INTRODUCTION

The boycott as an economic weapon appeared in the Ottoman Empire after the 1908 Revolution. The revolution paved the way for a chaotic social and political atmosphere in which the order of things changed drastically. The new era brought with it new social phenomena: elections, worker strike, and public demonstrations on the grassroots level had a deep impact on the different segments of Ottoman Society. Due to the chaotic social and political atmosphere after the revolution, state authority broke down. Amidst this political and social turmoil, a diplomatic crisis emerged between the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary, the Principality of Bulgaria, and Greece. This diplomatic crisis made the new regime’s situation even more precarious and was not really an expected development in such a short period of time after the revolution. Austria-Hungary proclaimed its annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina which had been under its rule for more than thirty years. The Bulgarian Principality declared its independence and cut off its last ties with the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, the Cretans with whom the Ottoman state had many problems in the 19th century re-formulated their wish to form an enosis (union) with Greece. Bulgaria and Greece worried that the 1908 Revolution and the promulgation of the constitution might trigger a regeneration of the Ottomans’ power and therefore quickly wanted to realize their political aspirations. The parliamentary elections and the deputies elected from these domains might have reinforced the Ottoman Empire’s relationship with these regions.
The young constitutional regime responded to its first diplomatic crisis in its own way. This particular reply was also an indication of the transformation that the revolution had brought to the empire. This study will trace how the politics of the new era and the Boycott Movement influenced each other. Thousands publicly demonstrated on the streets all over the empire. The Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman society were not in favor of a war and the mass actions paved the way for a boycott against the economic and commercial assets of these countries. These two weapons—the boycott and the public meetings—would be the most typical tools in the repertoire of the early Muslim/Turkish nationalism. Afterwards, whenever a diplomatic or national problem appeared, the Muslim/Turkish nationalist movement convened protest meetings and organized economic boycotts against the empire’s enemies. This work will depict how these two crucial instruments of mass politics emerged and functioned at the beginning of the 20th century.

Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria were lost in 1909. Yet, the Boycott Movement and the political and social environment that the revolution precipitated left its imprint on the political life of the Ottoman Empire. Boycotts were a crucial part of the mass politics that experienced a fundamental transformation after the revolution. This is why this thesis searches for answers to the following questions: how did boycotts provide an opportunity for the ruling elite to manipulate the population and control its reactions? How did the different segments of society express their interest within this mobilization process and represented themselves in the expanding political and public spheres? How did different issues—such as the diplomatic crisis, economic problems, the tragedy of the Muslims in the newly lost territories, and municipal affairs—turn into national and public issues? And how did ordinary people began to think of themselves as part of these public issues and find various ways to participate in and influence politics through this mobilization process?

---

1 As Monroe Friedman has argued, a boycott is “an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace.” Monroe Friedman, Consumer Boycotts: Effecting Change through the Market Place and the Media, (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 4. Monroe has also referred to another version of boycott by the name of “buyout,” which promotes what to buy rather than dictating what not to buy. This particular action usually appears in the context of national economy movements which advise the public to buy particularly national merchandise. The Boycott Movement in the Ottoman Empire also started with the boycott of foreign and non-national merchandise and then turned into a boycott of Muslim/Turkish products. For the concept, see: Monroe Friedman, Consumer Boycotts, p. 201.
In this context, one specific point should be highlighted. Throughout the thesis, I will use concepts such as class, public sphere, civil society, mass politics, and mobilization. Without these borrowings from the social sciences, it is not possible to analyze a boycott, which has economic, social and political aspects. Historiography in Turkey does not look favorably upon concepts, categories and theories derived from the social sciences. Nationalist and conservative historiography is overwhelmingly based on descriptive narratives and consistently underlines the uniqueness of the Turkish case. History as a profession provides a favorable ground for this vision, since studies are generally based on research on unique and peculiar cases. However, an over-emphasis on the uniqueness of a particular country or case may lead scholars to get mired in exceptionalism. Yet, theories, concepts and categories afford us an opportunity for comparison. Comparison is one of the most crucial methods to evaluate or even confirm the uniqueness of a particular case. At the same time, a debate on the meaning of a concept is only possible when it is applied to a particular context. Therefore, the profession of history and philosophical and sociological debates should nourish each other. Furthermore, the refusal to recruit concepts also paves the way for explaining causes and effects based on cultural essences; exceptionalism may entail essentialism. Therefore, this thesis starts and ends with debates on the relevant historiography and the place of the Ottoman Boycott Movement within these discussions and theoretical problems. Without them, it is virtually impossible to make sense of many aspects of the movement.

