THE DOCKS OF THE REVOLUTION: THE STRUGGLES OF THE PORT WORKERS OF ISTANBUL IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Thesis submitted to the

Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

by

Akın Sefer

Boğaziçi University

2009

"The Docks of the Revolution: The Struggles of the Port Workers of Istanbul in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," a thesis prepared by Akın Sefer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in History degree from The Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University. This thesis has been approved and accepted on June 2009 by

Assoc. Prof. Nadir Özbek (Thesis Advisor) _____

Assist. Prof. Cengiz Kırlı _____

Prof. Şevket Pamuk _____

An abstract of the thesis of Akın Sefer, for the degree of Master of Arts from The Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University to be taken in June 2009

Title: The Docks of the Revolution: The Struggles of the Port Workers of Istanbul in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

This study focuses on the role of the working classes, and in particular, of the port workers of Istanbul, in the making of a critical era in the Ottoman history. It shows that the Revolution of 1908, and working class activism it triggered, can not be understood without analyzing the struggles of the port workers throughout the decades preceding the Revolution. With the concession of the Istanbul Port to a European company, many port workers came to be threatened to loose their jobs, or more generally, by a process of proletarianization. This process also converged with the development of Armenian political movement, which had a decisive influence on the relations both between the working classes and the state and among the workers. The collective actions of the port workers against proletarianization directly through collective actions, or in mediation with the Armenian movement, negotiated, affected and transformed the power policies of the Hamidian government. The thesis argues that the port workers' struggles against the state and the companies were framed by the decisions, strategies and tactics made according to individual politics; the power struggles not only between the elites and the workers, but also among the elites and among the workers; and also the struggles over meaning, in which the top-down imposed definition were renegotiated by the workers. Thus the thesis not only examines the activities of port workers through the collective actions they displayed, but also through the legal-manipulative and/or criminal actions which they carried on as parts of their struggles at the everyday level.

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü'nde Yüksek Lisans Derecesi için Akın Sefer Tarafından Haziran 2009'da teslim edilen tezin kısa özeti

Başlık: Devrimin İskeleleri: On dokuzuncu Yüzyıl Sonu ve Yirminci Yüzyıl Başında Liman İşçilerinin Mücadeleleri

Bu tez çalışan sınıfların ve özel olarak da, liman işçilerinin Osmanlı tarihinin kritik dönemlerinden birinin oluşumunda oynadığı role odaklanmaktadır. Burada, 1908 devriminin ve onun tetiklediği işçi sınıfı eylemliliğinin, liman işçilerinin devrimi önceleyen yıllardaki mücadeleleri değerlendirilmeden anlaşılamayacağı ortaya konulmaktadır. İstanbul limanının Avrupalı bir şirketin imtiyazına verilmesiyle birlikte, pek çok liman işçisi işlerini kaybetmenin ve daha genel olarak da, proleterleşme sürecinin yarattığı tehditle karşı karşıya kaldılar. Bu süreç aynı zamanda Ermeni siyasi hareketinin de gelişimiyle çakışmaktaydı. Bu çakışma da çalışan sınıflarla devlet arasında belirleyici bir etki yarattı. Liman işçilerinin gerek doğrudan doğruya kolektif eylemlerle, gerekse Ermeni hareketi dolayımıyla gösterdiği muhalefet Abdulhamid yönetiminin iktidar politikalarını müzakere etmiş, etkilemiş ve dönüştürmüştür. Bu tez liman işçilerinin devlete ve şirketlere karşı mücadelesinin bireysel politikaya dayanan kararlar, stratejiler ve taktiklerle; yalnızca elitlerle işçiler arasında değil, elitlerin ve işçilerin kendi aralarındaki iktidar mücadeleleriyle; ve tepeden inme tanımların işçiler tarafından yeniden müzakere edildiği anlam mücadeleleriyle çerçevelendiğini savunuyor. Buna paralel olarak, bu çalışma liman işçilerinin faaliyetlerini sadece sergiledikleri kolektif eylemler üzerinden değil, gündelik düzeyde mücadelelerini sürdürmek için kullandıkları yasayı manipüle edici ve/veya kriminal faaliyetler üzerinden de incelemektedir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor, Assoc. Prof. Nadir Özbek for his valuable comments, support and encouragement for my study. His classes throughout my first year at the Institute gave me a significant theoretical perspective on the role of everyday struggles in history and also a practical experience on studying at the Ottoman Archives. Throughout the thesis writing process in which I tended to get lost among hundreds of documents, books and articles, he patiently reminded me the actual route of this thesis.

I am also grateful to Assist. Prof. Cengiz Kırlı, whose course on the nineteenth century Ottoman history had a great role in my concentration on this period of history, with a valuable historiographical background. I am also thankful to Prof. Şevket Pamuk, who attended my jury and made helpful comments and critiques on the thesis. Kathryn Kranzler edited this thesis, and Tracy Lord helped to improve and organize the text with her critical interventions. I am thankful to both of them.

I would like to thank to the staff of Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, for their help throughout my archival research. The presence and kind helps of Necla Turunç, Kadriye Tamtekin and Leyla Kılıç made life easier and joyful at the Institute.

This difficult process could not pass such easily without the presence of many friends. Murat, Hazal, Burak, Özlem, İrem, Aysun, Serkan, Cihan, Yagub, Ali and many others both from the Institute and outside, shared their precious friendship in this process. I am grateful to all of them.

This thesis could not be written without feeling the life-long and never-ending support of my parents, Ergül and Adem Sefer, and my brothers Emrah and Mustafa. Words fail to express their enormous efforts to make life easier and beautiful for me. Last but not least, Bengü, my better half, has always been with me in this process. It now seems to me that I could not survive this hard and challenging process without her constant love, patience and encouragement. Her support was not only spiritual, but she also read and discussed these pages, contributing much to my theoretical perspective.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Some clichés do not apply everywhere: The labor history of the Ottoman Empire, especially concerning the period before 1908, is not in a crisis, since there has never been such a subfield which, once upon a time, was boomed by the enthusiastic efforts of Ottoman historians. Even in the 1960s and 1970s, when interest in the history of working classes thrived throughout the world, written studies on the Ottoman working classes did not go beyond limited studies.[1] These studies were mostly devoted to either the strike waves and the emergence of nascent socialist movements (parties, unions, newspapers, etc.) following the 1908 revolution, or for the previous period, they were mostly concerned with the strikes in different times, the numbers of which were strictly limited.[2]

This probably has two main reasons, the first of which was that the archival resources and secondary sources then available to researchers were too limited to provide a deep understanding about the experiences and situations of the common people living in the Empire. But more importantly, the historians of the era were mostly concerned with the emergence and development of socialist ideas, unions,

---

[1] For a comprehensive overview of the studies on Ottoman labor, which also points out to the non-existence of an Ottoman labor history even in the 2000s, see Donald Quataert, "Labor History and the Ottoman Empire, c.1700-1922," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001).

[2] For instances see Hüseyin Avni Şanda, *Yarı Müstemleke Oluş Tarihi/1908 İşçi Hareketleri* (İstanbul: Gözlem, 1978).;Oya Sencer, *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı:Doğuşu ve Yapısı* (İstanbul: Habora Kitabevi, 1969).;George S. Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1967).;Dimitir Şişmanov, *Türkiye İşçi ve Sosyalist Hareketi: Kısa Tarih (1908-1965)* (İstanbul: Belge, 1978).;Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, 1908-1925* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, 1967).

parties and festivals like May 1, rather than the actual everyday life and experiences of the working classes' themselves. This was, of course, related to the prevalent way of understanding Marxism throughout the era, in a way that privileges unionized industrial working classes as central to the making of a revolution. As the existence of such a picture, especially before the revolution of 1908, could not be said to have existed, so there was little to say on an Ottoman working class.

The study which inspired this thesis, Donald Quataert's *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908*, which was first published in 1983 in English should have attracted much more interest and should have inspired many more studies than it did, especially in Anatolia, from which he derived his cases.[3] Indeed, one wonders why this pioneering work was left almost ignored throughout the following decade, rather than opening an entirely new sphere by kindling further research on the affects of the European economic expansion in the lives of the common people and resistance the latter presented to negate those affects.[4] Quataert gave the leading role in his narrative to tobacco smugglers, the miners of Zonguldak, and railway and port workers, most of whom had been either unrecognized or dismissed to the margins of traditional history books by the previous Turkish historians.

Throughout the last two decades, though still very nascent, a relatively increased interest in the workers of the Ottoman Empire and Middle East has

---

[3] Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908* (New York University Press, 1983).

[4] Beyond the dominant historiography's obsession with elites, considering that the students of the history of working classes have mostly socialist tendencies, we also should not ignore the destructive influence of the coup d'etat of September 12, which all but "cleaned" Turkish academia of leftist elements. The negative implication of conjectural limitations and difficulties of studying on labor was also emphasized by a labor historian who began his studies in this era, see Ahmet Makal, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi ve Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme," *Tarih ve Toplum:Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 3 (2006).

emerged in general. Conferences and workshops have been organized to bring together scholars who have directed their attention to the Ottoman working classes.[5] In parallel with them, there have also appeared significant individual studies in book format, which have expanded our scope of knowledge about the working classes of the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East.[6] While some of these studies have focused the description of industrial relations, others have focused more on the subaltern experiences of these classes. What most of them have shared, however, is that they generally have tried to show that there were working classes in the Ottoman Empire, beyond the existence of socialist ideas, unions, parties or leaders, and that they sometimes made their existence felt through strikes or machine breakings, or that they had alternative, separate cultures besides the elites. Depending on a very tiny amount of information, these studies have opened for future students of Ottoman labor critical doors by showing them that there is a great potential to be extracted from deep, archival research on the Ottoman working classes. This thesis salutes the earlier literature on the Ottoman working classes for at least trying to take these studies one step further, by showing that Ottoman working classes not only existed, but also played a leading role in the making of history, by stamping their marks on

[5] At least three anthologies, published in different years, form the evidence of this interest: Zachary Lockman, ed., *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East:Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).; Donald Quataert, and E.J. Zürcher, ed., *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine İşçiler:1839-1950* (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1998).;Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

[6] Among others, see Donald Quataert, *Workers, Peasants, and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire, 1730-1914* (Istanbul ISIS Press, 1993).;Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire : The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822-1920* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). John T. Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories : Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004). Ahmet Makal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çalışma İlişkileri, 1850-1920 : Türkiye Çalışma İlişkileri Tarihi* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1997), Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories : Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914*., Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, *1908 Osmanlı Boykotu : Bir Toplumsal Hareketin Analizi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2004).

the critical social, political and economic transformations of the era, including the revolution of 1908.

Looking through the labor history studies, the voices of the workers living before the revolution of 1908 are still barely heard by historians. Besides a few studies, most of these are again concerned with the post-1908 activism of labor, which is, deservedly, easier and healthier to study, given the relative abundance of resources.[7] As Quataert pointed out, one of the prevailing reasons for this is the political conjuncture after 1908, which allowed "unprecedented public, visible action by the workers."[8] This over-emphasis of "public, visible action" in the overall struggles of the workers have put critical limitations on the Ottoman labor historians, due to the difficulties of these kinds of actions before 1908, as I will detail in Chapter 2. However, besides this, the "public, visible actions" have mostly been limited to what we may call "industrial struggles", the struggles openly directed against employers, such as strikes or machine breakings. Therefore, even the most recent studies on the history of Turkish labor could not go beyond defining the limited collective actions that have been discovered by the labor historians.[9] How the struggles of workers, both at public and everyday levels, were integrated to other confrontations, and what kind of a role they played in the making of late Ottoman

[7] For instances see M.Şehmus Güzel, *Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketi, 1908-1914* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yay., 1996).; Güzel, *Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketi, 1908-1914*.;Yüksel Işık, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İşçi Hareketinin Evrimi (1876-1994)* (Ankara: Öteki, 1996).;Hakkı Onur, "1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler," *Yurt ve Dünya*, no. 2 (Mart 1977).;Mesut Gülmez, *Türkiye Belgesel Çalışma İlişkileri Tarihi (1936 Öncesi)* (Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 1983).

[8] Donald Quataert, "Ottoman Workers and the State, 1826-1914," in *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles,Histories, Historiographies*, ed. Zachary Lockman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).p.21.

[9] For two instances, see Yüksel Akkaya, "Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık-1," *Praksis*, no. 5 (2002)., and Mahmut Üstün, "Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketi Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler," *Praksis*, no. 8 (2002).

and early Republican history has remained missing in the overall picture. As a result, in an ironic way, the tendency of traditional Ottoman historiography to marginalize the late Ottoman workers in the making of history has been replicated by the new historians who aimed to break this attitude. There is, thus, still much to do to break the silence of the pre-1908 working classes in the Ottoman historiography.

This thesis, thus, aims to contribute to this literature, by focusing on a relatively ignored time period in Ottoman labor history, the two decades preceding 1908, and on port workers, who have been undeservingly ignored given their activeness relative to other groups. In this way, at least a step will be taken to break the silence concerning the history of working classes preceding 1908. One of the most important concerns of this study is to show that beyond existing, the Ottoman working classes were powerful enough to influence the critical economic, political and social transformations of the era. In other words, their existence was not a passive one, but active enough to contribute to the making of history.

Another aspect which distinguishes this study from the great majority of its predecessors is that it concentrates on the working classes in a limited field, the port.[10] Of course, it is not surprising that there are so few studies in a new-born subfield, where even the historical studies focused on the working classes, or crowds as a whole, are few. In an area in which the archives and other primary documents provide few details about the subaltern people as a whole, it is not possible to deny

[10] There are of course some few studies. See the articles devoted to seperate sectors in Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908*. Among others see also Chalcraft's study which mostly concentrates on service sectors in Egypt, Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories : Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914*.; Erdem Kabadayı's unpublished dissertation on factory workers M. Erdem Kabadayı, "Working for the State in a Factory in Istanbul:The Role of Factory Workers' Ethno-Religious and Gender Characteristics in State-Subject Interaction in the late Ottoman Empire " (Unpublished PH.D. Diss., Munich University, 2008).and Brant Downes's phd dissertation on the port workers of Beirut and Salonica in late nineteenth century, Brant Downes, "Constructing the Modern Ottoman Waterfront:Salonica and Beirut in Late Nineteenth Century" (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 2007).

that to focus on the workers of a limited section of the working classes carries its own peculiar difficulties. One of them is emanated from the Ottoman system itself at the ports: the divisionary guild system. In fact, the term "port workers" is a construction built for the sake of analysis. The people working at the ports, traditionally, did not have an organized structure which unified all of them under the same umbrella. Instead, most of them were divided into separate guilds, either according to their work place, or their simple differences. For instance, the porters were divided according to the docks they worked, and also their way of carrying things. The boatmen were divided into *kayıkçı*s (rovers) and *sandalcı*s (boatmen), according to what they carried, besides their work places. The reason for this, of course, was related to the needs for better surveillance and control of a possibly dangerous class. That's why the researcher here should not submit the objectified definitions of the state documents, which were accorded with those needs of the power elites.

However, as these workers were too divided and the guilds were too small, it is not possible to talk about a developed bureaucracy devoted to these workers even as porters or as boatmen alone, let alone the "port workers", which would leave us a body of systematic information related to the institution and its workers, as it has been in other bureaucratic structures. So here we are unfortunately devoid of a bulk of documents related only to a single body of workers, which makes the research more and more exhausting. Indeed, while the reader could think, considering the cases analyzed in the following chapters, that it might not be as hard as it is supposed to find information about port workers, the author of these pages saw in the process of archival study what a daunting task it is to seek the workers of a single sector among thousands of documents. In addition to understanding and showing that such

a study was possible, I was also convinced that the Ottoman archives provide more than enough opportunities to write on the contentious collective actions of the urban crowds in general, of course in a way much easier than to write on a single sector.

This thesis aims is contribute to the efforts to go beyond the new historiography on the Hamidian era.[11] Although this literature has taken significant steps especially, in going beyond euro-centric form of the modernization paradigm, it has failed to understand that, as Özbek writes, "a past which is constructed in a modernist-historicist epistemology, by taking the Ottoman and Turkish political elite into the center, will function to legitimize the hegemony of the power segments alongside a sequence of past-present-future."[12] In the following pages, by taking the working classes into the center of its analysis, the aim is to show that the lower classes, which mostly appeared only in times of crisis resisting to, say, proletarianization[13] in the "history from below" perspective, were not only active against resistance, but used many ways, strategies, tactics and opportunities to intervene the making of history in the Hamidian era. To limit the workers' agency only to resistance does not give the working classes a subject position, but, on the contrary, contributes in a paradoxical way, to their subjectification: "In this way," writes Özbek, "the subalternity and secondary position of the lower classes is

[11] For a critical review of this literature, see Nadir Özbek, "Modernite,Tarih ve İdeoloji:II.Abdulhamid Dönemi Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme," *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (2004).

