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34. BETWEEN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND GREECE: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REALITIES OF THE CRETAN MUSLIMS AFTER THE BALKAN WARS
(OSMANLI İMPARATORLUĞU İLE YUNANİSTAN ARASINDA: BALKAN SAVAŞLARI SONRASI GİRİTLİ MÜSLÜMANLARIN TOPLUMSAL VE SİYASAL GERÇEKLERİ)

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Abstract

The Balkan Wars led to territorial losses and large-scale Muslim emigration from the Balkans and Crete to Anatolia. The island of Crete was directly affected by the Balkan Wars. Following the unification of Crete with Greece in 1913, Cretan Muslims abandoned their own lands and began to emigrate from Crete to various places in the Ottoman Empire. It is interesting to note that, however, an important Muslim community remained on the island until 1923. Due to the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Empire witnessed profound socio-economic, territorial and political transformations. Within this context, this paper aims to deal with the Cretan Muslim immigrants and to focus mainly on the Cretan Muslims' experiences in Western Anatolia and on the island of Crete. The standard approach generally argues that these Cretan Muslim immigrants contributed to the politicization and nationalization of Anatolia and that they became active elements of Turkish nationalism. It is important to note that throughout the nineteenth century the infiltration of Greek national ideology into Cretan society helped shape the trajectories of politics and led to the gradual transformation of the island into part of the Greek world. At the same time, the Greek state was characterized by the Great Idea and defined Asia Minor as the "Unredeemed Land". In this respect, this paper suggests that transformations and changes in the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be explained without a reference to the discourse of sovereignty and rival nationalisms. The present paper will offer a new look at the socio-political and demographic transformations of the Ottoman Empire through the mirror of the Cretan Muslims and provide a detailed picture and particularities of the Cretan experience.

Introduction

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 led to territorial losses and large-scale Muslim emigration from the Balkans and Crete to Anatolia. Eighty percent of the Balkan territories of the Ottoman Empire was lost. These wars not only led to the loss of the Balkans, but also threatened the lives of the Muslims. It was estimated that some 400,000 Muslim refugees arrived from the former Ottoman territories.¹ The defeat of the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars deeply influenced Ottoman society and paved the way for a clash between different religious and ethnic communities. Thousands of people were forced to leave their homes, inter-communal relations had shifted, mutual tolerance was destroyed, and heterogeneity replaced homogeneity.

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¹ Eric Jan Zürcher, "Greek and Turkish refugees and deportees 1912-1924", Turkology Update Leiden Project Working Papers Archive, Department of Turkish Studies, Universiteit Leiden. <http://www.transanatolie.com/english/turkey/turks/ottomans/ejz18.pdf> (11 Ocak 2013).

The mainstream literature has analyzed the traumatic events such as forced migrations, population exchanges or social engineering projects of the early twentieth century within the framework of Turkish nationalism. This approach overemphasized the role of Turkish nationalism arguing that Turkish nationalism gained a crucial power and dramatically shook the existing structure in the empire. This view suggests that the imperial balance was disturbed by the rise of the Turkish nationalism and national fanaticism of the Committee of the Union and Progress.² However, this approach failed to analyze the roles of the local people, rival nationalisms and regional and economic factors. One has to remember that the events and turmoil both in Ottoman Anatolia and on the island of Crete should be examined within the framework of the discourse on sovereignty. At the turn of the century, on the one hand, the Greek kingdom had been trying to expand and realize the Great Idea, and on the other hand, the Ottoman Empire was trying to be self-legitimized in the world of the nation-states.³ It is important to note that both Crete and Western Anatolia were defined as symbolic places and had been contested territories under the forces of imperial competitions and various nationalisms. At that time the Greek state defined Asia Minor as the 'Unredeemed Land' and tried to incorporate 'Unredeemed Greeks' of Ottoman Anatolia to the Greek kingdom.⁴ With its important Orthodox Christian population, Crete attracted attention from the Greek state and became the fundamental object of its irredentist policies. In an ironic way, the Ottomans were seen as 'foreign occupiers' of Crete and the Cretan Christians were always linked to the ancient Cretans. From this perspective, the Cretan Muslims were regarded as 'a case of cultural minority-ness', representing the Ottoman regime.⁵