Furthermore, the Boycott Movement was not peculiar to the Ottoman Empire, and neither was the constitutional revolution. The 1908 Revolution was a crucial link in the wave of constitutional revolutions at beginning of the 20th century, in Russia (1905), Iran (1906-1909), Mexico (1910), and China (1911). Their causes and effects show significant similarities and discrepancies, which might be instructive to students of this particular era. In a similar vein, the boycott emerged as an influential political and social weapon in the era. Interestingly enough, although its name was coined in Ireland during the land struggles, the term boycott was internationalized and passed into different languages—such as Dutch, French, German and Russian—without any linguistic alteration.2

Furthermore, the application of the boycott weapon was so widespread

---

in different empires that one may call this era the “Age of Boycotts.” A mere mention of the eight boycotts in China between 1905 and 1932 may indicate its prevalence. The boycotts in Ireland, Iran, Ottoman Empire and China took place in the initial stages of rising nationalisms. They popularized nationalist thought and issues in general. Different social and professional classes collaborated in these movements. The Tobacco Protest in Iran, the Anti-Japan and anti-American boycotts in China, and boycotts against non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire managed to mobilize the masses all over the respective countries, using the press, telegraph services, and civil organization in the process. These mobilizations also coincided with the rise of national political organizations, such as the Guomintang and the Committee of Union and Progress. These social movements and political organizations nurtured each other. The boycott movements in different empires brought about organizations such as the Economic Warfare Society in the Ottoman Empire and the National Humiliation Society and the Society to Propagate the Use of National Goods in China. The public demonstrations and direct actions employed various means, such as placards, letters, handbills, pamphlets, and visual materials. Moreover, there appeared similar symbolic acts in different empires. For instance, one of the spectacular acts of the merchants who proclaimed their adherence to the boycott was the burning of boycotted merchandise, which provoked emotions in Iran, China and the Ottoman Empire. There appeared inspection teams in order to control the loyalty of the people, and there were perpetrated assaults on people believed to buy or use boycotted goods. In these three empires, the boycott movements labeled the boycotted items under a common terminology, such as “inferior,” “unclean,” and “rotten,” while the national merchandise was called “sacred.” National products became a symbol of these movements.3

The Boycott Movement consisted of different social classes and seg-

---

ments of society. These different social groups had diverse agendas during its long time-span. The variety of goals within the movement made it a complex social phenomenon. This diversity was not only based on social classes, but also on the geographical scope of the movement. The boycott was executed in almost all urban centers, particularly the port cities of the Ottoman Empire. Understandably, the boycott in Salonica, Beirut, Smyrna, Konya, Giresun, and Erzurum had significant dissimilarities. This study will depict how the boycott network and different civil organizations and initiatives succeeded in imposing the boycott on an empire-wide scale and how heterogeneous social groups—such as port workers, merchants, urban notables, low-ranking officers, and the professional classes—played a part in the last decade of the Ottoman Empire.

This is significant because the historiography on Turkey generally depicts Turkish nationalism as an exclusively intellectual current. Studies on nationalism concentrate on the thought of several political and intellectual figures, or the designs of political and civil organizations. However, nationalism is also a social phenomenon. Nationalist movements are also social movements that mobilize a wide range of social groups and deeply influence the daily life of the population. Therefore, one should not be content with research on intellectual history, but also focus both on the official nationalist policies from above and the mobilization of society from below. The Boycott Movement in the Ottoman Empire contributed to the rise of Muslim/Turkish nationalism and turned particular ethnic/religious problems into a social problem or national question. The movement constituted the social and economic aspect of Muslim/Turkish nationalism. This thesis tries to indicate how political figures, civil organizations, and different social classes played a role in the rising nationalism and in the elimination of non-Muslims. Yet, although this particular period is considered an era of rising Turkish nationalism, the era’s discourse was predominantly based on Muslim identity. The main frame of reference of the nationalist movement was Islam as a distinct marker of a communal identity. This is why the nationalism of this particular era is defined as Muslim/Turkish nationalism throughout this thesis.

The Boycott Movement also reveals a different side of the Committee of Union and Progress, which is generally ignored. The underground activities of the Committee members both before and after the revolution have led to the creation of a literature on komitadjis. Secret gangs were in fact part of the history of the Committee. This study tries to show
how the network of the Committee and how their inclinations changed over time and from one place to another during the boycott movements. Therefore, one should refrain from depicting an overall monolithic picture of the Committee of Union and Progress. Social movements, such as boycott actions, may provide insights for understanding the different aspects and tendencies of the nationalist movement in the Ottoman Empire.

The historiography on Turkey and the Ottoman Empire attributes agency only to Great Men. The state elite and the intervention of the Great Powers are the main forces that changed the Ottoman Empire in these narratives. Therefore, the great majority of studies are based on the activities of Great Men, the transformation of state structure, or the activities of intellectuals and political figures. These studies are restricted to the political or intellectual history of the empire. Even studies on the state, high politics and nationalism that take them into account as a socially constructed phenomenon are still marginal. Sociological approaches, on the other hand, focus mainly on social and economic structures.