[12] Ibid. p.85. *"... Osmanlı ve Türkiye siyasi elitini merkeze alarak modernist-historisist bir epistemolojiyle kurgulanan bir geçmişin, iktidar konumundaki kesimlerin egemenliklerini geçmiş-bugün-gelecek dizilimi içinde meşrulaştırma işlevine sahip olduğu gerçeğini görme yeteneğinden uzak bulunmaktadır."*

[13] For an anthology on working classes against proleterainization from a comparative perspective, see Ira and Aristide R. Zolberg Katznelson, ed., *Working-class formation : nineteenth-century patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986).

sustained."[14] Therefore, while reading the following pages, one, at times, may be surprised at how certain "big events" and transformations of the Hamidian era, from the Armenian problem to the modernization process, from the policies and transformations which made Abdulhamid II "the Red Sultan", to those which made him "the Great Khan" in the eyes of politically opposed views, were shaped, reshaped, negotiated, stretched and/or distorted by the working classes. The role of the elites, including the Sultan, is only one side of the story. The following narrative is about the role of "the other side."

Focusing on the role of other side, however, does not mean dismissing the former altogether. The criticism of the Marxist way of understanding especially throughout the 1980s and 90s led to a new wave of academicism which focused on discourse and discursive formations and imprisoned the agency of subject into these formations.[15] The Ottoman counterparts of these studies which have taken the perspective brought by Subaltern Studies to its limits, despite their successful contribution to bringing the common people forward to Ottoman studies, have not been able to overcome a degree of academicism which is only interested in describing the elites' attempts to completely establish their hegemony, and/or the resisting and the manipulating attempts of the subalterns against them.[16] There seems

[14] Özbek, p.87.

[15] For an extreme version of this wave, see especially Chapter 2 of Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy:Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London Verso, 1985). For its criticism along Marxist line, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat From Class : A New "True" Socialism* (London;New York: Verso, 1998). The basic assumptions, positions and contra-criticisims of both sides, a mutual polemical series of dialogue provide an exceptional opportunity, see Norman Geras, "Post-Marxism?," *New Left Review*, no. 163 (1987).;Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism Without Apologies," *New Left Review*, no. 166 (1987).; and finally Norman Geras, "Ex-Marxism Without Substance: Being A Real Reply to Laclau and Mouffe," *New Left Review*, no. 169 (1988).

[16] Especially Khaled Fahmy's studies on Egypt, see Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men : Mehmed Ali, His Army, and the Making of Modern Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).; Khaled Fahmy, "The anatomy of Justice: Forensic Medicine and

to have been no substantial effort "to understand the ways in which culturally and historically constituted subjects become agents in the active sense-how their actions and modes of being in the world always sustain and sometimes transform the very structures that made them."[17] In other words, to bring the subaltern classes forward in Ottoman historiography, it is critical to point out to how they contributed and intervened to the making of history, rather than sufficing it to say that there were subalterns in the past and they were able to manipulate and resist the hegemony.[18] In addition to replicating the old schools in dismissing the subaltern classes to mark their own stamps in the making of history, these studies also have limited themselves by only narrating the lives of the subalterns. This self-limitation also functions to the self-imprisonment of academic history writing behind its own gates.[19]

One of the interventions this study aims to make is into the contemporary discussions going on around the issue of class, or more generally, around the crisis of the socialist left, which are hovering along marginal, shallow waters. Although it has entered into a deep crisis throughout the days this thesis was written; we have been

---

Criminal Law in Nineteenth-century Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society*, no. 6 (1999). Also for an extreme version of this stance in Ottoman studies see Necmi Erdoğan, "Devleti İdare Etmek: Mâduniyet ve Düzenbazlık," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 83 (1999-2000).

[17] Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, "Introduction," in *Culture, Power, History:A Reader in Contemporary History*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994). p.12.

[18] Of course, especially more recent studies on Middle East seem to have overcome these weaknesses. For the most recent example, see, Cronin, ed., *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa*.

[19] Özbek's reminder here carries critical tips on this point : *"*Our recollection about the past to construct an alternative history could be described as a jumping back from the circumstances of the present, as a search for an inspiration for the solution of the contemperory problems and at last, an effort to build a new past. That an historical understanding, which does not concern itself with an active intervention to the present time and only suffice it to form the so called representations of the past, is academicism, if not a chronicle writing, should be underlined." Nadir Özbek, "Alternatif Tarih Tahayyülleri: Siyaset, İdeoloji ve Osmanlı-Türkiye Tarihi," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 98 (2003).p. 235.

surrounded by a neoliberal hegemony which has pushed class politics out of the center. What has contributed to this has been the failure of socialist circles to go beyond the formal, institutional, vanguardist assumptions, which equated the existence of class with the existence and power of trade unions, socialist parties, and workers' manifested struggle for a better, more humane world by throwing out the existing system by at least going on strikes. Where the power of these elements are either weak or non-existent, the "concept" of class has been chucked out, and even the word "class analysis" has come to be seen as a backward, reactionist and sometimes antiquarian way of thinking.[20] Unfortunately, even the new Ottoman-Turkish historiography apparently has escaped to contribute these discussions by pointing to the active role of the working classes in the radical tranformations. This study, turning its face back to an era of Ottoman history which was marked by the non-existence, or severe suppression, of trade unions, political parties, or even the socialist ideas, in other words, to a period where even the kernels of the possibility of a formal, open class politics was out of question, will seek "inspirations" to show that classes were actively there even in the most impossible circumstances in terms of an avowed class politics, by focusing on the class*ed* moments of solidarity, struggle and everyday politics. In other words, it will show that even those *glimpses* of class had an enormous role in the making of history.

Throughout this thesis, I will take class and class consciousness not along a progressivist line which determinedly evolves in parallel with proletarinaziation, nor as a structural level that was located at the very bottom of society. Following

[20] Yiğit Akın, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihçiliğine Katkı: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar," *Tarih ve Toplum:Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 2 (2005). P.112

Thompson, class will be conceptualized only in its very dynamism, in its struggle.[21] For, as Thompson teaches, class can never be thought of without the concept of class struggle, and it does not cease to exist when the "movement" stops. Therefore, when class is at the center of the analysis, it should be taken in its "process", as a formation throughout the struggles.[22] When class is conceptualized in this way, it also gives us the opportunity to understand the intra-struggles, differences, exclusions and heterogeneities among the working classes. As Eley explains, "in exploring the always incomplete process of construction that thus defines class as an operative phenomenon, we should concentrate less on uncovering an underlying coherence in the languages of class than understanding their lines of fracture and difference."[23]

Another issue which this study will touch is the ongoing discussion on the description of the declaration of the Constitution in 1908. The time in which this thesis was written coincided with the 100th anniversary of 1908, which triggered discussions on this matter. One of the most popular discussion topics was on whether 1908 was a revolution or a coup d'état. According to one side, 1908 was a somewhat Turkish version of the French Revolution, with the active participation of the masses, and with its embrace of the slogans of 1789, liberty, equality and fraternity (*hürriyet, musavat, uhuvvet*) and its own original mark to these: justice (*adalet*), referring to the injustices of the era of "istibdat" (*autocracy*).[24]

---

[21] See the "Preface" in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth Penguin Books, 1968).p.9-14.

[22] For Thompson's conceptualization of class in this manner, see also Ellen Meiksins Wood, "İlişki ve Süreç Olarak Sınıf," *Praksis*, no. 1 (2001).

[23] Geoff Eley, "Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terence J. McDonald (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University, 1996).p.219

[24] Aykut Kansu is the most popular and ardent defender of this view. Aykut Kansu, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey* (Leiden ; New York: Brill, 1997). Also see Aykut Kansu,

On the other side, there are also historians who argue that it was not a revolution demanded and joined by the masses, but a military coup d'état, which aimed to reinstate the constitution, overthrow the Sultan and reopen the parliament.[25] It is interesting that the new historiography which has claimed to make the subaltern classes the center of analysis, does not, or can not seem to intervene to these discussions. However, to make such an intervention is especially critical, because to show how the subaltern classes contributed to this process is significant for going beyond this superficial polarization. For, both sides are deficient with their modernist-progressivist assumptions: They share progressivism, and only differ on the role of the masses in this progress.

At this point, the criticisms of both sides have some merit. While it is correct that 1908 was not a radical transformation or an overthrow of an existing system, except for paving the way for the "nationalization of economy",[26] to label it a simple coup d'état replicates and submits it to the traditional historiography which takes the elites into the center. Therefore, the discussions of 1908 provide enormous opportunities to show the role of the subaltern classes throughout the making of a critical turning point in Ottoman-Turkish history.Such discussions can even further motivate the search for the role of the common people, say, in the foundation and establishment of the Turkish Republic. With this study, although it does not focus on the revolution of 1908, I hope to take at least a step to search for the role of the

---

""Hürriyet, Müsavat, Uhuvvet, Adalet": 100. Yıldönümünde 1908 Devrimi'ni Anlamaya Çalışmak," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 175 (2008).

[25] For an interesting antology on this polarization, see Fikret Başkaya, ed., *Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları: 1908 Darbe mi? Devrim mi?*, vol. IV (Ankara: Özgür Üniversite, Türkiye ve Ortadoğu Forumu Vakfı, 2005).

[26] For a study which argues for the emergence of "national economy" in the period following 1908, see Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de "Milli İktisat": 1908-1918* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982).

struggles of the working classes in the making of the revolution of 1908.[27] In other words, it will follow Quataert's call for a new history of 1908 from the perspective of labor.[28] Indeed, 1908 represented the peak of the crisis of the Hamidian hegemony, and the working classes, this thesis will show, might have a significant role in undermining that hegemony through years of struggles at both the macro and micro levels, by using several, violent and unviolent, methods, tactics and weapons. [29]

William Sewell, Jr., in an excellent article in which he offers a new "rhetoric" for future labor history, identifies three "imperialistic" tendencies in the social sciences, namely the "political", the "cultural" and the "economic". According to Sewell, some of the scholars explain every social phenomenon by citing the influence of "scarcity" or economics in general. Some others, especially after the "linguistic turn", see discourse and meaning determinant in every social phenomenon. And there are also the ones, especially influenced by Foucault, who analyze everything with reference to power relations, expanding the sphere of the political to every space of social life, including the family. Against this compertmentalization, Sewell defends what he calls a "post-materialist" stance:

---

[27] In this thesis, 1908 will be preceded by the word "revolution", but the intention is not to support a side in the "revolution-coup" polarization, or to join to the assesments that 1908 is a radical transformation. The word is used for the sake of expression, to point out to the declaration of liberty, in its immediate meaning.

[28] Quataert, *Workers, Peasants, and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire, 1730-1914,* p,41-48.

[29] In fact, a century ago, during the heydays of the revolution, Leon Trotsky did give the the tips for such an analysis of 1908, which unfortunately have not been deepened by Ottoman historians since then, by pointing out the role the "sympathy" of the lower classes played in this process, without getting into the trap of that polarization: "The power of the Turkish officers and the secret of their success does not lie in a brilliantly organized plan or conspiratorial talents of diabolical skill, but the active sympathy shown to them by the most advanced classes in society: merchants, craftsmen, workmen, sections of the administration and of the clergy and finally masses in the countryside exemplified by the peasantry." See Leon Trotsky, 3 January 1909, *The Young Turks*, trans. Ted Crawford, , available [online] http://trotsky.org/archive/trotsky/1909/01/1909-turks.htm [24 April 2009].

> I would argue that we must imagine a world in which every social relationship is simultenously constituted by meaning, by scarcity, and by power. This would imply, for example, that all social relations are discursive but that social relations are never exhausted by their discursivity. It also implies something much more radical: the discursive features of the social relationship are themselves always constituted by power relations and conditions of choice under scarcity. It further implies that this constitutive shaping is reciprocal- just as meanings are always shaped by scarcity and power, so scarcity is always shaped by power and meaning, and power is always shaped by meaning and scarcity.[30]

This thesis will look at the experiences of port workers in the Hamidian era, especially after 1890, and will analyze these experiences and struggles from this perspective. In other words, the port workers' struggle against the company and the state elites in this era, it will be argued, were shaped by three things: First, structural factors limited their space of maneuver and forced them to behave according to the costs and benefits of their behaviors. Second was the influence of the power struggles not only between the Empire and European states, or the state and its people, but also among the working classes themselves, i.e. among the guild members or among workers of different religions and/or ethnic origins. And finally, the struggle over the meaning, over the different discourses, came to the forefront especially when the elites tried to impose and hegemonize their own way of making sense of the things, but met with the resistance and criminalized the workers' worlds of meaning.[31]

---

[30] William H. Sewell Jr., "Toward a Post-Materialist Rhetoric for Labor History," in *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis*, ed. Lenard R. Berlanstein (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).p.35.

[31] However, as Sewell also added, this is not an exhaustive articulation in explaining the socio-historical phenomenon. In fact, looking and analyzing history is not limited with those factors, but, on the contrary, they form only a limited part of these dimensions. The struggles of the working classes, in other words, can also be analyzed from demographical, social, spatial and even evolutionary perspectives. For an alternative analysis of Ottoman port workers, from a "historical-spatial perspective" which, as far as I know, is unique throughout the Ottoman labor studies in that manner, see Downes's dissertation, in which he analyzed the role of port workers in the socio-geographical transformation of the port cities of Beirut

It seems that the role of personal interests and the role of structural transformations in shaping the contentious tactics of the subalterns have to be much more emphasized than has been not only in the traditional Ottoman working class history, but also in the recent Ottoman historiography, in general. It should not be ignored that people, besides their collective interests as a class-based, religious, ethnic or kinship-based communities, also had personal interests as individuals, and that most of the time, their behavior in terms of contention against the state was determined according to these interests. Here, I find Sidney Tarrow's concept of "political opportunity structure" a useful tool to understand the behavior of workers against the state in terms of presenting collective contentious actions.[32] Tarrow defines this concept as "the consistent –but not necessarily formal, permanent or national- dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action."[33] Pointing out the opportunity structures give us a useful tool in analyzing and understanding the conditions of scarcity which largely determined not only why the workers did not apply to contentious, open collective actions every time, but also why at other times they had to apply to certain repertoires which were criminalized by the state elites.

---

and Salonica, Downes, "Constructing the Modern Ottoman Waterfront:Salonica and Beirut in Late Nineteenth Century".

[32] It is to be noted here that I do not agree with Tarrow's modernist-progressivist categorization of contentious repertoires as "traditional" and "modern". Tarrow treats "episodic and cathartic" actions as traditional, as belonging to the past, and emphasizes (in a somewhat flattering way) the "transition" from these spontenous direct actions to what he calls "deliberate movements". Rejecting this categorization, I hope to show in the following chapters that these two actions go hand in hand throughout the contention against the state, and they can not be defined and categorized along a horizontal line of progressive transition, which attribute the term "social movement" only to the latter part of this line. See Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement : Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge [England] ; New York Cambridge University Press, 1998).p.45-46.