Furthermore, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the persecution of Ottoman Muslims in the Balkans during the Balkan Wars created a widespread fear of an invasion of Asia Minor among the Turkish elite and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). The Balkan Wars also confirmed suspicions in the CUP that non-Muslim inhabitants of the Empire could not be trusted. For that reason, the CUP aimed to create a national core in the Ottoman Empire by pursuing the Turkification policies. This project had various dimensions including the Turkification of the economy, the Turkification of Asia Minor's demography and the Turkification of the state mechanism of the Ottoman state.⁶ The defeat of the Ottomans at the hands of former subject people produced feelings of suspicion against the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, particularly against the Ottoman Greeks. Emphasizing the role played by the Greek warship *Averof* in the Ottoman defeat, it was argued that the Ottoman Greeks sent a large amount of money to the Greek state in order to finance the construction of *Averof*. In a way, all pamphlets argued that there was a close cultural and political relationship between the Ottoman Greeks and Greece. Therefore, the Ottoman Greeks were considered a real threat against the survival of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of this, the CUP wanted to replace the Ottoman Greeks of the coastal regions in Western Anatolia with Muslims whom they considered to be more loyal.⁷

² For instance see: Mathias Bjørnlund, "The 1914 Cleansing of Aegean Greeks as a case of violent Turkification", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10, 2008, ss. 41-57; Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and Armenian Genocide*, (New York, 2004); Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi*, (İstanbul, 2008).

³ Elektra Kostopoulou, "The Muslim Millet of Autonomous Crete: An Exploration into its Origins and Implications", (İstanbul: Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Boğaziçi University, 2009), s. 24.

⁴ Sia Anagnostopoulou, "The Process of Defining Izmir's 'Historical National Mission' in the 19th c.-1919", içinde *The Passage from the Ottoman Empire to the Nation-States* (İstanbul, 2004), s. 93.

⁵ Kostopoulou, "The Muslim Millet...", s. 214.

⁶ Erol Ülker, "Contextualising 'Turkification': Nation-building in the late Ottoman Empire, 1908-18", *Nations and Nationalism*, 11, 2005, ss. 613-636.

⁷ Yusuf Doğan Çetinkaya, "Muslim Merchants and Working Class in Action: Nationalism, Social Mobilization, and Boycott Movement in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914", (Unpublished PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2010), s.200.

Needless to say, the island of Crete was directly affected by the Balkan Wars. The island was united with Greece at the end of the Balkan Wars. In December 1913, Prime Minister Venizelos and King Constantine raised the Greek flag at Chania, marking the end of Ottoman sovereignty in Crete. The island was proclaimed a Greek province and all Cretans were to become citizens of Greece.⁸ Following this unification, the Cretan Muslims abandoned their own lands and began to emigrate from Crete to various places in the Ottoman Empire. It is important to note that an important Muslim community remained on the island until 1923.

This paper aims to establish a trans-local link between the Cretan Muslim immigrants in Western Anatolia and Cretan Muslims in Crete in the late Ottoman period, and to connect Western Anatolia to the island of Crete through the experiences of Cretan Muslims. It deals with the transition from empire to nation-state in the Eastern Mediterranean in the context of a wider political panorama. The debate centering on the transformation of 'Autonomous Crete' to 'Greek Crete' and the transformation of the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic is associated with the wider issue of the continuous negotiations and conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean. While the first part of this paper examines the experiences of the Cretan Muslim immigrants in Ottoman Anatolia after the Balkan Wars, the second part deals with the impact of the Balkan Wars on the Cretan Muslims and the inter-communal relations between the Cretan Muslims and Christians on the island.

It is important to remember that the Cretan revolt of 1897 succeeded in altering the local social, political, and economic structures and laid the groundwork for the establishment of an autonomous government on the island. Fearing from their future after the Cretan revolt of 1897 many Cretan Muslims emigrated from Crete to the Ottoman Empire. This Cretan Muslim immigration continued during the political disturbances of 1908, and after the Balkan Wars. One may assume that Western Anatolia saw one of the largest concentrations of Cretan Muslim immigrants who settled in the coastal towns and the interior of the region. It is noteworthy to mention that throughout the nineteenth century the demographic composition of the island changed. Whereas in 1821 the Muslim population was 160,000 and the Christian population 129,000, the ratio altered to 60,000 Muslims to 200,000 Christians by 1866. The census of 1881 showed that the total population of the island was 279,192. The Muslim population of the island began to decrease in 1897, when the number of Muslims amounted to 70,000. During the census of 1900, the decrease in the Muslim population was confirmed. Out of 303,553 inhabitants, the Muslims comprised 33,496 (11 percent), the Christians 269,319 (88 percent), and the Jews 728 (1 percent). Between 1900 and 1908, the dramatic decrease in the Muslim population slowed, and in the latter year it amounted to 37,000. According to the census figures of 1911, the Muslim population had decreased again to 27,852. When the island of Crete was united with Greece in 1913, the Muslim population was 25,000.⁹

During the Balkan Wars, Muslims in the former provinces of the Balkans were killed, thrown out of their homelands and assaulted by paramilitary groups and bandits. Therefore, their experience of violence from Christians was alive and they were transferred from one generation to the other particularly after the Balkan wars when they took refuge in Ottoman Anatolia.¹⁰ As a result of this, constant warfare, violence and insecurity had become a daily occurrence in Anatolia. Furthermore, the publication of news of the atrocities and assaults of Orthodox Christian gangs on Muslim villages in the Ottoman newspapers and journals increased the tension between the Muslim and Christian

⁸ Kostopoulou, "The Muslim Millet...", s. 20.

