapaşa, Makriköy (Bakırköy), Çatalca.
	6. Division (Selimiye)	Üsküdar, Kadıköy, Anadolu Boğaziçi, Cihangir, Beşiktaş, Rumeli Boğaziçi, Kasımpaşa, Teşvikiye, Hasköy, Şile.
III Corps (Tekirdağ)	7. Division (Bandırma)	Bandırma, Balıkesir, Kepsüt, Kirmastı, Karacabey, Bursa, Çekirge, Gemlik, Atranos (Orhaneli), Gönen.
	8. Division (Soma)	Soma, Akhisar, Demirci, Sındırgı, Alaşehir, Eşme, Uşak, Gediz, Simav.
	9. Division (Çanakkale)	Kale-i Sultaniye (Çanakkale), Gelibolu, Lapseki, Biga, Karabiga, Bayramiç, Ezine, Ayvacık, Edremit, Kemer (Burhaniye).
IV Corps (İzmir)	10. Division (İzmir)	İzmir, Bornova, Kuşadası, Menemen, Manisa, Kasaba (Turgutlu), Bergama, Dikili, Ödemiş, Tire.
	11. Division (Aydın)	Aydın, Nazilli, Çine, Bozdoğan, Karacasu, Sarayköy, Denizli, Hunaz, Çal, Tavas, Muğla, Milas, Marmaris, Megri (Fethiye).
	12. Division (Isparta)	Isparta, Eğridir, Uluborlu, Yalvaç, Burdur, Tefenni, Elmalı, Antalya (Teke), Akseki, Alaiye (Alanya).
V Corps (Ankara)	13. Division (Ankara)	Ankara, Kalecik, Balâ, Yabanabat (Kızılcahamam), Ayaş, Beypazarı, Sivrihisar, Haymana, Kengiri (Çankırı), Koçhisar, Çerkeş, Kırşehir, Keskin, Mucur.
	14. Division (Kastamonu)	Kastamonu, Araç, Taşköprü, Boyabat, Sinop, Ayancık, İnebolu, Güre, Cide, Safranbolu.

	15. Division (Yozgat)	Yozgat, Akdağmadeni, Alaca, Kayseri, Erkiilet, Tavulson, Boğazlıyan, Çorum, İskilip, Osmançık, Develi.
VI Corps (Aleppo)	16. Division (Adana)	Adana, Karaisalı, Mersin, Tarsus, Silifke, Anamur, Misis, Sis (Kozan), Feke, Osmaniye (Cebelibereket).
	26. Division (Aleppo)	Birinci Halep, İkinci Halep, Üçüncü Halep (Cebelisem'an), Harim, Antakya, Ma'ra, İdlip, Ordu (Muradiye), Bab, İ'zaz, Kilis, İskenderun, Dirzor.
	26. Division (Antep)	Antep, Kızılhisar, Nizip (Rumkale), Birecik, Suruç, Urfa, Haran, Maraş, Elbistan, Zeytun, Pazarcık.
VII Corps (San'a)		Bu kolordunun Sana'da bulunan 19., Hudeyde'de bulunan 20. tümenleri ile Asir'de bağımsız bulunan 21. tümenle Hicaz'da (Mekke) bulunan 22. tümen için Kolordu Asker Alma Daireleri, tümen ahz-ı asker kalemleri ve bunların askerlik şubeleri yoktur. Bu kolordu ile bağımsız tümenler erlerini diğer kolordu askerlik daire ve kalemlerinin tertibi üzere anavatan askerlik şubelerinden alırlar.
VIII Corps (Damascus)	25. Division (Damascus)	Birinci Şam (Meydan), İkinci Şam (Kanavat), Üçüncü Şam (Salhiye), Duma, Nebik, Zibdani, Katana (Kunetra ile birleşik), Baalbek, Der'a, Havran, Aclun, Ezr'a, Basri eski Şam, Süveyde.
	25. Division (Trablüşsam)	Trablüşsam, Hasinülekrat, Safiye, Humus, Hama, Umraniye, Lazkiye, Ceyhun, Cibli.
	27. Division (Hayfa)	Beyrut, Sayda, Sur, Hayfa, Cenin, Nablus, Cemain, Benisa'ib.
	27. Division (Jerusalem)	Kudüs, Bire, Halilürrahman, Yafa, Remle, Gazze, Mecdel.
XI Corps (Erzurum)	17. Division (Bayburt)	Trabzon, Polathane, Büyük Liman, Maçka, Sürmene, Of, Rize, Erhavi, Pazar.
	28. Division (Erzurum)	Erzurum, Pasinler (Hasankale), Hınıs, K1ğı (Plümür hariç), Mamahatun (Tercan), Erzincan, Plümür, Kemah, Refahiye, Karaköse (Karakilise).
	29. Division (Erzurum)	Bayburt, İspir, Keskin, Tortum, Aşkale, Gümüşhane, Kelkit, Şiran, Karahisar, Mesudiye.
X Corps (Erzincan)	30. Division (Sivas)	Sivas, Yıldızeli, Hafik, zara, Divrik, Kangal, Gürün, Sarkışla, Aziziye.
	31. Division (Amasya)	Tokat, Reşadiye, Niksar, Amasya, Mecitözü, Merzifon, Köprü, Havza.
	32. Division (Samsun)	Samsun, Bafra, Çarşamba, Ünye, Fatsa, Perşembe, Ordu, Giresun, Tirebolu.
XI Corps (Mamuretülaziz)	18. Division (Elazığ)	Elazığ, Harput, Arapkir, Malatya, Akçadağ, Adıyaman, Besni, Hozat, Mazgirt.
	33. Division (Van)	Van, Başkale, Gevar, Erciş, Hizan, Siirt, Mardin, Midyat, Nuseybin. (İran sınır bölgeleri bu tümeninde olup erlerini bu tümenin askerlik