[33] Ibid.p.18

It will be seen in the following cases that the opportunity structure shaped by the process of proletarianization, the development of Armenian nationalist-socialist politics and the hegemonic politics of the Hamidian government, had a large influence on the stance of the workers against the elites. The proletarianization forced them to openly resist and struggle, while they were discouraged from it in many times, for the costs of it were mostly too expensive for them. Anyone who attempted open contention was immediately expelled, which was a heavy price for people who saw and came to Istanbul as a last resort to support themselves or their families in their places of origin. Therefore, one motivation which led them to resort to open-contentious collective action was that they saw that they had no other means of showing or communicating their reactions and discontent to the elites to get them to stop the processes which made them suffer. In other words, their possibility to apply contentious gatherings was mostly determined throughout their dialogue with the elites. Thus the contention in this period was not an absolute war between the two opposites, but rather open contention and supplication were used simultaneously. As Tilly noted,

> The distance between a politics of deference and a politics of direct action was much less than our 20th century experience would lead us to expect. The deference was contingent on the proper performance of the authorities, and the alternative was not far away: It was direct action against, instead of, the authorities.[34]

Another motivation for a significant part of port workers to apply to open contention and thus risk the heavy prices of uprising against the authority was the emergence of nationalist-leftist partisan politics, which seemed to use the legitimacy

[34] Charles Tilly, "The Web of Contention in Eighteenth-Century Cities," in *Class Conflict and Collective Action* ed. Louise A. Tilly and Charles Tilly (Beverly Hills Sage Publications, 1981).p.38

crisis of the state in the eyes of its Armenian working classes in an effective way to organize and agitate them against the state. This thesis will try to show that the great uprisings of Armenians in Istanbul especially in the 1895 Demonstration of Bab-ı Ali could not be have been imagined without the class struggle that intensified with the modernization and opening of the port of Istanbul, considering the active participation of Armenian port workers. One significant aspect of their participation was related to their scarcity of choices of contention to show their suffering, especially triggered with the massacres of their relatives in Anatolia in that period. "For people whose lives are mired in drudgery and desperation," writes Tarrow, "the offer of an exciting, risky and possibly beneficial campaign of collective action may be a gain."[35]

These scarcities and choices were not independent from the power relations of the era at both the macro and micro levels. In other words, it seems impossible to analyze the experiences of port workers without integrating the role of the power struggles of this period. It is important to note that the contemporary struggles of the lower classes were not exhausted by a simple polarization between the expansion of Hamidian hegemony, with all its coercive, disciplinary and surveillant practices, and a resistance to this expansion by a homogenous mass of workers. Doubtlessly, these attempts to complete the establishment of hegemony had a great influence on the struggles of workers. The autocratic policies, especially the severe punishment of collective initiatives, constrained the abilities and lowered the incentives for them to show their discontent avowedly, and, in many times, pushed the bulk of the struggle to either into the legal or hidden, criminal spheres. The legitimacy practices of the sultan had a critical role in softening the development of a class-based anger in the face of proletarianization. They also obstructed the turning of the anger against the

[35] Tarrow, p.19.

Sultan himself, except in the eyes of the Armenians, by attributing him the role of a "patriotic father", who is on the side of his subjects in their struggle against bureaucrats.

At the same time, this also paved the way for the workers to utilize the weaknesses, or fissures, of the system. They did not see what we call the "state" as a monolithic structure, acting like a body, the organs of which are inseparable from each other. On the contrary, they acknowledged the power struggles among the hierarchical levels of the state, from the Port Administration to the palace, and utilized them by, in cases, threatening them with taking their contention to the next highest level.

The power relations were not only limited with the intra-bureaucratic ones. There was also a power structure between the European states, and their companies, and the Ottoman state itself, which had an enormous influence on the struggle between the workers and the state. The Ottoman state, in this era, behaved neither as a simple puppet of the European interests nor like an anti-imperialist hero which absolutely protected its worker-subjects against the foreign capitalists. It endeavored to continue a policy of stability between the European governments, which pressed for the interests of the companies, and the working classes, which threatened the government with a loss of legitimacy. In other words, in front of the Ottoman government, there was a hard choice: "Raison d'état" required to support the companies against the workers. The workers, however, forced them not to ignore that "the reason of the state" was not limited to its international position, and that its fate was not only in the hands of the European powers. It will be seen in the cases that when the government tended to support the companies, the workers reminded it of their "existence" in very effective ways.

The struggle between the elites and the workers was also influenced by the power relations within communities, and among the workers in general. That the anger of workers was revealed in mediation with the "Armenian" labeled uprisings did not occur suddenly, but it had much to do with the decades of power struggles within the church between the seculars and church elites. The strong emergence of Armenian secular-socialist parties from this struggle, despite all opposition from the church elites, provided the workers of Armenian origin a powerful mechanism with which to mediate their class-based discontent against the state. Furthermore, the power relations among the workers at the everyday level also had a significant impact on the segmentation of working classes as a whole. Several differences and divisions among these workers and their intra-struggles over these kept them from sharing identical interests against the elites at the same time. Although proletarianization and, to an extent, the development of Armenian identity had some triggering influences on the expansion of the circle of solidarity among the workers, that they had several contradictory lines among them was generally more dominant. Besides the dividing role that the activation of ethno-religious "boundaries" played among workers,[36] especially with the Armenian uprisings and afterwards, there were also everyday struggles between the guild leadership and the members, among the workers of different kinships, among the guild and non-guild workers, and among the workers of different guilds, which were mostly divided according to workplaces or simple working differences, as mentioned above. To ignore these power relations at the everyday level would leave us without a critical dimension of the circumstances in which class formation took place in this era.

[36] Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge ; New York Cambridge University Press, 2003).p.75.

The scarcities and the power relations shaped, and were shaped by, the struggles over meaning in this era. To focus only on the macro levels of struggle hides that there were ongoing struggles at the everyday level, around the definitions and representations of social phenomenon. When we concentrate solely on "big events" such as violent demonstrations, riots and other kinds of "impropriety" and "disorder", as they are called in the Ottoman state documents, a bulk of other forms of contention are missed or ignored. "The effect," notes Frank Munger "is to remove protest from everyday social action and view it as breach in an otherwise peaceful social landscape."[37] Therefore, researchers interested in the contentious actions of the lower classes should not rely only on state documents, which only show the great, popular protests as significant, and label the others as simple, individual violations of law.[38]

To expand the arena of protest the working classes used, this thesis also tries to point out the everyday struggles over discourses. What this means is that as the elites attempted to impose certain definitions and representations as part of their intention to establish their hegemony, they met with resistance from the working classes against the rule of these meanings. However, this was not a reactionary resistance. They seemed to realize, in the documents, that these subalterns had their own meaning structures which were different, but not independent, from those of the elites. When they realized, for instance, that there were forms of solidarities at the everyday level within, but alternative to, the guilds which had, for centuries, been imposed by the state as the sole legitimate solidarity structure for the working

[37] Frank Munger, "Contentious Gatherings in Lancashire, England 1750–1830," in *Class Conflict and Collective Action*, ed. Charles Tilly Louise A. Tilly (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981).p.75.

[38] ibid.

classes, they immediately tried to contain and criminalize the existence of such alternative bodies.

Law and crime also constituted an arena of struggle over meaning in this manner. In Ottoman historiography, as an extension of history writing from elite perspectives, the role of laws and the Constitution for the working classes in the Hamidian period have remained understudied. However, the workers did not hesitate to use them, sometimes in a manipulative way, to follow their interests and struggle against the authorities. In the following chapters, it will be seen that the discursive gaps in the texts of laws, the Constitution and other legal documents between the elites and the workers formed a critical dimension of the class struggle in this period. Furthermore, the arena of crime should also be viewed as an arena of struggle. In recent years, crime has started to attract the attention of the Ottoman social historians, who are interested in the potential of this arena to learn more about the lives of subaltern classes and how the modern state formation took place in the Ottoman Empire.[39] We will also briefly contribute to these efforts by pointing out that crime constituted an important space which reveals a critical struggle over meaning between the port workers and the state elites. For instance, when the state elites labeled lower class Armenians and other unemployed as potential members of the criminal classes, or when they gave the monopoly of tobacco only to the French Régie Company, one of the most critical blows to these attempts came from the boatmen, who smuggled persons and things which the state banned. These boatmen were arrested, criminalized and kept under close surveillance. Here, the dialogue

[39] For an exemplary anthology in this manner, see Noémi and Alexandre Toumarkine Levy, ed., *Osmanlı'da Asayiş, Suç ve Ceza* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007).

rises to an understanding which belies the fictitious distinction between "the working class and the criminal class."[40]

Following these lines, Chapter Two presents a landscape of the struggle, the conjuncture. As mentioned above, the role of three conjectural factors will be discerned in a broad sense: The emergence and development of the Armenian movement, the entry of Western capitalism into the ports, and the peculiar political characteristics of the Hamidian government, with its policies of repression and legitimacy. These three factors cannot be separated from each other in terms of the establishment of hegemony. That these factors are discerned in three separate sessions, I hope, will not confuse the reader to suppose that their roles in the workers' struggles will be analyzed independently of each other. The sole reason for devoting separate sections to these factors is for the sake of the simplicity of presentation. For, every factor, in fact, had its own background which was so complex that it is difficult to discuss them all as one, which might lead significant aspects being overlooked. This complexity also led the author to think that it is impossible not to dwell on and deal with each factor by without risking artificial isolation.

Chapter Three, in effect, presents evidence of the fakeness of this isolation. The chapter presents an overview of the class struggle throughout the two decades preceding 1908. However it shows that the struggle was not a pure antagonism against proletarianization, but was mediated through other axes of struggle in those years. Beginning with the 1890 Armenian demonstration at Kumkapı, it goes on with the collective actions which were intensified with the concession of the Istanbul Port

[40]Özgür Sevgi Göral, "19.Yüzyıl İstanbul'unda Suç, Toplumsal Kontrol ve Hapishaneler Üzerine Çalışmak," in *Osmanlı'da Asayiş, Suç ve Ceza*, ed. Noémi Lévy and Alexandre Toumarkine (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007).

to the French-owned Istanbul Quay Company. As the "big events" of 1895 and 1896 were critical turning points, the struggles between the elites and the workers continued with the further opening of the ports and further interventions of the company into the "traditional" labor relations at the ports. It analyzes these events not only through the lens of the workers, but also through that of the elites, who followed a seemingly neutral policy between the workers and the companies, but turned their backs to the workers with the more or less establishment of the dominant existence of the company at the ports. This turning back motivated them to "sympathize" with the opposition, a sympathy which was revealed with their active support of the revolutionary condition through strikes, boycotts and other collective actions.

Chapter Four brings the thesis back from the more macro-level struggles to the more micro-level experiences of the workers. Workers, primarily to sustain their lives, used and benefited from certain strategies and methods to follow their interests. However, as they were operating at this level, they were simultaneously fighting a fierce struggle over meanings. Of these everyday struggles, three dimensions will be examined. Firstly, in the legal arena, the subalterns used and manipulated legal mechanisms to force the upper elites to behave in favor of them. Secondly, they were swimming through the illegal waters, by acting in ways which were criminalized by the authorities as behaviors worth and needing punishment. And finally, a special case will be taken which exemplifies that the boundary between the legal and illegal was not absolutely clear, but instead blurred by both sides. Although the chapter focuses on everyday experiences, it will be, hopefully, explained sufficiently that these struggles were not independent of the struggles told in the previous chapter, but on the contrary had close links between them.

Although this study started with the aim of discovering and analyzing the struggles of port workers in all across the Empire, the limitations on time and space and the concentration of the documents in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives mostly on the cases in Istanbul forced me to limit this thesis only to this city. Therefore, it is inevitable to note that it does not mean that the struggles of other workers in other cities are ignorable and less significant, but, on the contrary, it should mean that a study on other port workers in other cities of the Empire shows that such studies are more than feasible to do. Furthermore, this study does not intend to show that the experiences of the port workers in Istanbul can be generalized to all of the Empire. In fact, because there is a very tiny bulk of studies which we can compare, we need much to know even about the fate of the workers in other cities to make such a generalization on the Ottoman working classes. As Downes suggested, in other words, "the question of whether Istanbul, because the size of its port, the number of workers, or its proximity to the center of Ottoman power, accurately describes the experiences of workers in the Empire's various provincial ports remains unexplored."[41] Indeed, we have still yet to know even the basics about other workers in other cities such as İzmir, Beirut, Salonica, etc.[42]

[41] Downes, p. 32.

[42] We should not of course, bypass the significance of the studies made on the workers of these cities, which in fact has pionerring places in this field. For port workers of Salonica and Beirut, see Downes, "Constructing the Modern Ottoman Waterfront:Salonica and Beirut in Late Nineteenth Century".For workers in Port Sa'id in Egypt, see John T. Chalcraft, "The Coal-Heavers of Port Sa'id: State-Making and Worker Protest, 1869-1914," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 60 (2001). For porters in Salonica, see especially pp.98-101 of Donald Quataert, "Selanik'te İşçiler, 1850-1912," in *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine İşçiler, 1839-1950*, ed. Donald Quataert and E.J.Zürcher (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1998). On the role of port workers in İzmir in the Boycott of 1908, see M.Emin Elmacı, "1908 Avusturya Boykotu'nda Liman İşçileri," *Kebikeç*, no. 5 (1997).

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONJUNCTURE: THE CONSOLIDATION OF ARMENIAN NATIONALISM, EUROPEAN CAPITALISM AND HAMIDIAN POWER IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In his narrative of the class struggles in a small Malaysian village, Scott divides his analysis of the struggle into background, middle ground and foreground of the landscape.[43] As foreground refers to the immediate arena in which class struggle occurs, middle ground and background represent rather famous Braudelian terms of *conjuncture* and *structure*, respectively. This chapter will present that middle ground, that is, the recently emerged factors that shaped and intervened with the behaviors, tactics and strategies of the workers. Here three factors will be defined: the emergence of Armenian nationalism, the introduction of European capitalism in the form of the port modernizations, and the power practices of the Ottoman government under the rule of Abdulhamid II. This period was characterized by the declaration and abolition of the constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*), the specific repressive period that followed it and the simultaneous increase in the legitimacy policies of the Ottoman monarchy. When pointing out that they affected the struggle, the term "struggle" is used in its immediate meaning. That is, these factors not only shaped the movements of workers, but they also determined the policies and strategies of the upper classes against the former. As the concept of class cannot be thought of without dealing with the specific forms of class struggle and that these conjectural factors played an influential role in the struggles of late Ottoman

[43] See Chapter 3 in James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

workers, class formation in the late Ottoman Empire could not be studied without considering these conjectural factors.

The Emergence of Armenian Nationalism

Armenians, who had lived in Ottoman lands for hundreds of years, entered the Ottoman agenda as a serious "problem" when they became the "object of international affairs", in the Berlin Treaty of 1878.[44] It does not mean, however, that their sense of being, feeling and identifying themselves as "Armenians" started with that period. The Armenians had been recognized as"millet" by the Ottoman state since the fifteenth century, when they were organized under the leadership of the Armenian Patriarchate.[45] In the nineteenth century, the ideals of the French revolution had an influential role in the emergence of the nationalist movements, including the Armenian one, with the aim of independence from the Ottoman rule. The Armenian millet organization had a contradictory impact on this process. On the one hand, because they had a hitherto existing identity with a language, religion and a formal organization, they already had a self-identity, which facilitated and, probably, encouraged their integration to the nationalistic atmosphere that came with the French Revolution of 1789. This process in the Ottoman Empire was firstly led by the Armenian students sent to Europe by Protestant missionaries who had been active since the first half of the nineteenth century, especially with their recognition

[44] Selçuk Akşin Somel, "Osmanlı Ermenilerinde Kültür Modernleşmesi, Cemaat Okulları ve Abdulhamid Rejimi," *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 5 (2007). p. 71.

[45] A. Ter Minassian, *Ermeni Devrimci Hareketi'nde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm:1887-1912*, trans. Mete Tunçay (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1992). p. 8.

by the Ottoman palace as a formal religious community.[46] These students met with the ideas of French revolution and returned to their homeland with the ideals of liberating and modernizing their own people. It is not clear that their will to improve their own community implicated the will for independence. Yet, it is certain that they had continued to feel a sense of belonging to their own community that had existed for centuries. It seems that their goals and ideals were mostly limited to the secularization of their own community in the spheres of education, culture and language.

In addition, it was felt that the form of politics within the Armenian community, which had been, until then, under the monopoly of the Armenian religious class needed to be reformed.[47] That these Armenian activists had a separate space of belonging and acting played a crucial role in their further attempts to appropriate the nationalistic notions of the French Revolution in the following decades. It also affected the labor position in the sense that, as will be seen, the church for the Armenian port workers was a central place in socialization. Thus, the affairs within this Church-led Armenian community, with secularization attempts within the community and the nationalist tendencies most likely had a direct impact on how the Armenians, who formed the majority among port workers until the turn of the century and who became extremely anxious in the 1890s about losing their livelihoods, set their positions against state.[48]

The traditional structure of the Armenian community gradually eroded in the nineteenth century. In addition to the emergence of a new, secular bourgeoisie in the

[46] Somel, p. 77.

[47] ibid., p. 74, 77, 81.

[48] See the next section.

community, the most separatist blow came from the missionary activities of other Christian sects. That the palace formally recognized the Catholic Armenians in 1831 and the Protestants in 1850 had decisive consequences for the future of the Armenian community.[49] These two religions, especially with their school networks, caused a cultural revival within the community. Especially the Protestant schools had a great role in this process. Although it is doubtful whether they were successful in spreading their religion within the Armenian population, the Protestant missionary schools, with their secular education, had a great influence on the secular identity of the future nationalist movement. Their graduates dispersed across the Anatolia as teachers in several Armenian schools. These teachers mostly preferred and encouraged the daily use of the Armenian language, and the foundation of new communities and unions for cultural and educational purposes. In short, this was a process in which the Armenian identity gradually gained a secular character, which had a decisive influence on the relations between the Armenian people, the Church and the State. [50]

On the other hand, however, the church was embedded in the Ottoman power structure in such a way that it was against the interests of the Armenian church to embrace the secular ideas of these people, which would deprive it of the power it possessed under the Ottoman rule.[51] In the Ottoman millet system, religion (and sects) was the main criteria for the organization and rule of communities. Therefore, the communities were organized under the religious leadership of each community, in which a religious class was held authorized and responsible for the internal affairs

[49] Somel, p. 74.