Human agency, the role of the social classes, and the world of ordinary men is generally excluded from the literature. Even rarer are history-from-above studies that look at the impacts of the elite’s policies on the people and the manipulation of the masses. However, the mobilization of the masses and the reactions of the common people to the high politics played significant a role in the 19th century, since the domain of politics expanded and was no longer restricted to the ruling elite.

These structuralist and elitist viewpoints have highlighted the role of the external dynamics in explaining the transformation that the Ottoman Empire experienced in the 19th century. Yet, as Chapter I will reveal, internal factors—such as native economic structures, local trading networks, the structure of Ottoman production, traditional guild organizations, local cultural structures, and local social classes—are also significant for understanding this process. For instance, the incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the world economy did not erase the traditional guild organizations and the Muslim merchant class from social and economic life. The internal economic and social structure attuned itself to the transformation brought by the world capitalist economy and the reforms of the state elite. Concurrence and resistance went hand in hand during this transformation process. Chapter I will focus on how these internal factors tuned with the changing social and political context, as
well as on the place of Muslim merchants and working classes in this process. The literature within the framework of the World Systems Theory generally considers the non-Muslim bourgeoisie solely as a local agent of change. Although this vision of history is able to depict a significant element of history, it blurs the other parts of the picture. In these narratives, the ethnic clashes in the first quarter of the 20th century appear as a reaction of nationalist cliques in the fashion of a conspiracy theory. The Boycott Movement, however, gives us the opportunity to look at the social background of this process.

Chapter II analyzes the emergence of the Boycott Movement as political weapon in the Ottoman Empire. The 1908 Boycott targeted two foreign countries and was very much influenced by the fraternal atmosphere among the different ethnic/religious communities of the empire. The revolution set the stage for hope for a bona fide relationship between communities. A revival of Ottomanism and the Ottomanist discourse popularized the symbols of fraternity. This is why a boycott against Greece based on the Cretans’ aspirations for a union with Greece was impeded. The Young Turks and the supporters of the new regime did not want to risk the newly constituted constitutional regime and jeopardize the fraternity between different communities. There was a large community of Greeks, both Hellenes and native Rums, living in the Ottoman Empire.

As a result, by declaring a boycott against Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, a popular reaction was organized in which each community represented its support. The spontaneous protests espoused a constitutionalist path and did not turn against the regime. Thanks to the revolutionary atmosphere of the time, no particular political or social group dominated the Boycott Movement. The Ottoman government, the Committee of Union and Progress, the merchants, workers, the different national organizations of the communities, and ordinary people from all walks of life had different agendas and interests within the Boycott Movement. This is why different social and political dynamics collaborated and competed with each other in a mixed social movement.

The Boycott Movement did not disappear after the Ottoman Empire and the boycotted states came to terms and concluded a treaty. The Cretan Question was not settled and continued to create diplomatic problems between the Ottoman state and Greece, triggering popular reactions in nationalist circles. Thus, in 1909 a boycott was declared against Greece, although it did not last long. However, as the political and so-
cial environment of fraternity evaporated, a much stricter boycott against the Greeks was introduced in 1910 and lasted until the end of 1911. Although it was officially applied against Greece and its citizens, native Ottoman Greeks were also affected. This boycott contributed a great deal to the deterioration of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. The 1908 Boycott was implemented also to unite different elements in the empire against a foreign enemy. However, the boycott against Greece aimed at the disintegration and differentiation of Muslim/Turkish and Greek communities. As a result, different problems between the two communities—from education to conscription, from churches to parliamentary issues—emerged due to the Boycott Movement. The details of the 1910-11 Boycott will be analyzed in Chapter III.

As the literature on Turkey has emphasized, the Balkan Wars had a deep impact on Ottoman state and society. The loss of the lands in the Balkans and the defeat by its former subjects shocked the Ottomans. The influx of Muslim immigrants into the Ottoman domains increased greatly, and Muslim/Turkish nationalism started to gain an unprecedented power in the Ottoman Empire. It was not a coincidence that the Boycott Movement began to openly target non-Muslim communities. At the end of 1913, thousands of pamphlets called Muslims to support each other economically. Solidarity was preached to the Muslim community, while native non-Muslims were accused of betraying the empire. The governors began to express openly their discontent and dislike of non-Muslims to the foreign consuls. National Economy was redefined as a project for the progress and development of the Muslim/Turkish community, in opposition to the interests of the non-Muslims.

Chapter IV examines the widespread publications and general anti-Muslim agitation after the Balkan Wars. It then concentrates on the changing characteristics of the Boycott Movement and Muslim/Turkish nationalism. The violence that went along with the movement increased to an unprecedented scale. Unfortunately, this trend did not subside and bequeathed a pernicious legacy to World War I. The actions and assaults of nationalist gangs increased particularly in early 1914.