	34. Division (Muş)	şubelerinden alırlar.) Muş, Malazgirt, Genç, Palo, Lice, Silvan, Erganimadeni, Diyarbekir, Derik, Siverek.
XII Corps (Mosul)	35. Division (Mosul)	Birinci, ikinci ve üçüncü Musul, Bagsika, Dehük, Akra, Erbil, Revandiz.
	36. Division (Kerkük)	Kerkük, Köysancak, Dauk, Selahiye (Kefri), Birinci Süleymaniye, İkinci Süleymaniye. (İran sınır bölüklerinin bu bölgedeki aksamı erlerini bu tümenin askerlik şubelerinden alırlar.)
XIII Corps (Baghdad)	37. Division (Baghdad)	Birinci Bağdat (Mercaniye), İkinci Bağdat (Haydarhane), Üçüncü Bağdat (Kerh) Dördüncü Bağdat (Diyale), Azâmiye, Kâzimiye, Delvane, Yakubiye, Samra, Memdeli.
	38. Division (Basra)	Kerbelâ, Delim, Hille, Hindiye, Necef, Basra, Amara, Diyale.

Source: *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, III. Cilt 6. Kısım (1908-1920)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1971), appendix 8.

APPENDIX D: Miscellaneous Illustrations

D.1. *Fetva Emini* Ali Haydar Efendi announcing the holy war (*cihad*) to the crowd at the Fatih Mosque (Istanbul) on 14 November 1914.



Source: *The Times History of the War*, vol. 3 (London: The Times Printing House, 1915), p. 44.

D.2. Crowd listening to the reading of the holy war proclamation at the Fatih Mosque (14 November 1914).



Source: *The Times History of the War*, vol. 3 (London: The Times Printing House, 1915), p. 45.

D.3. Ottoman reserves joining the colors in high spirits during the Balkan War.

Note the *imam* in front of the group and the drum and clarion players behind him. This composition, which amalgamated religious and festive atmospheres in the moment of departing soldiers also continued during the Great War at the local level.



Source: Philip Gibbs and Bernard Grant, *Adventures of War with Cross and Crescent*, second edition (London: Methuen & Co., 1912), p. 66.