[50] ibid., p. 81, also see Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, vol.2* (Cambridge University Press, 1988). p. 202.

[51] ibid., p. 200.

of its own community. Hence, for instance, the Armenians were called the "Gregorian millet" by the state authorities, emphasizing its religious character. In return for complete loyalty to the Ottoman state, the ruling elite had delivered autonomy to these classes in religious and cultural affairs.[52] Formally, the Ottoman state had no authority to intervene in these areas according to this historical compromise. The leader of the community, the Patriarch, with other members of the religious class, had complete authority in these areas in his own sphere. The threatening of this power structure by the above-mentioned secular factors, not surprisingly, forced the religious authority into a defensive position. Although it may be expected that the development of an ethnic identity would contribute to the power of the Patriarchate, the secular character of this development throughout the nineteenth century urged it to reform its own cultural networks, especially against the competitiveness of the Protestant schools.[53] The religious class was conscious of the fact that as these rivals became more popular, its power in the community would diminish in a respective manner.

On the face of it, this stance of the religious strata was also in the interest of the Ottoman state. That is, as they tried to keep their power against this newly emerged class to prevent them from penetrating the ruling strata of the community, they also became the main wall in front of the separatist ideas, which had become increasingly popular among the religious minorities of the empire throughout the century, keeping them from spreading into the community. As a result, the secularist and nationalist tendencies of the new intellectuals met with strong resistance from the traditional Armenian power structure.

---

[52] Ibid.

[53] Somel, p. 78.

Ironically, the support for these secular sections came from the Ottoman state itself in the Tanzimat era. The ideology of the Ottomanism of the Tanzimat elites, with equal citizenship, democratization and secularism as their core values, promoted the rule of law and extended representation in the internal affairs of each community, as well as the whole society. The idea behind this was that the diminishing loyalty of the non-Muslims with the influence of nationalistic notions could only be restored by making them see the state as the will of the whole society, including their own. The idea of equal citizenship, which would be the basis of this process, could not be established without eroding the dividing loyalties that crosscut it. The structure of the religious communities of the empire presented the main obstacle for these elites.[54] In other words, as non-Muslims felt themselves as belonging to a separate authority other than the state, it would be impossible both to strengthen the state and obtain the loyalties of non-Muslims. The secularization of the communities, according to this line of thought, would solidify the sense of being Ottoman among the non-Muslim communities of the empire. Accordingly, the Ottoman state helped the secular groups penetrate the power structure of the Greek, Armenian and Jewish communities between 1858 and 1865.[55]

The first Armenian constitution (that would never be called as such by the Ottomans, but rather by the Armenians and Europeans) that increased the secularization of the community was prepared in 1860 and approved by the sultan in 1863, under the title of "Statute of the Armenian Nation" (*Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyan*).[56] According to this document, there would be a general community

[54] Somel, p. 74-75; Shaw and Shaw, p. 200.

[55] Somel, p. 75.

[56] A. Ter Minassian, "The role of the Armenian Community in the Foundation and Development of the Socialist Movement in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1876-1923," in

assembly, which would be convened to elect the patriarch and the religious and corporal assemblies.[57] This victory of the secular elite not only increased their power over the politics of the community, but they facilitated their control of education and other cultural spheres. It is not surprising that the Armenian cultural unions and schools in different parts of Anatolia flourished after the 1860s.[58] Somel, looking at the development of ethnic identity rather than Ottomanism among Armenians, points out the failure of the Tanzimat elites to "understand that religious belonging was more compatible with the Ottoman system."[59] The main reason for the rise of the Armenian nationalism was not the Tanzimat policy, but the desperate defeat of 1878 with its bitter consequences in terms of both the break away of many of the non-Muslim lands and the stiffening and intolerant policy of the state against non-Muslims, especially with the emergence of separatist militant committees like the Hunchaks and Dashnaks of the Armenians..[60]

The Post-1878 Era

It was not that there had been no violent resistances among Ottoman Armenians before 1878. Indeed, for instance, the Armenians' resistances in Zeytun in 1862, and the ones in Van and Erzurum in 1863 had presented the kernels of a

---

Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1923, ed. Mete Tunçay, and Erik Jan Zürcher (London & New York: British Academic Press, an Imprint of I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994). p.116 .

[57] Ibid.

[58] Somel, p. 79-81.

[59] Ibid., p. 81.

[60] Ibid., p. 71.

future nationalistic revival by ordinary Armenians. However, although the small militant cells of nationalists had tried to give these resistances a nationalistic color, they had been mostly interpreted as the explosion of hitherto existing disturbances of the local people from the oppression of the local landlords and bureaucrats. The fact that these insurgences were spontaneous, unorganized and limited in terms of both time and space has been shown to support this interpretation.[61] The Ottomans' strategic attempts through reacting to the rebellion by sending commissions that consisted of Armenian senior officials and by the authorization of the Armenian Constitution in the same period contributed to their failure to grow towards an organized nationalist movement. It is correct to say that, due to the foundation of small militant organizations after these insurgences, like the Union of Liberation in Van in 1872, it may be shown as a turning point of Armenian nationalism as a movement.[62] Nevertheless, there is no reason to dismiss the observation of an Ottoman bureaucrat who served in various senior positions in the first decades of the twentieth century on the relations of different minorities in Diyarbakir, an eastern province of the Ottoman Empire: "Until 1880, Armenians, Turks, and Kurds around Diyarbakir lived as fellow sufferers under the general awfulness of the administration of government."[63]

The heavy defeat in the 1877-78 war with Russia and the subsequent treaty of Berlin had a disastrous impact on Ottoman-Armenian relations for both sides. Shaw

---

[61] Süleyman Kani İrtem, *Ermeni Meselesinin İç Yüzü* (İstanbul: Temel Yay., 2004). pp. 6-7. Also see, Minassian, "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketi'nde..." p. 17.

[62] Minassian, Ibid.

[63] Kani İrtem, p.13 *"1880 senesine kadar Diyarbekir taraflarında Ermenilerle Türkler ve Kürtler hükümet idaresinin umumi fenalığı karşısında dert ortağı gibi yaşarlardı."*; R.G. Suny also argues that the period between 1453-1878 could be called as a "harmonic co-existence", quoted in Selim Deringil, *Simgeden Millete: II.Abdülhamid'den Mustafa Kemal'e Devlet ve Millet* (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2007).p. 221. (footnote).

and Shaw write that after this disastrous defeat, the Ottomans had to "give up two-fifths of its entire territory and one-fifth of its population."[64] According to the Berlin Treaty, while a part of Bulgaria became almost independent with a formal Ottoman suzerainty, the Serbia, Montenegro and Romania became totally independent. In addition, in the east the Ottomans left some important territories to Russia.[65] This new order, which was terrible for the Ottoman state, created distrust on each side. While the Armenian elites began to think and feel more enthusiastically about the vision for independence, the Ottomans began to impose more surveillance and pressure on the Armenian population.

The great amounts of land lost by the Ottomans along with the great part of Christian minorities that had become independent, the secular and, to a lesser extent, traditional Armenian elites saw the possibility of the creation of an independent Armenian state both more realistic and more necessary than it had been. These losses created a serious feeling on the part of elites that there was little chance for the Ottoman state to survive much longer and that it was no longer possible for the Armenians to progress and develop under a crumbling empire. Before the war, the Armenian elites had shared the same hopes as the Young Ottomans, who had followed a policy of Ottomanism and parliamentarism and had seen the revival of empire in the establishment of a constitutional regime.[66] However, 1878, with the defeat and its heavy social and economic consequences and the abolition of parliament, as Minassian writes, "was marked by a real revolution in the attitudes of

[64] Shaw and Shaw, opt.cit. p. 191.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Minassian, "The Role of Armenian Community…" p. 117.

Armenian dignitaries (Patriarch, high clergy and leading figures)." [67] In other words, the Armenian elites saw the necessity of walking independently to introduce the reforms they considered as indispensable for the well-being of the Armenian people, especially for those living in the eastern provinces.

The success of the nationalist movements of the Balkan nations, which was proven with the outcome of the Treaty of Berlin, also encouraged the Armenian elites to envision that the dream of an independent Armenia was more practical than ever. The necessity, in other words, had brought together with itself the transformation of a possibility into a reality. The triggering factor for this transformation was not only the successful examples of the Balkan nations, but also that the Berlin Treaty offered a great opportunity and hope for the realization of this dream. Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty marked, in a sense, the internationalization of the Armenian question:

> The Sublime Porte engages to realize without further delay, the ameliorations and the reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Kurds and the Circassians. The Sublime Porte will periodically render account of the measures taken with this intent to the Powers who will supervise them.[68]

This article, by raising initially the hopes, and then bringing on the disappointments of the Armenian activists, played a critical role in the development of Armenian nationalist movement. With the first declaration of the Berlin Treaty including this article, it was perceived both as a new arena of struggle in favor of their causes and the basis of great expectations for this community. The idea was that the internationalization of this question would bring the protective cover of the great European powers, which would inevitably lead to the independence of Armenia,

[67] Ibid.

[68] Quoted in Vahan M. Kurkjian, *A History of Armenia* (New York: Indo-European Publishing, 2008). p.238.

given the condition of the "sick man of Europe," and the previous examples of Balkan nations. In other words, Article 61 was seen as a guarantee of European powers for the realization of their hopes. They believed that at any moment that the Ottoman power would apply to violence and oppression against the Armenians, and that the European powers would immediately intervene into the affairs, thus paving the way for the further liberation of the Armenian people. In fact, this possibility of intervention, especially after the occupation of Egypt by Britain, would shackle the Ottoman rulers in the struggles between the (Armenian) port workers and the European companies, as will be seen in the next chapter.

However, in the following years, the relatively passive stand of the European powers towards the Armenian cause, even in the violent decade of the 1890s, showed that these hopes came to naught. The disappointment following this inability or the reluctance of the powers gave way to the foundation of militant organization. This was a sign that many in the Armenian community felt that they were alone in their cause and no alternative other than violence could help them to achieve their ideals. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest, in other words, that the disappointment that followed the practice of Article 61 marked the beginning of the organizational violence in the Armenian community.[69]

The internationalization of the Armenian cause, with the catastrophic blow of the territorial losses had also a critical impact on the Ottoman state authorities. The post-war circumstances created a continuous state of crisis and emergency on the part of the Ottoman elites, led by Abdulhamid II.[70] From 1878 on, the pressure and surveillance on the Armenians as a community incrementally increased, especially as

[69] Minassian, Ermeni Devrimc i Hareketi'nde… , p. 16-17. ; Minassian, "The Role of the Armenian Community…" p.112; Shaw and Shaw, opt.cit. p. 202.

[70] Somel, p. 73.

the violent actions of the Armenian militant organizations became more appeared in several districts of the Empire. The constraints and discipline applied on the whole population was particularly felt by the Armenian community, even for the sections of it that chose to stay and act within the legal framework. The schools, religious spheres, cultural unions and other social organizations and actions of the Armenian community became the targets of constant and severe pressure. The tolerance and encouragement shown in many spheres, especially in education and culture, to the Armenians before 1878, disappeared year by year, as Armenian militants increased their popularity and actions in the Armenian community.[71] However, it may also be claimed that this decrease of tolerance also was caused by a conscious change of policy by Ottoman state elites toward a policy that put Islam and Muslims at the center. The main reason for this was the dramatic rise of rate of Muslims within the general population because of the losses of Christian lands and the migration of great numbers of Muslims from the Balkan and Caucasian territories to Anatolia as well as the increasing sensibility of this majority against European pressure and nationalist violence.[72] On the one hand, the state elites continued to try to integrate the Armenians or at least not to alienate them completely. On the other hand, they failed in their efforts at sincerity as the violent actions of the nationalists and the violent reaction of the Muslim population to them, at times with the encouragement of state officials, could not be stopped.

Under these circumstances, Armenian political activities began to flourish in the second half of the 1880s.The first political party of Armenians, the Armenekan Party, was founded in Van in 1885. It was a liberal-democratic party, which would

[71] Somel, p.85-90.

[72] Shaw and Shaw, p. 259.

not be effective in the following decades because of its being limited to small group of intelligentsia in Van region.[73] The most influential parties, which marked Ottoman-Armenian relations, were socialist-oriented. It seems that their strategy to build their parties along class lines was core to their popularity in the community.

Two parties were popularly supported by the Armenian lower classes, mainly the peasants in the eastern provinces and the urban workers in the west. The Hunchakian Party was founded in Geneva by six university students and they were, from the beginning, a more determined Marxist party compared to the ambivalence of the Dashnaks, which was founded in 1890 in Tiflis and, as Minassian writes, "hesitated between the revolutionary socialism of Russia and the socialism of Jaures."[74] These parties considered their primary duty to educate the Armenian lower classes, who were predominantly peasants in the east, and to protect the Armenians from the oppressions of state bureaucrats and Kurdish tribes. For the latter aim, they formed armed militias and organized several resistance acts in various places of Anatolia in the 1890s. They also based their propaganda and lobby activities on the promises of the Berlin Treaty and expected the European powers to intervene against the Ottoman oppression of the Armenians.

In terms of independence, however, they were not exactly at the same point. While the Hunchaks aimed to liberate the Armenian people living under Russian, Ottoman and Iranian domination by uniting them under the same flag, the Dashnaks followed a more democratic, reformist policy. In the Dashnak program, there was no appeal to the independence or unity of all Armenians but the educational and economic development of Armenians and what Minassian describes as "the

[73] Minassian, "The Role of Armenian Community…"p. 112. For the description of Armenian political parties, we will mostly rely on this study.

[74] Ibid.

establishment of democratic freedoms in Turkish Armenia by revolutionary action."[75] The first, and maybe the most popular, action of Dashnaks came in 1895, when a group of Dashnak commandos occupied the Ottoman Bank.[76]

The Hunchaks, on the other hand, sought to achieve national independence by revolutionary insurgent movements and thus were violent especially between 1890 and 1896. In 1890, they organized a demonstration in the Kumkapı district of Istanbul, where the Armenian Patriarchate was located. In 1895, they organized the famous Bab-ı Ali demonstrations, in which they experienced a bloody conflict with Ottoman security forces. Then, with the support of the Dashnaks, with the acts of resistance in nearly 25 different locations in Anatolia, all of which were suppressed violently and in bloody ways by Ottoman forces.[77] As the two parties were popularly supported in all of these actions by the lower classes, the port workers also played a central and critical role in the conflicts in Istanbul, as will be discussed below.

This enthusiasm of the first half of the 1890s was replaced gradually by a widespread disappointment and lethargy among the Armenian community. Initially, it was expected that these acts of violent resistance, at best, would allow them to achieve their ends be they successful, founding an independent socialist republic, or, be they suppressed, provoking the Europeans to intervene as a result of which the Armenians could obtain more privileges that would be a further step in their liberation.[78] However, both expectations failed. The acts of resistance were

---

[75] Minassian, "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketi'nde…" p. 27.

[76] We will analyze the three Armenian rebellions in Istanbul in detail in the following chapter.

[77] For the chronology of the Armenian resistances in this period, see Bilal Şimşir, *Ermeni Meselesi: 1774-2005* (Ankara: Bilgi Yay., 2006).p. 281-286.

[78] As an example for the "maximum" and the "minimum" programme of Hunchakian Party, see Minassian, "The Role of Armenian Community…" p. 123-124.

suppressed brutally and the European powers did nothing but declare ineffective protestations and condemnations against the Ottoman state. This frustration led to inactivation and internal divisions among the parties. The Hunchaks were divided between those who defended the continuation of the armed struggles and those who argued for a civilian struggle without emphasizing the idea of independence. [79] Beginning with the 1900s, the Hunchaks and Dahnaks joined the conferences held by the Young Turks that aimed to determine the strategies and road maps to undermine and overthrow the Hamidian autocracy.[80] Although local armed struggles occasionally appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century, there was no corresponding enthusiasm or efficiency in the Armenian struggles until the beginning of the First World War. In fact, in 1908, with the declaration of liberty, Armenian militias throughout the Anatolia laid down their arms in order to show their trust in and support of the new order.[81] A small group in the new parliament of 1908 also represented them and they sometimes became the leading defenders of labor issues in the relatively democratic atmosphere of 1908-1912. [82]

Economic Dependence and Integration with European Capitalism

Another conjectural factor that had a great impact on the relations between port workers, companies and the state was the privatization of ports to European companies in return for their modernization. The nineteenth century was an original

---

[79] Minassian, "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketi'nde.." p. 24-25.