⁹ Pınar Şenişik, *The Transformation of Ottoman Crete: Revolts, Politics and Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (London and New York, 2011), s. 65.

¹⁰ Emre Erol, "A Multidimensional Analysis of the Events in Eski Foça (Παλαιά Φώκαια) on the period of Summer 1914", *Cahiers Balkaniques*, 40, 2010. <http://ceb.revues.org/911?lang=en>

communities of Ottoman Anatolia.¹¹ During the period from the end of the Balkan Wars until the eve of the Greek army's defeat in Asia Minor the tension in the relations between Christians and Muslims was carried on. Claims of Ottoman Greeks disloyalty during the Balkan Wars served as a pretext for greater exclusion of the Ottoman Greeks.

Anti-Greek movements gained impetus in March 1914. The boycott movements took place in various places in Ottoman Anatolia, targeting non-Muslims, particularly Ottoman Greeks. The aim was to exclude native non-Muslims from economic networks and to destroy the commercial and economic predominance of the Greeks throughout the Empire. The Ottoman press and patriotic movements called upon Muslims to boycott Christian businesses and employ only Muslims. It is certainly the case that the Cretan Muslim immigrants did participate in the boycott movements.¹² Even a quick overview of Ottoman archival material and foreign consular reports indicate that the Cretan Muslim immigrants made up the main component and were actively involved in the boycotts of 1914. However, the standard approach generally argues that the Cretan Muslim immigrants were the most ardent supporters of the boycott movements and other anti-Rum activities. All the blame was cast on the shoulders of the Cretan Muslims who were depicted as 'shrewd', 'cunning' and 'unfriendly'. They believed that these 'bad Turks' corrupted the Anatolian Turks by politicizing and nationalizing them and altered the inter-communal balance between the local Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants of Anatolia. It was asserted that

Before the Cretan Turks came we got on very, very well with the local Turks. Whenever we went to the Turkish villages we would be given cheese pies. Although it was obvious that the Cretan Turks wanted to get rid of us, and it was also obvious to us that they were being encouraged by the government.¹³

The Cretan Muslims had also been perceived as the representatives of 'fanaticism'. Accordingly, they were stereotyped as 'troublemakers' and 'war-like' people. For instance, Pantelis Kontogiannis stated that, during the Christian deportations and expulsions just before the First World War, and indeed during that war, the Cretan Turks were the most merciless and aggressive persecutors of the Greeks.¹⁴

Moreover, it was claimed that along with the Macedonian refugees who came to Anatolia after the Balkan Wars, the Cretan Muslims became the 'earliest foot soldiers of Turkish nationalism' and 'waved the Turkish flag more enthusiastically than the local peoples'. With regard to this, the following statement was made:

We lived together in a brotherly fashion with the Turks until 1912. With the Balkans Wars and the exodus from Macedonia-came the haters. They were anti-Greek. So too were the Cretan Turks. The Turks did not pressure us. We loved them, they loved us. But the Macedonian Turks came through here and they were fanatics and they spoiled them Until the Hurriett we enjoyed a blessed life with the Turks. Then came the refugees from Crete and Bulgaria. They were fanatized against Greeks, and every so often they propogandized the locals to hate us.¹⁵

However, the above interpretations do not appear to be valid. These interpretations considered the Cretan Muslim immigrants as a homogenous entity disregarding the differences, complex networks, and various web of interactions. I have found that the actual magnitude of the relationship

¹¹ Çetinkaya, "Muslim Merchants...", s. 192.

¹² *Ayn Eser*, s. 207.

¹³ Nicholas Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and Its Destruction in the Late Ottoman Anatolia*, (Oxford, 2013), s. 139.

¹⁴ *Ayn Eser*, s. 138.

¹⁵ *Ayn Eser*, s. 140.

between Muslims and non-Muslims in the early twentieth century Ottoman Empire was considerably different and larger than the findings that the above approaches provided. Accordingly, the typologies attributed to the Cretan Muslim immigrants as 'bad Turks' were not analytically relevant ones. We must keep in mind that such crude stereotypes would be unfair since the Cretan Muslim immigrants in Anatolia refused to accept too many of the demands of Turkish nationalism and tried to protect their cultural particularities. Moreover, it seems that Cretan Muslim immigrants preserved their local identity and were linked to their place of birth, relatives and memories. At this point, linguistic particularity of Cretan Muslims has to be taken into consideration. They had managed to maintain their Cretan dialect (*Kritika*) in Anatolia. Most importantly, like the other displaced people, the Cretan Muslim immigrants had lost their homes and have experienced the 'sense of a lost homeland'¹⁶ and 'often speak nostalgically of the homeland'.¹⁷