D.4. Regular troops in uniform departing for the battlefield on the right; newly enlisted men still in their civilian cloths on their way to their units on the left (earlier days of the Great War).



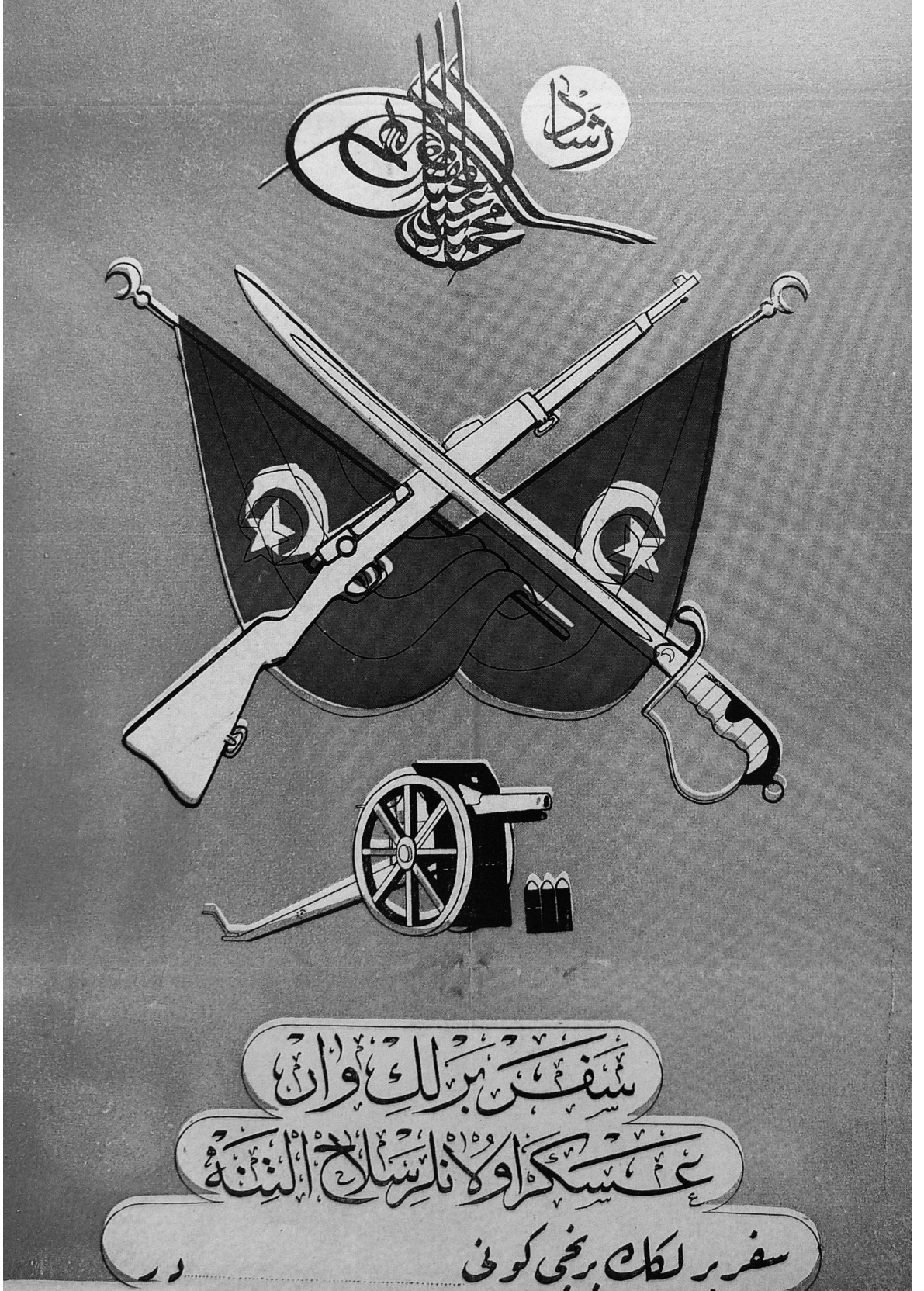
Source: *The Times History of the War*, vol. 3 (London: The Times Printing House, 1915), p. 47.