[80] Minassian, "The Role of Armenian Community…" p. 136-138.

[81] Ibid. p.139.

[82] Ibid.

phase in the Ottoman history in which a broad-based "restructuring" accompanied an increasing economic dependence that led to the necessity of integration into the world market, a significant consequence of which, among many, showed itself in the modernization of transport systems.[83] In order to grasp the causes of port modernization, a brief overview of Ottoman economic dependence in the nineteenth century is required. In addition, also an account of the world economic conditions, which also determined the state's position in terms of both the privatization of ports and other assets of the Empire and the struggles and resistances of the port workers against this integration, should be discussed.

Ottoman Economy until the Hamidian Era

The course of the Ottoman economy in the nineteenth century was in part determined by certain internal affairs and associated with the reorganizing efforts for the rationalization and centralization of the state structure. Beyond those internal factors, there were the external ones that affected the economy. The course of world capitalism and the European economic expansion to mitigate the burden emanated from the excessive production because of the Industrial Revolution in the European lands. The restructuring attempts at the beginning of the century by Selim III, which remained limited to the military, extended in the long era of Mahmud II (1808-1839). Mahmud believed that the reforms had to be implemented in the bureaucratic structure and that these new bureaucracy could truly function only through the

[83] As Chalcraft defines, the process of restructuring " involved the rise of new trades and the disappearance and adaptation of the old, and the far-reaching transformation of products, locations, and means and relations of production in response to deepening market relations, changing consumption tastes, and increasing competition." Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories : Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914*. p.10.

complete elimination of the old system.[84] At about the same time, with the pressures of the European economic expansion that especially started to be felt overwhelmingly with the eighteenth century, a new economic order marked by the orientation of Ottoman agriculture to produce raw materials to export them to Europe began to appear.[85] However, it was not until the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826- a symbolically critical attempt of Mahmud II to monopolize the governance- that the restrictive and protectionist policies began to be left in favor of a more liberalized economic policy.

The elimination of the Janissaries meant the removal of the strongest block in front of the liberalization policies. The Janissaries had been the most powerful ally of the especially lower class artisans, of which most of them had belonged. The so-called "Auspicious Event" represented the destruction of what Quataert calls the"best organized advocates of protectionism" for the still uncompetitive artisans of the Empire.[86] The new army not only eliminated the strongest ally of the artisans, they were also used, in accordance with the re-centralization policies, to repress the autonomy and power of the guilds, which was also a necessary step to implement the liberal policies of the following decades.[87] This process of "cleansing" had reached to such a degree that, according to Ertuğ, while some of the workers were killed in a "delirious" way, those who were able to sustain were exiled outside the city.[88]

---

[84] Shaw and Shaw, opt.cit., p. 1.

[85] Donald Quataert, "The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire: Vol.2*, ed. Halil İnalcık, with Donald Quataert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).p. 762.

[86] İbid. p. 764.

[87] Ibid p. 768.

[88] Nejdet Ertuğ, *Osmanlı Döneminde İstanbul Deniz Ulaşımı ve Kayıkçılar* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 2001).p.103.

The artisanal sector of the empire, already under the threatening introduction of cheap manufactured goods from the European countries, was exposed to a further blow with the Baltalimanı British-Turkish Convention on Free Trade in 1838, signed under the shadow of a threatening challenge against the Ottoman dynasty by the Governor of Egypt, Mehmed Ali. According to the treaty, while the tariffs on exports increased to twelve percent, the tariffs on imports became five percent (both of these were three percent before the agreement). In addition, foreign merchants would be exempted from internal tariffs, while Ottoman citizens would continue to pay them. With this treaty, the Ottoman government accepted the foreign intervention in its economic policies. Due to its destructive impact on the, then premature, industrial world of the Ottoman lands, the agreement has been seen as a critical date that determined the fate of an underdeveloped Turkey.[89] However, considering that the agreement most probably could not easily have been implemented in the existence of a strong opposition of artisans, as had been before 1826, it is more appropriate to suggest that it was a path-dependent decision rather than being a turning point.[90] Besides this, the artisanal sector, although weakened, did not totally disappear but resisted, and even flourished, as was the case with some cotton-based products.[91] Moreover, the great gulf between the mechanized mode of production of Europe and the traditional workshops of the Empire was a decades-old problem rather than a

---

[89] As an earlier example of this approach, see Şanda, *Yarı Müstemleke Oluş Tarihi/1908 İşçi Hareketleri*

[90] Quataert, "The Age of Reforms", p. 764.

[91] For a study which criticizes the "decline paradigm" which dominates the studies on Ottoman manufacture, by pointing out that the "internal demand" was at the center of this sector, see Donald Quataert, *Sanayi Devrimi Çağında Osmanlı İmalat Sektörü*, trans. Tansel Güney (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1999).

suddenly appeared one. Thus, it is problematic to argue that the Convention was fully responsible for the industrial backwardness of the Ottoman Empire.[92]

Meanwhile, the Tanzimat Edict, as the most triggering and symbolic event of the centralization process, was declared by the grand vezir Mustafa Reşit Paşa in 1839. In addition to its promise of a regime of rule of law based on equal citizenship, the Tanzimat regime envisaged a direct control of tax revenues and reorganization of the administrative system. The Tanzimat elites aimed at reducing the autonomous power of the provincial elites by means of a combination of a centralized tax system, which referred to the replacement of salaried officials with tax farmers, with a series of administrative reforms that foresaw the foundation of local councils with members from the ruling elites and "principal subject groups of each area" led by landlords and local bureaucratic elites, as well as the restructuring of the administrative bureaucracy to ensure the extension of the arms of state to even the smallest districts.[93] While these reforms required a substantial increase in the scale of bureaucracy with additional costs to the state, the idea was that these could be financed by the simultaneous increase of state revenues by direct taxes. However, the system did not work because of several difficulties, ranging from the inability to replace or even weaken the local power holders, to acts of resistance, especially in the countryside.[94] In addition to this, the increasing military expenditures, due to the persistent modernization efforts in the army especially since the era of Selim III, also played a destructive role in the budget default, which could not be closed for

[92] Şevket Pamuk, *Osmanlı Ekonomisinde Bağımlılık ve Büyüme* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1994). p. 20-21.

[93] Shaw and Shaw, p. 84.

[94] Shaw and Shaw, ibid., p. 96-97 and, as an example of resistance to the Tanzimat in rural districts, see Ahmet Uzun, *Tanzimat ve Sosyal Direnişler* (İstanbul: Eren Yay., 2002)..

decades. Under all of these financial difficulties, the beginning of the Crimean War in 1854 against Russia marked a new era for the Ottoman state, the impacts of which would be felt even in the first decades of the Turkish Republic 70 years later.

In 1854, the Ottoman state took its first international loan from a financial institution based in London, with a six percent interest rate. The loan, in fact, occurred in a specific era in which both the international states and institutions outside and the Ottoman leaders inside were longing for these operations. The 1850s and 1860s were remarkable years for British and French commercial expansionism, especially with the beginning of the Crimean War, in which the Ottoman state increased its expenses for military equipment and provisions, which in effect doubled and tripled the trade volume with those countries.[95] As such, it would be in the best interest of those countries when the Ottoman state took loans, for these loans would trigger economic benefits for these countries especially in the Middle East. As a result, the region became once again an important region for the European interests almost two centuries later.[96]

The second factor that made the loans more available after the mid-century was that the international financial world had become more mature, open and willing to give loans to financially cramped states like the Ottoman Empire. Especially the newcomers in the 1850s were so ambitious in lending their money to foreign investment to a point that in the following decades, specific financial institutions to give credit to the Ottoman and Egyptian governments began to appear, such as the French Society Génerale in Paris.[97] Beyond this, the Ottoman public officials, due to

[95] Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy:1800-1914* (London ; New York: Methuen, 1987). p.102.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid. p. 102-103.

the decades old financial distress based on the above-mentioned difficulties and the emergent war circumstances in the 1850s, tended to borrow money in order to relieve the state's budget. In fact, the first proposal to borrow foreign money, which came at the beginning of the decade by the GrandVezier Mustafa Reşit, had been rejected by the Sultan due to concerns of foreign dependency.[98] By the beginning of the war, the increasing budget deficits and the need for triggering military expenses, with the severe pressures of British and French governments because of their anxiety for a strong Ottoman resistance against Russia, made the international loans irresistible even to the Sultan.

As usually happens, the state elites were not satisfied only with this loan and during the following two decades, the state borrowed 14 more times from several international institutions and governments. As a result, in 1875, the total debt was so great that the state declared a partial moratorium and in 1876, it stopped all of the payments.[99] The reasons for this bankruptcy were complex. To begin with, because of the decreasing level of confidence, the debts were given on less and less favorable terms, in addition to rising interest rates. Secondly, partly because of the decreasing competitiveness especially after 1838, and partly because of never ending military and bureaucratic expenditures, the money could not be used for industrialization and other economically efficient and productive solutions. Furthermore, the critical factor for the bankruptcy was the international "Great Depression" of 1873, the effects of which lasted for two decades, due to which the state could not borrow anymore because of the absence of money to borrow in the international markets. Lastly, a further blow was that the 1872-73 droughts caused a "domestic depression" within

[98] Ibid. p. 100.

[99] Ibid. 108.

the Empire in the sense that the state could not collect agricultural taxes, on which its economy mostly depended, so that it did not have the chance to relieve the debts and/or, at least, waive the bankruptcy.[100]

The Limitations of the Hamidian Era, and European Penetration into the Ports

The Hamidian era began within this financial turmoil. The Turco-Russian War of 1877-78 added new debts, increasing the burden on Abdulhamid II. At the end of the war, beyond war reparations, many of the richest provinces in the Rumeli region were lost. In 1881, the Ottoman sultan issued the Muharram Decree, which allowed the establishment of the Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-u Umumiye İdaresi*) (PDA). According to the agreement between the state and a number of European states led by the British and French (the leading creditor nations to the Empire), in return for a certain decrease in the amount of debt, the remaining debt would be paid by allocating taxes taken from a number of (generally the most significant and beneficial) sectors to this administration. In the following years, the Administration also had the right to collect other duties and a part of the tobacco tax, which would be collected by a foreign-controlled Régie Tobacco Company with the first half of 1883. The administration also would help the state to obtain additional loans in the following decades in order to finance the modernization efforts, the most popular of which, and the one in which this thesis is most interested, occurred in the transportation sector.[101]

[100] Ibid. 100-105, 109; Charles Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)., p. 64. ; Pamuk, p. 68. ; Quataert, "The Age of Reforms", p. 773.

[101] Owen, p. 192-193

Beginning with its foundation, the PDA acted to turn these pressures into effect in the transportation sector, along with its central role in triggering the process of Ottoman economic integration into the world economy on a larger scale. Indeed, the PDA seems to have acted as an effective agent of European investors to protect and promote their interests.[102] While on the one hand, it helped the Ottoman government to borrow from foreign markets by using its own existence as a sign of security for the investments, on the other hand, it acted as a local pressure group for the concessions given to European companies for a variety of public works, including the ports.[103] During the three decades following the establishment of the PDA, the Ottoman government, despite the 1875 moratorium and the ongoing depression in the foreign markets, managed to get further loans at lower interest rates, which would have been impossible in the absence of the PDA. However, both due to the reluctance of the Ottoman bureaucrats to a further debt and because of less available conditions of foreign markets, these loans remained at a lower level.[104]

Meanwhile, however, these loans were not sufficient for the Ottoman public officials, who sought to finance new projects to create new and additional revenues for the budget. As a great portion of revenues had disappeared because of the territorial losses after the Berlin Treaty, the Empire had to submit most of the greatest revenues to the control of the PDA. Beyond this, the Ottoman economy, still suffering from the consequences of the 1873 Depression, could not bring the desired sources due to the decreases in tax revenues.[105] Therefore, it was impossible for the

[102] Ibid., p.193-194

[103] Ibid.

[104] Pamuk, p. 79

[105] Ibid.

state elites, who were determined to see that the only way to save the Empire was to modernize the Empire- including its economy- as quickly as possible, to achieve their ends by using the state budget, almost the third of which was earmarked for the external debts.[106] In addition to the loans borrowed seventeen times between 1887-1906, the Hamidian government also sought to modernize the transportation systems, both to increase the agricultural production in rural areas, along the railway lines, and to increase trade revenues, which, according to them, could only be achieved through a determined effort to integrate into the world economy. As a result, the government had no alternative but to give concessions to European companies, which possessed the required material and technical resources, to build and modernize the transportation system in all over the Empire.[107]

The period in which Hamidian government felt these necessities also matched with the capitalist expansionism of France and Germany, the latecomers to the imperialist era. They actively sought their own external markets and areas of influence in the world. The role of the British hegemony throughout the world diminished at that time. In addition, the Ottoman Empire did not become a colony until that time and afterwards. Those contributed to the persistent efforts of French and Germans to encourage the Ottoman government to build modern transportation systems through their own companies and to seek concessions for themselves, to create their own economic and political peripheries in the large and fertile lands of the Middle East and Anatolia.[108] Therefore, it was not surprising that during the following decades, French and German companies mostly built most of the

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid. p.80; Owen, p.96

[108] Pamuk, p. 87-92.

concessions for railway systems, port facilities and other public works. Indeed, while the share of the French and Germans in the foreign investments were 31.7 and 1.1 percent, respectively, in 1888; in 1914, these shares dramatically jumped to 50.4 and 27.5. For our interests, the French had an overwhelming dominance in the ports, in which their share in 1914 was 69.1 percent.[109]

The dominant role of the French in the ports was particularly significant to prove how financial control became a stick for the concessions in this period. The foreign banks in the Empire were exceptionally instrumental in the financial exploitation of the Empire. The Deutsche Bank and the French-controlled Imperial Ottoman Bank acted as the active financial agencies of the two latecomers. As their main function was to float government loans and to provide credit for large projects, they put a great deal of effort into using these functions to promote and protect the interests of their own nationals. The Ottoman Bank, in particular, was a significant example of this process.

Especially after 1881, the French share in the debts of the Empire continuously increased in the following three decades. As French liabilities (including those of financial institutions as well as government) formed 45 percent in 1881, it reached to 75.3 percent in 1914.[110] Pamuk also argues that the Imperial Ottoman Bank played a central role in this increase due to its efforts to sell bonds in the French stocks.[111] As Ottoman financial dependency increased in this period, so did French efforts to exploit this dependency by forcing the Ottoman government, either directly or through the Imperial Ottoman, to grant the concessions to French

[109] See Table 4.2 and 4.3 in Pamuk, p. 74-75.

[110] Pamuk, p. 84.

[111] Ibid. p. 85.

companies. It was most likely that this stick was also actively used to establish the French hegemony in the ports. In one apparent instance, in 1903, one of the conditions of the French government used that sort of a card to force the government to "leave control of the Istanbul docks in French hands," alongside other conditions.[112]

It is most probably that the foundation of the PDA and increasing financial control marked the beginning of a new term in which the Hamidian government, anxious to increase the revenues to modernize the Empire and, thus, to prevent further territorial losses, would be more obliged to modernize the transportation system. In fact, however, the pressures for these projects did not emerge suddenly in this period. Especially after the introduction of steam technology into the Ottoman waters in the third decade of the nineteenth century, the rate of steam vessels to the sailing ships gradually increased throughout the century. As steam technology brought larger and quicker vessels, the increase in the tonnage of shipping rose in an exponential manner. While, for instance, the shipping tonnage entering the Port of Alexandria increased at about nine times between 1830 and 1860, the increase in Beirut in the same period was ten times.[113] With concurrent growth in British and French commercial expansionism into the Middle East that was mentioned above, the rate and extension of commerce steadily increased in the following decades. Steam vessels gradually replaced sailing ships, to the extent that, for instance, in Istanbul, 95 percent of all goods were shipped by steam vessels by the end of the

[112] Owen, p. 198.