The Boycott Movement and the political and social environment that the revolution precipitated left its imprint on the political life of the Ottoman Empire. The mass politics that the ruling elite employed in governing the empire changed drastically. This change and its relationship with the boycotts will be discussed in the Epilogue. The 1908 Revolution
paved the way for a turn to mass politics and mass mobilization in the Ottoman Empire. Two different mobilization patterns emerged: first, there is the mobilization of the masses from above, by the political elite. This was very much politically oriented and to a great extent employed by the nationalist organizations. The second pattern is the mobilization of different social classes for their particularistic interests. The transformation of the public sphere and the expansion of civil society laid the ground for these different elements of mass politics. Demonstrations, mass meetings in public squares, mass campaigns, spectacles, parades, pageants, activities of civil societies, and elections became common aspects of daily life in the Ottoman Empire.

Last but not least, the scope and sources of this thesis should be explained. This thesis particularly focuses on the Boycott Movement that appeared against non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire and its place within the transformation of mass politics between 1908 and 1914. Although the great majority of material included here refers to various instances of anti-Christian boycotts, it mostly refers the anti-Greek movements. This is so because the open boycotting of native Ottoman citizens came to the agenda only at the end of 1913 and mainly in 1914. Therefore, the boycott did not openly target native non-Muslims. It was the Greek state and its Hellenic citizens that were boycotted. The boycotting of natives and foreigners were an undesired outcome, according to the boycotters. The openly boycotted locals were those who had betrayed the empire; they might also be Muslims. Therefore, the boycott organization and network was very much established against the Greek community. Other non-Muslims, such as the Armenians, were not boycotted to the same extent as the Greeks, at least until 1914. The boycott against Armenians mainly commenced after February 1914. Due to this fact, there is not enough information on the boycotting of Armenians, whether in the archival sources or in the secondary literature. Even Armenian sources do not provide enough information, since Armenian scholars generally quote Turkish studies about the boycott.

Yet, instances of boycotting other non-Muslims are also included in this study wherever information has been available. The boycott of Armenians became widespread during World War I and after. The boycott was applied against those who had been able to survive the tragedy of 1915 and wanted to return to their homes in the Armistice Period. However, this time the boycott seems a rather less damaging weapon in com-
parison to the deportations, massacres and ethnic clashes and, therefore, has not attracted the historians’ attention. Furthermore, the boycott was a weapon generally used in peacetimes. During the war years, nationalists had much more effective ways of eliminating the non-national from the empire. This study limits itself to the Second Constitutional Period before World War I, since the latter created an entirely different economic and social environment, and focuses primarily on the anti-Greek mass mobilizations.

This dissertation depends on a variety of sources. Making use of a variety of primary sources is crucial, since nationalist historiography in Turkey is mainly based on Ottoman or Turkish state archives and, therefore, narrates the past through the eyes of the state elite. Furthermore, a significant number of studies on the construction of nationalism and the formation of the Turkish Republic have been written to canonize the so-called national heroes. Even doctoral dissertations and studies authored by academics reproduce the nationalist argumentations and nationalist historiography. Yet, the longer this reproduction proceeds, the more these texts become a caricature of the classical nationalist narratives. In these works, the non-Muslim communities are portrayed as monolithic groups of people acting against Muslims and Turks under the command of their national leaders. These nationalist narratives not only depict the Muslim/Turkish community as a unified body, but also the non-Muslim communities as a nation without diversity. Therefore, the historical process is described as a struggle for survival in which one nation had to loose. In addition to this nationalist mentality, the use of a single type of archival sources contributes to this particular vision of history. In order to avoid such a single-minded point of view, this dissertation is based on several contemporary sources.

One of the main sources of this thesis consists of the state archives. The Ottoman, Greek, British and French state archives have left us with a substantial number of documents that present different viewpoints. As a result, one may reconstruct the historical process from a variety of angles. Secondly, the periodicals of the time—such as newspapers and journals—are also crucial sources of information. They not only convey details regarding the Boycott Movement, but were also an agent and a significant factor in the movement. Therefore, one should not consider these accounts objective or unbiased. For that reason; a variety of newspapers and journals have been included in order to allow different vi-
sions to emerge. This also helps to understand the viewpoint of a particular periodical. Since the Boycott Movement as examined here primarily involved the Muslim/Turkish and Greek communities, this dissertation concentrates mainly on Turkish and Greek periodicals. This may help to overcome the one-sidedness of the nationalist narratives. There are many studies on the non-Muslims communities of the Ottoman Empire that do not use the material that these communities produced in their own language. The pamphlets, widely distributed in the Ottoman Empire, have also been taken into consideration in order to see how boycotters and nationalists utilized a certain discourse in order to mobilize the Muslim public.