D.5. Enlisted men from Anatolia waiting to be sent to their units (earlier days of the Great War).



Source: *The Times History of the War*, vol. 3 (London: The Times Printing House, 1915), p. 79.

D.6. Ottoman mobilization poster. “*Seferberlik Var. Asker Olanlar Silah Altına!*”
(Mobilization has been declared. All eligible men to arms!)



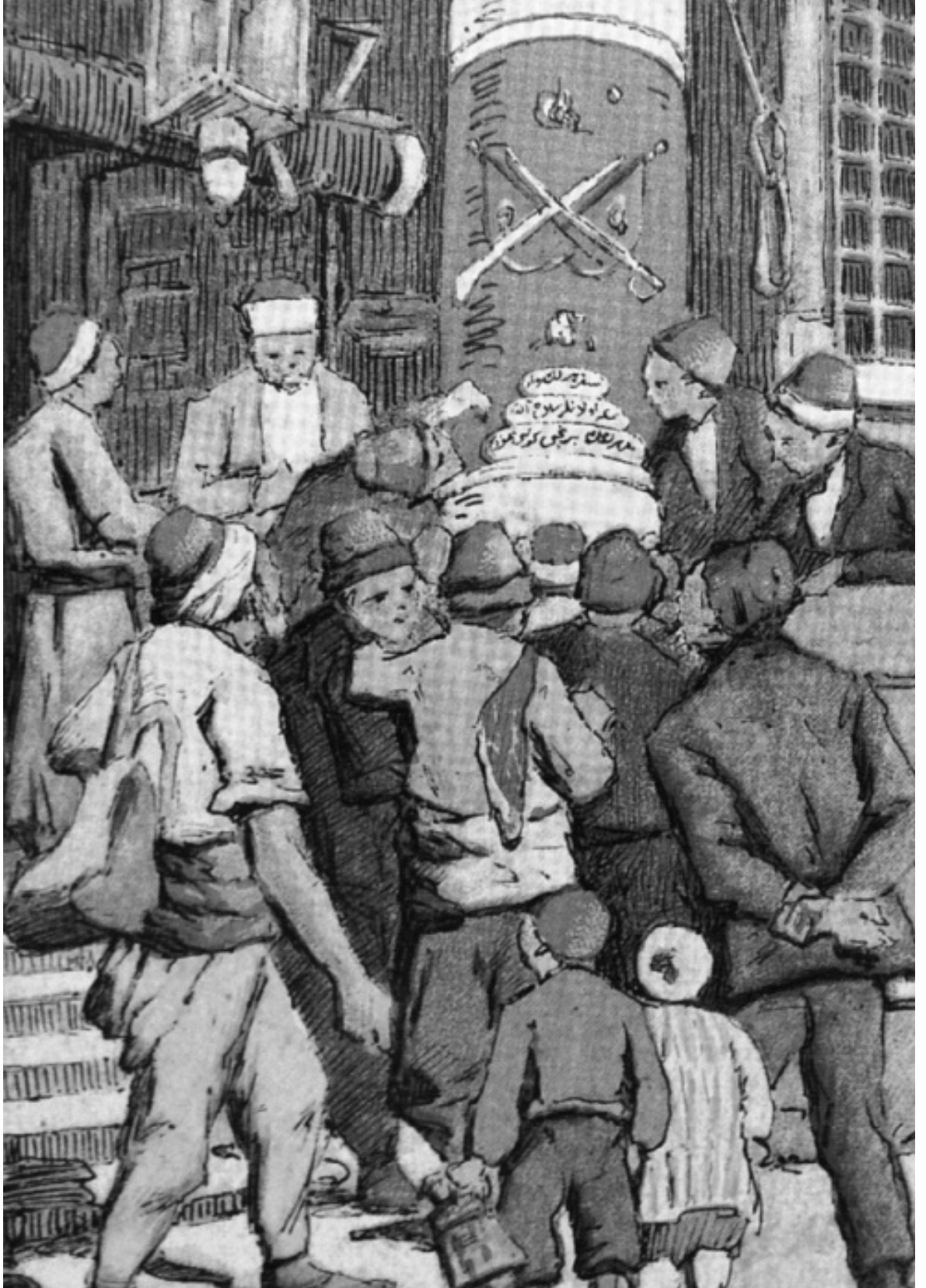
Source: Haluk Oral, *Arıburnu 1915: Çanakkale Savaşı'ndan Belgesel Öyküler* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 4.