[113] For the number of tonnage of shippings between 1830-1914 in these and other Ottoman ports, see Table 3.1 in Issawi, p. 48. See also D.Quataert, "The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914" p. 800-801.

century.[114] Of course, as the steam technology belonged to the Europeans, so did the steam vessels. In 1870, almost all of the steamship lines, except one Turkish and three Egyptian, which had regular services in the Mediterranean, were European-owned (namely, British, French, Austrian, Italian and Russian).[115] This dominant foreign involvement in sea transport, as expected, would bring continuous pressures to modernize the ports according to the needs and requirements of the steam vessels.

Ottoman ports, designed to serve sailing ships, did not change during the century to any significant degree. The steam vessels had to adapt to the traditional ways of doing things in the ports. Because the larger ships could not dock due to the insufficient capacity of the existing ports (in terms of depth, width and length), they generally anchored offshore. From there, the passengers and goods were carried by boat and barge to the dockside and to the storage boats, from where the goods were carried by porters to the customs and warehouses. [116] This process was extremely long and difficult for the ships as well as the merchants, who suffered from the delays. Because it was much quicker to unload ships at a dock, scale and speed of trade would dramatically increase in modernized and enlarged ports. On the other hand, however, thousands of boatmen and porters lived on these jobs, which would disappear if the ports were modernized, as there would be much less need for the barges and boatmen since the modern facilities in the ports would eliminate the necessity for them. [117] Most probably, this hesitation played a significant role in the retardation of the modernization process.

---

[114] Quataert, ibid. p. 800.

[115] Issawi, p. 46.

[116] Quataert, "The Age of Reforms", p. 802-803.

[117] Ibid. ; Issawi, p. 50.

The first port modernization took place in Izmir in 1875. This was followed by Beirut, Istanbul and Salonica, the greatest port cities of the Empire throughout the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century. In this process, new, larger quays that allowed the larger ships to unload more directly, and new warehouses for storage and new trams to carry the goods more easily along the port were built.[118] In Istanbul, in particular, the concession for the modernization of ports was given in November 1890 to a French company named the *Société des Quais, Docks et Entrepots de Constantinople* (Istanbul Quay, Docks and Warehouses Company). According to the agreement between the company and the government, the former would open new and modern docks, quays and warehouses as well as tramway lines on the docks and a steam ferry service within the region from Tophane and Azapkapısı on the Galata side and from Sirkeci to Unkapanı on the Istanbul side.[119] This concession meant, as will be seen in more detail in the following chapter, the elimination of the jobs of thousands of workers, who formed one of the most powerful sections of the working classes within the city. While, on the one hand, it signified a new era in terms of the Ottoman integration into the world economy, it was also a direct assault on the basic livelihoods of thousands of workers, which was apparently a difficult policy for a government. On the one hand, it was anxious to increase its legitimacy over its people and did not want to antagonize any part of them against itself, while on the other it would have fewer means to resist the pressures of the European countries, which tried to maximize the interests of their companies against the Ottoman workers.

---

[118] Quataert, "The Age of Reforms", p. 803.

[119] Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908*., p. 96-97.

The Impact of the Limitations on the State-Worker Relations

It is hard to suggest that the Ottoman state elites simply submitted to the foreign pressures at the expense of the port workers due to these limitations. On the contrary, until the beginning of the century, they did take care not to alienate the workers, or at least, they tried to play a balancing role between the company and the workers. Two factors especially determined the government's attitude towards workers in this era in terms of the capitalist penetration: the specific position of the Ottomans in the world capitalist system and the state of capitalist expansionism throughout the world. The relations between the port workers and the state should not be read without considering these factors.

The Ottoman state was, neither officially nor unofficially, a colony of a certain industrialist nation. It was an arena of struggle for the establishment of the hegemony of particular nations through affiliates. In other words, rather than entering into alliances with European-minded classes within the Empire, European nations were in a heated competition to attract (or force) the Ottoman state elites to make the Empire their own periphery.[120] Because they were incapable of directly colonizing the Empire, they tried to establish their economic (and political) superiority through concessions in certain sectors. The fact that the integration process had been limited throughout the century meant that what Pamuk calls re-structuring (the transformation of the mode of production because of the integration into the world capitalist system) did not allow proletarianization in this process.[121] This characteristic of the Ottomans must have enabled their public officials to resist for a

[120] Pamuk, p. 11.

[121] Ibid.

long time the pressures of the Quay Company, as the latter attempted to bypass the guilds and monopolize the control of labor and labor relations,. However, as French investments in the ports increased in the following years, it became much more difficult for the state elites to resist the pressure of the company as the investments were accompanied by financial dependence, which the French government did not hesitate to use when needed.

Another factor that determined the position of the state between workers and the company was the relevant context of the international capitalist system. As mentioned above, beginning in 1873, the international markets suffered substantial losses from the Great Depression, the effects of which lasted until the end of the century. This regression in the world economy caused the industrial states to apply to protectionist policies and thus to loosen up their relations with the peripheries. In other words, as capitalist expansionism slowed down in this era, so did the pressure on the peripheries in terms of open trade policies, although it is hard to argue that they were completely withdrawn. Therefore, it is most likely that a significant reason why the Ottoman state could seem to act on behalf of workers (or at least seem more neutral) until the turn of the century was these relatively loose relations between center and periphery. As these relations strengthened in the following decade due to the beginning of a new boom era in the world capitalist system and it became more difficult for the state elites to dismiss or resist the capital-owners, they would immediately alienate the other side of the struggle. The more alienated the port-workers became, the more they attempted to show their discontent in various ways. In response to these declarations of discontent, the state elites of the Hamidian era used the Janus faces of power, the very characteristics of the modern state; repression and legitimacy.

Power Policies in the Hamidian Era

So far, the emergence of Armenian nationalism and the introduction of European capitalism as they affected the immediate world in which workers lived and acted accordingly have been discerned. While the capitalist penetration directly attacked the basic livelihoods of the port workers through eliminating their jobs, the concurrent flourishing of Armenian nationalist activities presented workers a new arena of contestation in which they could show their discontent with the state. These conjectural factors directly threatened the very power of the state elites, both by undermining the legitimacy of the state among its citizens, and, in parallel with this, by paving the way for alternative forms of power that would directly threaten the very existence of the Ottoman monarchy. So, how did the Ottoman state elites react to this conjuncture? What forms of strategies did they develop to eliminate these threats and to re-establish legitimacy of the monarchy among its subjects? Two words can be used to analyze these policies, showing the bad and the good face of the same *father*: Repression and legitimacy. It does not mean, of course, that they were isolated from each other. On the contrary, they were both indispensable for the state to establish its hegemony over the citizen subjects, and they enmeshed with each other. Repression includes a wide variety of policies, like the abolition of the constitution, the censure of the press, the ban on gathering, the policy of exile, and surveillance practices. In order to reestablish or strengthen its legitimacy, the state executed social policies and applied religion, a certain sect of Islam, and the symbolic practices that reinforced the presentation of the Sultan as the protector and bona fide father. The impact of these policies was also critical for the development of

class formation among the port workers in the sense that they molded the ways the workers reacted against the conditions in which they lived. That is, they both restricted the areas of maneuver and opened other ways that they actively used or supported.

The 1876 Constitution and the Era of Repression

As the practical suspension of the 1876 Kanun-i Esasi was a symbolically significant event that marked the beginning of a new era in which the relatively democratic environment of the previous years were left behind, it is necessary to analyze the constitutional period and its impact on the workers. Although certainly there was a serious movement recruited mostly from the elite-bureaucratic classes led by the community of Young Ottomans, which actively promoted the declaration of the constitution, it seems more accurate to call it an "edict constitution," to use the words of Tanör, rather than a result of popular demand.[122]

The Kanun-i Esasi was declared on 23 December 1876, in a specific atmosphere in which the Great Powers were negotiating on the recently emerged problems in the Balkans and the wider problems about the situation of the Ottoman land in the Dockyard Conference (*Tersane Konferansı*). Abdulhamid II had just sat on the throne, with the support of Midhat Pasha, then a popular statesman and the most active proponent of the constitution, in return for a promise to declare the beginning of a constitutionalist regime with a parliament.

It is hard to suggest that the Constitution was a revolutionary step that extended, sanctified or even legalized some of the social rights of Ottoman citizens.

[122]Bülent Tanör, "Anayasal Gelişmelere Toplu Bir Bakış," in *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, ed. Murat Belge (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1985). p. 19.

There was not even one line about the right to gather, to unionize and to go on strike. Those were the most critical rights, especially for the labor movements throughout the world, in the Constitution. It could be argued that, because the Constitutional process was a contested one that reflected the opposite interests of constitutionalists and conservatives, the former wing thus could not introduce everything they proposed within the constitution. Although it was true in terms of some of the provisions, these rights were not on the agenda of the constitutionalists. According to Midhat Pasha's draft, there was again no reference to the right of gathering or unions.[123] It was again not surprising. Like most of the European constitutions, it did not introduce the most of the basic social rights until the 1920s and 30s. Yet, it should also be noted that it was impossible that the Ottoman constitutionalists were unconscious of those rights. Despite certain limitations, such as "public safety", certain rights such as "the right to associate" had been included in the 1848 Constitution of France, a country in which most of the Young Ottomans had studied and lived for long years.[124] Furthermore, French laws were also the primary source for many laws especially after the Tanzimat, one of which was the 1845 Statute of Police (*Polis Nizamnamesi*), which said that one of the duties of police forces was "to devote continuous effort to prevent a revolution by abolishing and eliminating the unions and communities of the workers who aim to leave their jobs and go on strike

[123] Tarık Zafer Tunaya, "Midhat Paşa'nın Anayasa Tasarısı: Kanun-ı Cedid," in *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, ed. Murat Belge (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1985).

[124] For a contemporary criticism of 1848 French Constitution, see Karl Marx.14 June 1851. *The Constitution of the French Republic Adopted November 4,1848*. Available [online] http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1851/06/14.htm [8 January 2009].

and these staff of seditious and mischief-maker unions which violate the public safety."[125]

Thus, the strikes and unions were not alien to the Ottoman legal language, as it mostly derived from the French, the country that hosted the most active labor struggles at that time. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire was not unfamiliar wit the strikes in those years, as exemplified by that of miners in Zonguldak in 1863, or the strike of railway workers in İzmit in 1872.[126] Of course, those were mostly spontaneous, non-union actions, but it shows that the Ottoman state elites could have been aware of this phenomenon. However, neither positively nor negatively, those had a place in the constitution.

It seems likely that the most significant factor that led to the absence of those rights was that there was no popular demand, like a massive labor movement, for those rights in those years. In addition, the policy makers of either wing were most likely reluctant to introduce and popularize the language of labor movements. For, leaving the recognition of those rights a side, even if the Constitution declared that the strikes, meetings or unions were illegal, it would open a new arena of contestation between the upper and lower classes, and it seems that the elites were not aware of this possibility. Considering the sensibility of the draft of Midhat or the approved Constitution even to mention these rights, it may be suggested that it was a conscious maneuver to block the introduction of a potentially revolutionary language into Ottoman society.

---

[125] Makal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çalışma İlişkileri, 1850-1920 : Türkiye Çalışma İlişkileri Tarihi*. p.256 *"İşini bırakarak greve gitmeyi amaçlayan işçilerin dernek ve toplulukları ile buna benzer kamu düzenini bozucu fitne, fesat derneklerini ortadan kaldırmak ve yok etmek böylelikle ihtilalin önünü almak için devamlı surette uğraşmak ve çaba harcamak."*

[126] Yavuz Selim Karakışla, "Osmanlı Sanayi İşçisi Sınıfının Doğuşu, 1839-1923," in *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine İşçiler, 1839-1950*, ed. Donald Quataert, and E.J. Zürcher (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1998).p.30.

Of course, there were critical provisions in Midhat's draft constitution, *Kanun-i Cedid*, which could provide the opportunity for the introduction and extension of these and other basic rights in the constitution, but seemingly were sacrificed in the negotiations with the conservatives. One of the most significant of these consisted of a provision that guaranteed, though with limitations, the freedom of thought: "Everybody is free to express his thoughts by speaking or by writing. However, the ones who abuse this by attempting to violate the security and general morality will be punished by operation of law."[127] This provision was not introduced to the constitution and its absence served the justification of the Hamidian repression of ideas in the following 30 years. The absence of freedom of thought had a profound effect on the formation of working class in the Ottoman Empire, for almost none of the socialist-communist literature was able to enter into the Empire in those decades. The prevention of socialist ideas helped the conservative Hamidian regime, with its legitimacy practices which will be detailed in the next section, to establish an ideological hegemony over Ottoman society.

The suppression of thoughts and ideas has a critical role in the consolidation of hegemony in a system, for it requires the rule of a specific language that eliminates or marginalizes the others in the public sphere. According to Gramsci, hegemonic order is the one in which the ruling class is able to make its own language in representing the social phenomenon, its own understanding the social reality as the dominant one in society.[128] In other words, in a hegemonic order, the ruled do not even question the dominant perception and representation of reality for they

---

[127] Tunaya, p.31. *"Herkes kaalen ve kalemen beyan-ı efkarda azadedir. Ancak bunu suistimal ile asayiş ve ahlaki umumiyeyi ihlale tahaddi edenler ber-mucib-I kanun ceza göreceklerdir."*

[128] Joseph Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony,Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). p.24.

internalize that perception and representation as *the* natural one. This dominance, however, is not achieved through the use of force, but depends on the consent of the majority. To make it clear, Gramsci proposed a distinction between political and civil society. As he attributed "coercion" to the control of the political society, he used hegemony to define the dominance based on consent in civil society. In Femia's words, the Gramscian conception of civil society is "the ideological superstructure, the institutions and technical instruments that create and diffuse modes of thought."[129]

However, as Gramsci himself admitted, in the practice, these two spheres are not mutually exclusive and in many cases, the state uses the instruments and institutions, which are supposed to be specific to civil society, to create a system in which its own values are accepted and internalized by the citizens. To put it in the terminology of Althusser, the state uses what are called the "ideological state apparatuses", i.e., school, media, religion, clinics, parliaments, judicial institutions, political parties and all kinds of literature, to shape the opinions of individuals and guarantee that the individuals within the system have no other reference point than the ideas of the ruling classes. [130]

In a hegemonic system, the ordinary people have no means to imagine a radically different representation of reality, a fundamental alternative to the existing system. Gramsci introduced a critical concept to understanding the disparity between the experiences and representations of the reality for the ruled masses: contradictory consciousness. It describes the conditions in which the language which represents

---

[129] Ibid. p.26.

[130] For more on Althusser's conception of ideological state apparatuses, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. S. Zizek (London Verso, 1994).

reality does not reflect the practical experiences of the oppressed people live, but belongs to the experiences of ruling classes.[131] The proletariat, according to Gramsci, lives the same experiences, a poor, graceless life with unbearable conditions, but is unable to contemplate it or seek a radical course of action based on the solutions to those troubles since it lacks the conceptual tools to do this. As Femia writes, "On the one hand, his education has never provided him with the ability to manipulate abstract symbols, to think clearly and systematically; on the other, all the institutional mechanisms through which perception is shaped… in one way or another, play into the hands of the ruling groups." [132]

To what degree the attempt at establishing hegemony was successful in the Ottoman context will be seen in the next chapters. But it is clear that the Hamidian government understood the role of ideas in terms of hegemony and used modern technologies to make its own ideas the ruling ones. The censure on the press had, in effect, was a policy that complements the ban on the freedom of thought to establish the ideological hegemony. The press could play a critical role to deliver news of revolutions, labor movements, insurgencies that occurred both in and out of the Ottoman territories. The lower classes, though illiterate, were aware of the content of papers through the coffeehouses, where these papers were read aloud and discussed, contributing to the formation of the "public opinion."[133] In other words, a free press could have more than foreseeable consequences in terms of damaging the ideological hegemony of the state on the side of the lower classes. The press also could be very

[131] Femia, p. 43.

[132] Ibid. p.44.

[133] For the formation of public opinion in the coffeehouses of Istanbul in the Tanzimat era, see Cengiz Kırlı, "Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire," in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman, and Armando Salvatore (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

active in improving the constitution and extending the arena of freedom that the one in 1876 lacked, as stated above.