On the other hand, the Muslims who had remained in Crete after 1913 were trying to adapt to the new situation by defending their interests. The unification of Crete with Greece represented a fundamental change in the local dynamics that redefined the ideological boundaries between the Cretan Muslims and Christians. During the period 1913-1923, the Cretan Muslims and Cretan Christians had not lived in isolation from one another. Instead, there was intimate daily contact between them. In other words, the relations between Muslims and Christians were not only characterized by the conflicts, but also by the common everyday life. Therefore, it is meaningless to insist on a clear-cut distinction between the Cretan Muslims and Christians, since they interacted in both economic and social spheres. However, it should be noted that acts of violence continued in the hinterland and the Cretan Muslims were forced to leave their houses and properties and flee to the major coastal towns.¹⁸

To understand the survival of Cretan Muslims in Crete during the period 1913-1923 one should examine the role played by the *Cemaat-i İslamiye İdaresi* which became the essential element for the well-being of the Cretan Muslims. *Cemaat-i İslamiye İdaresi* catered for the economic and social needs of the Cretan Muslims, and facilitated the integration of society. This institution was not only crucial for socio-economic lives of the Cretans Muslims but also for the operation of Muslim educational institutions. Moreover, *Cemaat-i İslamiye İdaresi* preserved the religious identity of the Cretan Muslims and responded to certain religious needs of the Cretan Muslims. For instance, restoration and repair of the Muslim places of worship, mosques, *mevlevihânes*, *dergâhs*, and graves as well as the appointment of religious officials and payment of their salaries were among the important activities of this organization.¹⁹

The sale contracts of the real-estates, including houses, farms, olive trees, fields, and shops present the vivid account of the marginalization of the Cretan Muslims and the transmission in property ownership. The Ottoman Bank Archive indicates that there was a profound change in the ownership of properties, which means that many Muslim properties rapidly became Christian. In other words, the large-scale Muslim flight not only changed the demographic picture of the island, but also its socio-economic structure.²⁰

During the First World War, the tension between the Cretan Muslims and Christians reached its peak. Mosques and Muslim schools were attacked by large crowds, communal buildings were occu-

¹⁶ Renee Hirschon, "The Consequences of the Lusanne Convention", içinde *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange Between Greece and Turkey*, Edited by Renee Hirschon, (Oxford and New York, 2003), s. 20.

¹⁷ Doumanis, *Before the Nation...*, s. 141.

¹⁸ Melike Kara, *Girit Kandiye'de Müslüman Cemaati (1913-1923)*, (İstanbul, 2006), s. 67.

¹⁹ *Aynı Eser*, ss. 45-59.

²⁰ The Ottoman Bank Archive includes quite rich records concerning Muslim communal issues and pious foundations in Crete from the last decades of the nineteenth-century through the 1930's.

pied by the Greek army, and numerous initiatives were taken by Christians. The arrival of the Christian refugees from Anatolia was making the situation even worse. These refugees circulated stories of Turkish atrocities in Anatolia aiming at preparing the ground for the emigration of the whole Muslim community from Crete. Hence these rumors circulating among the Cretan Christians increased the tension between the Cretan Muslims and Christians.²¹ Bruce Clark notes that the ‘the death-blow’ to the Christian and Muslim co-existence in Crete came in May 1919, when the Greek army occupied İzmir. The atrocities that Greek troops were committed in Anatolia had spread throughout the island. It seems that stories from the battlefield created an atmosphere that Cretan Muslims and Christians could no longer live together on the island.²²

Ironically, in a letter written by Venizelos to his friend Aristidis Stergiadis in 1919, it was stated that

Turkish Cretans (τουρκοκρητικοί) are going to help us administer Asia Minor Greece... Their Muslim devotion to the Will of God and their local patriotism, can make them priceless servants of our administration in Asia Minor... It is thus time we leave behind the prejudices tied to old, tiny Greece; it is time we move towards values that inspire and motivate peoples (λαούς) destined to govern great numbers of foreign populations...

This paper has been an attempt to discuss the Cretan Muslims by making perceptions about the Cretan Muslim immigrants and the relationship between the Cretan Muslims and Cretan Christians the main points of reference for understanding the impacts of the Balkan Wars on the Cretan Muslims in the late Ottoman Empire. The paper demonstrated that the Cretan experience cannot be understood by describing the events from the standpoint of a clear-cut distinction and mutual conflict between the Muslims and non-Muslims, or exaggerating tolerance and co-existence between the various communities.

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²¹ Kostopoulou, “The Muslim Millet...”, ss. 409-410.

²² Bruce Clark, *Twice a Stranger: The Mass Expulsions that Forged Modern Greece and Turkey*, (United States of America, 2006), s. 35.

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