D.7. Another Ottoman mobilization poster. Writings are the same: “*Seferberlik Var. Asker Olanlar Silah Altına!*”



Source: Haluk Oral, *Arıburnu 1915: Çanakkale Savaşı'ndan Belgesel Öyküler* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 2.

D.8. Mobilization posters were hung on walls of main public buildings. Here is an illustration depicting people getting informed by such a poster.



Source: Haluk Oral, *Arıburnu 1915: Çanakkale Savaşı'ndan Belgesel Öyküler* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 5.

D.9. A mobilization decree being announced to the public orally in Istanbul.

Oral methods of communication maintained their importance in Ottoman war propaganda.



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 54.

D.10. Young boys in Macedonia departing to join Ottoman forces.

Peer pressure at the local level was an important factor in the mobilization of mobilization.



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 59.

D.11. Ottoman troops on the Caucasus front (1916).

Lack of basic needs was always a major problem on the battlefield undermining the Ottoman military performance. Troops had to endure hard winter conditions with insufficient clothing.



Source: T. Örses and N. Özçelik, *I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Türk Askeri Kıyafetleri* (Istanbul: Denizler Kitabevi, n.d.), p. 156.

D.12. Ceremony held for the reception of military banner by the 134th Infantry Regiment in a town of Syria (1915).

Note the presence of local Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious men praying for the troops. Such images of communal unity usually existed in such formal ceremonies. But in practice, non-Muslims' reception of mobilization was mainly characterized by reluctance, and a deep distrust characterized the Ottoman state policies concerning non-Muslims.



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 158.

D.13. Mevlevi Volunteer Battalion in Damascus departing for the battlefield (1916).



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 186.

D.14. Mevlevi Volunteers in Konya holding a ceremony for departure for the battlefield in the presence of their sheikh Veled Çelebi (1916).



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 186.

D.15. Ottoman officers and troops in Iraq praying for victory on a religious fest day (1915).

Note the presence of Arab soldiers (probably volunteers) in their local clothes. Religion was not only a major discourse of unity in Ottoman mobilization, but also used for combat motivation on the battlefield.



Source: *Cepheleden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheleler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 172.

D.16. Captured deserters (probably Arab) in Iraq.



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 173.

D.17. "Ottoman troops in British POW Camps". British propaganda leaflet depicting Ottoman POWs in great comfort and happiness in British POW camps.

Such leaflets aimed to encourage Ottoman troops to desert to the British side. They usually contained graphic material besides written statements.



Source: Haluk Oral, *Arıburnu 1915: Çanakkale Savaşı'ndan Belgesel Öyküler* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 142.

D.18. Another British propaganda leaflet exploiting anti-German sentiments among Ottoman soldiers.

Captured deserters usually complained about the privileged status of German soldiers in the Ottoman army. This leaflet depicts a well-fed German soldier having his meal while two slim and exhausted Ottoman soldiers fighting; Ottoman soldiers chat among themselves and question the alliance with Germans.



Source: Haluk Oral, *Arıburnu 1915: Çanakkale Savaşı'ndan Belgesel Öyküler* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 145.

D.19. Muslim Ottoman Women working in an ammunition factory.

The home front was an integrated part of the war and female labor was mobilized for the war effort.



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), p. 250.

D.20. Exhausted Ottoman soldiers on their way back home from Aleppo after Mudros Armistice.

Retreat was one of the weakest points in Ottoman military preparedness, and retreating Ottoman troops went through hard times in Syria at the end of the war.



Source: *Cephelerden Kurtuluş Savaşı'na, vol. 1: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Cepheler* (Ankara: Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2004), pp. 196-197.

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