A relatively free press played a significant role in promoting the necessity of a constitution in the first half of the 1870s, which helped to gain legitimacy among the middle and lower strata of society, the members of whom, most probably, were not conscious of the necessity of popular representation or constitutional limits to sultanic authority. As Midhat and his friends were fully aware of this fact, they thought to prevent the arbitrary censure attempts of the previous era by making freedom of the press a constitutional right. The twelfth provision of the Constitution said that "The Press is free within the boundaries of the law."[134] It was not an ideal one as it stipulated the freedom of press to the "limits of law," which again could be used for arbitrary censures. Thus, though it was progress, it attracted heavy criticisms from the contemporary press, the most famous of which was a caricature in *Hayal* journal, which shows Karagöz with his hands and legs chained and describing his condition as: "Freedom within the boundary of law!"[135]

With the suspension of parliament, the censure on the press was increased to such a degree that any kind of news which (apparently or supposedly) criticized authorities, told news about foreign revolutions, coups, insecurity, disorder in foreign countries and within the Ottoman Empire, especially in the Rumeli provinces, were intolerantly censured.[136] This policy was applied so sensitively that any words that supposedly referred to a criticism or fake about the authority were banned. As a

---

[134] *"Matbuat kanun dairesinde serbesttir." 1876 Kanuni Esasi* [23 Nisan 2001] available [online] http://www.belgenet.com/arsiv/anayasa/1876.html [20 December 2008].

[135] *"Kanun dairesinde serbesti!"* A. Kabacalı, Tanzimat ve Meşruiyet Dönemlerinde Sansür", in *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete* … p. 610-611.

[136] Kabacalı, p. 612.

result, the press was generally used on behalf of extending the state hegemony over the lower classes by delivering news that spread and praised the legitimacy policies of the sultan. In answering why there was no continuous or massive socialist labor movement in the Ottoman lands before 1908, we should be inevitably aware of this hegemonic circle around the lower classes, which deprived them of the ideological means to show their discontent in ways similar to those of the European labor classes.

Another limitation that has to be taken into account was Hamid's policy of exile against his opponents. In fact, the palace used one provision in the Constitution very successfully to legitimize its efforts against the supposed enemies of the regime. According to the 113th provision of the Constitution, the government could send into exile anybody whom they saw as a threat to the "security of the government."[137] The sultan used this authority first to exile Midhat Pasha, the builder of the constitution and the GrandVezier of the era, to strengthen his authority in the government. From then on, most of the dissidents or individuals seen as the potential threats in a widespread range were exposed to this policy.

Since most of the port workers were immigrants who came temporarily to the port cities to accumulate sufficient money and return to their homelands, this policy of exile was a direct threat to their livelihoods and futures. Especially after the Armenian rebellions of the 1890s, most of the Armenian workers were expelled and the entrance of the lower class Armenians into the capital was prohibited in the first decade of the twentieth century. This was a lesson to the workers of other communities that the cost of their dissidence could be much greater than they were

---

[137] *"Hükümetin emniyetini ihlâl ettikleri idare-i zabıtanın tahkikat-ı mevsukası üzerine sabit olanların memâlik-i mahrusa-i şahaneden ihraç ve teb'id etmek münhasıran Zatı Hazreti Padişahinin yedi iktidarındadır." 1876 Kanun-i Esas*

able to pay. Therefore, it was a substantial blow to their collective activities in the sense that it was directly opposite to their interests to seem to be dissidents. The unionization of workers, which is a vital part of working class formation throughout the world, also suffered after the exile of the members of the first Ottoman workers' union, *Osmanlı Amele Cemiyeti*, within a year after it was founded in 1894-95.[138]

The policy of surveillance went hand in hand with the policy of exile and other disciplinary measures. The Hamidian government established a widespread network of agents (*hafiye*) who regularly reported the daily activities and possible threats of the citizens, especially of the "suspicious" sections of the society, such as Armenians and lower-class circles that had caused trouble to the authorities in the past. The port workers, due to their critical role in many of the struggles of the period, were a specific target of that surveillance. In addition, they were right in the middle of a system in the smuggling of goods such as tobacco, weapons, and militants and banned journals (especially of Armenian parties) were widespread. Thus, we will see in the archival documents that even the ordinary meetings of workers, i.e. those in a Turkish bath or in a church for Sunday prayer, were immediately reported, which led to specific exchange of letters about the required precautions against these acts. As workers were most possibly aware of this fact, it can be suggested that most of the workers tried to show or solve their problems as secretly and individually as possible. This should lead labor historian of this era to concentrate more on the daily "solutions" which workers had to find in order to make their livelihoods, especially when they were threatened with losing their jobs or they were less or not paid for long periods.

[138] Makal, p. 244. The society was tried to be reactivated throughout 1901-1902. See Sencer, p.158.

Legitimacy

These problems, however, were only one side of the coin, considering that the Hamidian period has a specific place in Ottoman history for its legitimacy practices in addressing its subjects. As shown so far, especially the era after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 saw the political legitimacy of the state gradually disappear in the eyes of both its Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. Three interrelated areas were utilized to ameliorate this situation: Symbolic practices that constantly reproduced the holy figure of the sultan; the use of religion (Islam) as a prevailing characteristic of the state and society, as the Muslim population among the citizens had multiplied; and social policies, as they materially strengthened and complemented this symbolism among the subjects.

The socio-economic and political developments throughout the nineteenth century forced almost every great state to concentrate more on these kinds of practices. In other words, Ottoman state was not alone or isolated in using these strategies. Symbolic practices that defined and emphasized the figure of the ruler were also seen in the great empires, like Russia and Japan. The use of religion in terms of defining and extending a certain sect of religion and attempts to homogenize the population in this sphere were characteristics of the Czarist rule of Russia. Again, social policies were also seen either in the form of the more institutionalized forms of social security applied by Bismarck in Germany, or in a more philanthropic form as it was done in the Ottoman Empire.[139]

[139] For a comparative analysis of legitimacy practices in this era, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris 1999). and *Simgeden Millete: İkinci Abdulhamid'den Mustafa Kemal'e Devlet ve Millet* (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2007); Nadir Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet:Siyaset, İktidar, Meşruiyet, 1876-1908* (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2002). In this section, we will mostly count on these studies.

As almost all other great states did, the State in the Hamidian era invented or improved many symbolic practices to win the loyalty of its subjects "as citizens" due to changing patterns of legitimacy.[140] One of the most symbolic practices, the significance of which for the port workers will be seen in the next chapter, was the practice of petitioning at the Friday ceremonies. The traditional Friday pray ceremony displayed the image of the sultan as a "holy father" who came, listened or collected the complaints of his children in the form of petitions. The mosque was used as a ceremonial space more frequently to symbolize the "shift towards a modern public persona of the monarch" in the nineteenth century. [141] In the Friday pray ceremonies, the sultan came to the mosque as part of a majestic ceremony, which took place in the presence of his subjects and tourists. After the prayer, the officials of the sultan collected petitions from the subjects.[142] These ceremonies, in effect, seemed to contradict the overwhelming dominance of the bureaucratization process of the public affairs that prevailed throughout the nineteenth century, as an inevitable characteristic of state formation. Thus, the Friday pray ceremonies communicated a symbolic language to the subjects that the sultan was not a part of the bureaucratic structure of the state, but rather a figure, which, at times, protected the interests of its subjects even against his own bureaucracy. In this way, he put himself in an incomparable place above the state, an appearance that opened the way in the eyes of its citizens to complain about the injustices of the state to him. This ceremony was a

---

[140] S. Deringil, *Simgeden Millete,* p.23.

[141] Deringil, The Well Protected Domains, p. 23.

[142] See Mehmet İpşirli, "Osmanlılarda Cuma Selâmlığı (Halk-Hükümdar Münasebetleri Açısından Önemi)," in *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1991).

characteristic strategy of the Hamidian authority, which sought to make power appear "paternalist, unbureuacratic, and personalized" in the eyes of its subjects.[143]

Religion in the form a certain sect (*Hanefiyye*) of Islam presented a wide repertoire for both the public symbols and the mobilization of the people on behalf of the Hamidian authority. Especially after the 1877-78 war, many Christian-dominated lands were lost and there occurred a massive migration of Muslims, both from the Balkans and the Caucasian territories into the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the proportion of Muslims dramatically increased, compared to the parallel decrease in the numbers of non-Muslims. This new conjuncture, as Deringil puts it, forced the Ottoman leaders to "reorganize" the traditions.[144] The Ottoman state attributed itself an Islamic image both in the international arena, using the policy of Pan-Islamism, and within its own population. The leaders designed an "imagined community" based on Islam and tried to popularize it using its, still premature, "ideological state apparatuses," a la Althusser: newspapers, schools, public works, and architectural symbols.[145] This new redirection in the policy-making had negative impacts on the intra-relations of the urban classes that it dramatically worsened the relations between Muslim and non-Muslim (Armenian) workers. Of course, the communitarian division among the Ottoman subjects had historical-structural roots,[146] but the new orientation of the state, with the increase in Armenian

---

[143] Özbek*, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet*, p. 32. How the practice of petitioning was used will be analyzed in the next chapters.

[144] S. Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*, p. 29.

[145] Ibid.

[146] For an analysis of these roots which paved the way for political differentiations on the ethno-religious base, see Fatma Müge Göçek, "Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society " *Poetics Today* 14, no. 3 (1993).

nationalism, created among these workers a great gap, which was impossible to heal. In the Armenian rebellions of the 1890s in Istanbul, as explained above, as most of the participants had been recruited from Armenian port workers, the Muslims who massacred them had been recruited from the Muslim port workers, who were said to be armed by the state officials. Thus, it should be also clear that, in this era, especially after the mid-1890 events, it was much more difficult for the Muslim and non-Muslim port workers to behave collectively as there emerged unsurmountable enmities between the two communities.

The intervention of Hamidian legitimacy practices was not limited to symbolic policies, but it also made a critical intervention into the material lives of its subjects. Social policies, as a central element of this intervention, have been used, in the words of Özbek, as an "administrative technique and political method" since the nineteenth century: "As such, it should be considered in its relation with the power strategies of the political elite."[147] The Hamidian regime had a welfare system in which social institutions and a series of philanthropic activities with a direct reference to the figure of the sultan went hand in hand.[148] It established a system which organized wide-ranging activities from personal grants to the poor especially during times of religious festivals, to the social institutions like *Darulaceze* (House of the Poor) or *Darulhayr-ı Ali* (Imperial Orphanage).[149]

We learn from Özbek's study that the Ottoman state elite focused much more on these policies especially with the 1890s. As he concentrates on the legitimacy crisis caused by the "political tensions between the sultan -and -palace-centered

[147] Özbek, p. 18.

[148] Ibid. p. 26.

[149] For more details of the social institutions of this era, see Chapter 6 of Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet:Siyaset, İktidar, Meşruiyet, 1876-1908*.

political block and… the mid-level military, political and bureaucratic elite",[150] Özbek attributes this dramatic increase in social policies to the fact that the constitutionalist opposition (Young Turks) became more organized and active in those years.[151] Although this argument has certainly a point, the particular crisis in the class relations in those years seems to play a comparable role in terms of the increasing focus of the Hamidian authority on these policies.

Indeed, it is most likely that the Hamidian regime took the particular discontent of the lower classes in this era into consideration, as the reactions from these strata were much more concrete compared with the limited and then-premature political-intellectual activities of the constitutional opposition in those years. The conditions and reactions of the port workers in this era form a valuable case for this point. As mentioned above, the port workers reacted to their existing conditions through several methods that could not escape the attention of the elites. Firstly, they formed separate unions as in the case of *Osmanlı Amele Cemiyeti* (Ottoman Labor Community) in the first half of the 1890s. It was closed and its members were exiled. Secondly, the Armenian workers actively embraced the left-socialist Armenian movements and they popularly participated in the violent attempts that shook the capital city throughout the 1890s. As the Ottoman state elites, as showed above, attempted to suppress these through repressive policies, like exiling the Armenians, the state lacked the traditional power strategy of playing the religious communities off against one another. Hundreds of workers who lost or threatened to loose their jobs in those years reacted to the modernization attempts at the ports, using both violent and non-violent means. As could be seen, all of these were much more

[150] Ibid. p. 36.

[151] Ibid. p. 31.

effective (even traumatic) signs of the "legitimacy crisis" in the eyes of the Hamidian authority. The impact of a nascent, foreign-based opposition and of thousands of Armenian workers who attempted to march on the Sublime Porte (*Bab-ı Ali*) in mid-1890s should not be the same, in terms of affecting the policy measures the state elites took. Agreeably, it cannot be dismissed that the existence of a constitutionalist opposition had a significant role in the implication of wide-ranging legitimacy practices including the social policies. However, as a welfare regime is an "administrative technique" that addresses the lower classes of society, this power strategy could not be considered without measuring the "threats" of these classes. So far, it is clear the lower classes existed that they were dissatisfied and did not hesitate to show their discontent by supporting oppositional power blocks, as it did happen in the Armenian case, and would happen in the re-declaration of the constitutional regime on July 1908.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

So far, I hope that the conjectural factors in the Hamidian era that we will argue to affect the formation of the working class in the Ottoman Empire have been presented in an encapsulating manner. All three had negative and/or positive impacts on the class consciousness of the port workers. The Armenian nationalism, through the political-militant parties which associated nationalism and socialism in their own bodies, achieved to use the class discontent of the port workers, most of whom were economically excluded in the Ottoman society, to directly, apparently, and collectively react to the Ottoman state elites-which they had not done till that time. Although it was a revolutionary step in their collective consciousness, it also

weakened its class base by both intensifying the inter-ethnic division and violence among the workers and attracting the state's repression and replacement of a significant part of the workers' community along ethnic lines. The traumatic influence of this replacement also had a negative impact on the collective culture of the workers, as most of them were more hesitated and had to seem more loyal against these policies. However, as the modernization of ports caused hundreds of workers to loose their jobs, they were forced to challenge those developments through collective strategies, which may be easier especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, when there were much more little intra-dividing elements, as there was a more ethnically homogenized group of workers. In other words, the capitalization and mechanization of their work places caused their proletarianization, which caused the class struggle which became more apparent. The nationalist feelings did not cover it. As the state had to support companies against workers, the discontent and reactions increased, as did the legitimacy crisis, which played a significant role in the road to the July 1908 constitutional revolution. However, these activities of the workers were not continuous and were not always collective. It was reasonable for their interests because it occurred in an era in which the Ottoman authority applied uniquely extensive and massive repertoire of power policies. Those policies included both repressive and legitimacy-gaining measures. In other words, it is clear that it was a much more difficult era for the apparent traces of class-consciousness, of which most labor historians complained there to be a lack. The workers were fully aware that they had too much to lose if they showed their discontent openly and collectively: they would attract repression and they would lose the "blessings" of the legitimacy policies of the Hamidian authority. Thus, it is not

surprise that they applied more apparent repertoires of action only in cases where there was much less to lose.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COLLECTIVE ACTIONS OF THE PORT WORKERS AGAINST THE STATE AND THE CAPITAL

A New Era of Political Contention

On Sunday, July 15, 1890, in the district of Kumkapı, which hosted the Armenian Cathedral of Constantinople and one of the most concentrated populations of Armenian port workers, during a routine gathering for a religious service, one of the Hunchak party members, Haruthiun Tjankulian, made an address which protested the sultan's failure to exercise the Armenian reforms. After he read it, he smashed the Ottoman coat of arms which was hung in the Patriarchate, a seemingly well-intended symbolic act to motive the Armenians. Then, despite the opposition of the Patriarch Ashegian, he led a group of Armenians to march to Yıldız Palace to present the protest to sultan. The group was stopped with force by the Ottoman police, which led to a riot as a result of which a number of Armenians and a few Ottoman police were killed. Tjankulian was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The strategy of the Hunchakian leaders to choose the occasion to start their political activities in the so-called "*Kumkapı Numayişi*" had a rational explanation. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the Ottoman government in the Hamidian period did not allow the basic theoretical and practical conditions necessary for the emergence and development of a working-class political activism. In other words, in front of the Hunchakian activists was a country where an exclusively class-based political activity at the level of both the people and the state was impossible. "High

capacity regimes," says Tilly, "limit drastically the range of categorical pairs-hence boundaries- in terms of which people can make claims."[152] Whether the Hamidian government could become such a regime is very doubtful, considering the activism of the working classes, as will be analyzed in the following pages. However, considering the policies of repression discussed in the previous chapter, it seems that there was a great tendency to become such a government, and thus it tried to build higher and higher barriers to the formation of new types of groupings.

On the one hand, due to the repressive policies of the palace, a political opposition could not be sustained in the form of a political organization, like a party or a labor union. There were also heavy obstacles for the Hunchakian activists seeking to disseminate their ideas among the people in an open and legal way. The increasing hegemony of an ethnic-and-religious colored language, not only for the government but also its opposition, also created substantial hardships for the political activists of the era seeking to use a class-based language which denied or ignored any kind of ethno-religious difference.

Due to those structural factors, class was a language foreign to the socialist political entrepreneurs of the era, including the Hunchakians. Of course, the worldviews of the founders, who did not see any contradiction but harmony between socialism and nationalism, should also be noted: The prerequisite of a socialist state, for the founders, was the achievement of political independence and only after the revolution with political independence; the people could struggle for a socialist world.[153]

---

[152] Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*.p. 76.

[153] Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century* (University of California Press, 1963). p.112-114.

The main reason, thus, to choose the Patriarchate at a Sunday prayer as a starting point was clear: Pragmatically speaking, it was the easiest place to start. There was no kind of occasion which could bring together so many Armenians and no better kind of symbolic means to agitate people against the government. Using Tilly's concepts, the Hunchakians had neither the intention nor the opportunity to process "boundary activation along class lines."[154] In other words, as almost all political vanguards did, the Armenian revolutionaries had to count on pre-existing boundaries, singled out the strongest and the most applicable of them, activated it to agitate the people in their own favor as easily and quickly as possible. In an era in which nationalist movements within the Empires were in their heydays (for example, the Balkan nationalists of the Ottoman territories) and the State itself put an undeniably and visibly greater emphasis on being and seeming to be a Muslim state, there was nothing surprising for a dissident political organization to play along ethno-religious line for its short-term political objectives.

This appearance of a new form of politically contentious action most probably had a specific importance for the port workers, too. Hunchakian Party, in its first months, had about 700 members, according to Nalbandian.[155] Those members generally belonged to the educated classes who worked for the foreign consulates and maritime companies. Whether this was a conscious policy or not, is unknown. Nevertheless, it is clear that those positions were critical for the party's objectives. The party's main objective for this and the following demonstrations throughout the Ottoman territories was to attract the attention of the Great Powers and make them to

[154] Tilly, p. 75.

[155] Nalbandian, p. 117.

force the Ottoman sultan accept the demands of the party.[156] So the party, through its members in the consulates, could "lobby" for the party's aim to persuade the Great Powers to intervene in the Armenian question at the expense of the sultan. Considering the massive participation of the Armenian port workers in the following two "events" in Constantinople, it is not unlikely that those hundreds of the maritime officials were able to find significant opportunities to disseminate the ideas of the party among the Armenian port workers, winning them to their own cause.

Waiting for "the Last Instance": The Role of Individual Politics in Collective Actions

Though this type of demonstration by a political party presented a new way for the workers to declare their discontent with the system, their collective action did not emerge with this event. In fact, in every political system, there are various kinds of actions in the repertoires of the subjects. They continuously apply them on various occasions to gauge their applicability in the existing system, at as little cost as possible. In other words, the availability of a type of collective behavior can be measured by considering what kind of response it elicits from the authorities. If the authority replies with a high degree of repression, the cost of doing it will be increased for the challengers, which means that they will be less likely to join that kind of collective action again. [157]

The repertoire is shaped by the various kinds of interaction and struggles between the challengers and the authority, so the characteristics of repertoires depend on the characteristics of the existing political system. For, as Tilly writes, "governments and power holders themselves have interests in fostering some forms

[156] Ibid., p.127
[157] Tilly, p. 45-46.

of collective action, tolerating others, and eliminating still others from the scene."[158] The Ottoman government of the period was determined to eliminate any collective gathering that might have a contentious character. The attitude of the regime, particularly of Abdulhamid II, was so tough against and even paranoid about the people's gathering for whatever means, that as Huseyin Nazım Pasha, the Minister of the Police said during the Armenian rebellions between 1890-96, the Sultan "did not even allow five-ten persons that gathered for a wedding ceremony," arguing against the claims that the Sultan had armed the Muslims against the Armenians.[159] So in this period, as the cost of acting together was high for the people, it was most likely that the lower classes acted together only when their patience for the hard conditions they suffered became intolerable. In other words, as a forbidden act, collective action was used as a means of negotiation when workers had no alternative to voice their discontent at the violation of their collective interests.

A collective act of the workers that took place in 1886, the year which witnessed the closure of the first Ottoman labor union and the exile of its members, shows how this negotiation took place between the workers and the state before the Kumkapı Demonstration. According to a correspondence to the palace by *Şehremini*, the Mayor of Istanbul, on August 23, 1886, a few hundred workers from the *Tersane-i Amire* (Imperial Shipyard) gathered around the Sublime Porte. When their crowd was disbanded, twenty-seven of them were taken into custody. Asked the aim of their gathering, they said they had wanted to present a petition to the Sultan "to seek the kindness and favor" of the majesty for their complaints on the issue that "it was declared and offered that for the previous back wages they will be given assets of

[158] Charles Tilly, "Introduction," in *Class Conflict and Collective Action*, ed. Louise A. Tilly, and Charles Tilly (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981)., p. 21.

[159] Hüseyin Nazım Paşa, *Hatıralarım* (İstanbul: Selis Kitaplar, 2003). p. 48.

debt liquidation and also that their wages for 6 months have not still been paid this year." According to the Mayor, although the workers were told that as they previously had presented their petition by sending one or two representatives and "it [was] clear that their complaints would be accepted," it was not appropriate for them to complain through such "a planned union" by leaving their work places.[160]

One significant characteristic of the workers' collective action in the Ottoman cities, evidence of which can be seen in almost all of the elements of collective-contentious politics in this era, up to 1908, also appears here. That is, the workers applied to collective practices not at the moment that their discontent emerged, but, they showed up "in the last instance," when they had no power to sustain their sufferings and when they were left in a desperate situation, beyond which there was no hope for remedy by remaining silent. In other words, to apply to a collectivity, the individual workers had to estimate that the cost of his action would be worth the price in terms of being able to sustain himself and his family. As seen in the above case, the Tersane workers applied to collectivity only when it had been an intolerantly long time for most of them not to get paid and when employer-state attempted to pay its debts with assets, rather than in "hard money." Because they needed hard money to save or send to their families in the homeland, the offered

[160] Y.ŞHR., 2/47, 23 Za 1303 (23 August 1886). *"Tersane i Amire amelesinden birkaç yüz eşhasın bugün Babıâli civarında toplaşmakta olduklarının müşahade olunması üzerine jandarma ve polis efradı marifetiyle bunların cemiyetleri dağıtılmakla beraber yirmi altı neferi daire-i zabtiyeye getirttirilerek zabt olunan ifadelerine nazaran mahall-i ma'ruzda ictimaadan maksadları mukaddem ki ucurat-ı müterakimelerine mahsuben tasfiye-i duyun tahvilatı verileceği beyan ve teklif olunmasından ve bu seneden dahi altı aylık yevmiyeleri i'ta olunmamasından dolayı taraf-ı sami cenab-ı sadaretpinahiye arzuhal ile isti'taftan ibaret olduğu anlaşılmış ve kendilerine bu gibi müstebdi'yatı olub da içlerinden bir ikisini tevkil ile arzuhal eyledikleri halde saye-i kudretvaye-i hazreti padişahîde is'af- ı isti'daları bedihiyattan bulunmuş iken böyle cemiyet-i keşide ile maruzata kalkışmaları münasib olamayacağından ba'dezin bu mesellu ahvalden tevakki ederek işleri başından ayrılmamaları lüzumu ekidaen tenbiye olunmakla beraber matlublarının dahi tesviyesi çaresine bakılacağı ..."*

assets which meant nothing for the workers, seemed to stretch the patience of them to its limits, and only after this limit was violated that they chose to act collectively.

This decision seems to be very rational, considering the repressive policies and legitimacy practices of the government, which increased the cost the workers were likely to pay. As any kind of collectivity was intolerantly repressed by the government, the authorities eventually arrested the assumed-leaders/organizers of the action and, in most of the cases, exiled them to remote provinces, like Trablusgarb, or sent them back to their homelands.

Generally, the latter was applied by the government, especially for the port workers, for they came mostly from Anatolian villages. They came to the cities to overcome their economic distress and when they did find jobs, they either returned home when they had saved enough money for a few years or they sent their wages to the families they had left behind.[161] Exile, thus, was a powerful instrument in the hands of the state that made them fearful of an open, collective and contentious action. To be exiled was a heavy cost for the workers, because to save enough money, for most of them, was a life and death matter, and there would remain no hope to improve their lives when their entrance to the capital, or other great cities, was banned. If they were not banned, they had the means to at least sustain themselves for a few months, thanks to the informal traditional networks, based mostly on ethno-religious communities, and the improving social policies of the Hamidian regime towards the poor throughout those years, as discussed in the previous chapter.

It also seems from this document that the authority, which did not tolerate any kind of collectivity at the expense of its interests, forced the workers to communicate

[161] Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908*.p.97

their demands individually, or if not, by individual representatives, paving the way for the use of the traditional complaining mechanism, that is, the practice of petitioning. It is clear that, as the official who sent the correspondence points out, the workers, before acting collectively, had used this mechanism for the solution of their problems, but most probably because it had brought no payment of their wages, they were forced to resort to using collective mechanism as a means of last instance. The reason behind this timidity against acting collectively in a contentious manner against the government was not, thus, a kind of "false-consciousness" at the level of the workers. On the contrary, they seem to have behaved very consciously and just like any other "rational actor", acknowledging their powerless position against the power holders, emanating from the above-mentioned structural-conjectural conditions in which they lived, and acted accordingly. They realized it from similar experiences that will be described in the following pages, opposite them was a powerful state structure that provided them very little space to voice their protests.

Beyond the boundaries of that space laid the enormously vast lands of the "forbidden": It was attractive to step in, but the price was too high to pay. The working people were considerably aware of the nature of the system they lived in. Their stance was analogous to Tilly's vision, "The result of extensive monitoring and repression is to minimize the scope of contentious politics but also to push most of it into the forbidden range. The few tolerated performances receive extensive use, but collective claimants constantly run the risk of interdiction and or retaliation."[162]

It is not, thus, surprising to see that the port workers' violation of the "forbidden" became more frequent when faced with losing their jobs and their livelihoods. Especially with the increase in the operation of foreign companies in the

[162] Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, p. 50.

Ottoman ports in the late nineteenth century, the intervention of those companies with the traditional labor relations became more apparent, and thus, so were the struggles inbetween.

The Collective Struggles against the Foreign Companies

A series of events between the coal-heavers and the companies six months after the Kumkapı Demonstration displayed the very characteristics of those relations and struggles. On February 16, 1891, *Mutasarrıf* (the district administrator) of Beyoğlu, in his correspondence to the palace wrote that two days earlier they had learned that as two coal-carrying foreign ships would come to the Kireçkapısı dock in Galata, the coal-heavers there were likely to fight against each other for the right to unload the coal in the ships. The source of the problem, according to the investigation of the authorities, was that the companies' boatswains wanted to use "people of vagabond-staff", in Mutasarrıf's words, rather than the heavers who had been there working for a while. While some of the porters there were subordinate to the steward, it seems that most of the coal heavers -including the ones already working there- then did not have guild certificates, and thus did not have a steward. With the escalation of events, the group that was excluded by the boatswains applied to the authorities for a guild certificate and the assignment of a steward for "the conservation of their rights."[163]

At first, the state authorities obtained a promise from the steward not to escalate the matter and not to bother the others for a certain time, until a solution

[163] Y.PRK.ŞH., 3/65, 9 B 1308 (18 February 1891). *"…merkum hamallardan esnaf saire mesellü bir kethüdalığa ittibaen bir esnaf tezkeresi ahzıyla hukuklarının muhafazasını istida eden fırka i mücerred…"*

could be found. The problem was so complex for the government that a commission was formed by the three upper-level persons on 17 February: The Mayor of Istanbul, the Minister of the Police and the Chairman of the Port of Istanbul. The commission decided to "discipline them by inserting them into the guild-order", and, it was said, as the matter was related to the foreign companies and traders, although it should also be negotiated with the foreign ambassadors, it needed some time. However, there was not enough time according to the mayor, for the tension was escalating between the two sides. Although the workers who had applied to the government for a guild certificate, remaining loyal to their promises they had given a few days earlier, had totally withdrawn from the job and had not been working for a few days, they "[had] declared that they could not hold out anymore and that they would enter the next ship by force".[164] Worsening the situation was the provocation of the others:

> When the heavers, who are under the safeguard of the agencies and boatswains, see the workers who applied to the government, they insult the latter with "yuh" shouts in the streets. And for this reason, it is very likely that the workers, who have already withdrawn from the job for a few days, not tolerating both insults and hunger, will incite a great tumult to bring the matter to a conclusion as soon as possible.[165]

The Mayor said that security measures had been strongly taken and, with the assignment of additional forces from other stations, the matter should be solved quickly. He feared things would set out of control:

> …because among these there are persons who are the subjects of the Great States, it is not impossible that the foreign embassy ships

---

[164] Ibid., *"... muarız ve mütearrızlarıyla bir arbede çıkarmayacaklarına dair evvelce vermiş oldukları sened i muvakkata binaen işden külliyen el çekerek birkaç günden beri çalışmakda iseler de birkaç günden ziyade beklemeğe kudretleri müsaade olamayacağını beyan ve yine bunlardan bazıları yarın gelecek vapura cebren girmeğe muztar kalacaklarını dermiyan eyledikleri cihetle…"*

[165] Ibid. *"...acentelerle lostromoların taht-ı himayelerinde bulunan hamallar hükümet-i seniyeye müracaat iden ameleyi gördükçe zukaklarda yuha avezeleriyle tahkir eylemelerine mukabil zaten birkaç günden beri işden el çekmiş olan amelenin hem hakarete hem açlığa tahammül etmeyerek işi bir an evvel neticelendirmek için bir arbede-i azime çıkarmaları ihtimali pek kuvvetli bulunmuş…"*

> anchored in the Golden Horn of Istanbul could intervene in the matter excusing the protection of their own subjects, and that, as a result, God forbid, a case like the Alexanderia event, will occur…[166]

The so-called Alexanderia Event had created a deep fear for the Ottoman authorities in terms of foreign intervention. In September 1881, Urabi Pasha, a nationalist officer in the Egyptian army, had rebelled against and took over the government with his soldiers. He had sent troops to Alexanderia to protect the harbor from any foreign intervention. However, as the Ottoman leadership had persuaded the ambassadors not to intervene in the situation and had mediated between the Egyptian khedive and the rebels, the Muslims in the Alexanderia, provoked by the anchor of foreign ships outside the harbor, rioted and killed many foreigners. This, in return, led the British ships to bombard the city in July 1882. Two months after this event, which signified that the Ottomans could not solve the situation by themselves, British forces occupied Egypt and established colonial rule for their crown.[167] This was an additional shock for the Hamidian government, which had already been immersed in deep paranoia after 1878, that may have caused further caution about foreign intervention.

The government was caught in despair on both sides. On the one hand, it needed to solve the problem in a way that would satisfy the workers. If the workers were not satisfied, they would riot against the others, including foreigners, which would lead to the intervention, even occupation, of the Great Powers. On the other hand, because of its heavy dependency on foreign capital, it could not solve the problem, but had to converge with the foreign powers. Thus, although it was said in

---

[166] Ibid. "*...çünkü bunların içinde düvel-i ecnebiye tebasından ademler bulunduğu cihetle halic-i dersaadetde bulunan ecnebi sefaret vapurlarının tebaalarını muhafaza vesilesiyle işe müdahale ederek Huda negerde bundan İskenderiye vakası gibi bir hadise zuhura gelmesi ihtimalattan be'id olmamasına…"*

[167] Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, vol.2*.p.194-195.

the above correspondence that the matter was so urgent and significant that the negotiations with foreign ambassadors could wait, considering that the problem could not be solved in the immediate future, it seems that the government needed to involve the ambassadors in the case. The mayor, who seems to have been very anxious about the slow pace at which the government moved to solve the problem, lost his patience to such a degree that he sent another correspondence to the palace thirteen days later. He said that although the protests of the unemployed heavers were delayed for another few days and the security measures were taken as far as possible, the Bab-ı Ali had not made a decision on the matter despite its urgency. Moreover, as recently two coal-loaded ships had come to the port, it was decided heavers from both sides would be used to unload the coal. This decision had also been declared to the agencies, with their confirmation. Despite these decisions, the Mayor said that

> When the heavers went to the ships to work, the boatswains of the Agency of Foscolo Mango, rejected them with words like "Now, go to your government, then!" provoking the workers to fight. The workers, exposed to this kind of rejection in addition to the loss of their jobs, applied to my municipality and the Port Chair, saying that if this case continues in this way, they will have to present a petition to the merciful sultan…[168]

The workers had shown the last and the most powerful card in their hands, the threat of collective petitioning. They threatened to display their discontent in one of the most symbolic ceremonies in the Ottoman Empire, turning it into a political-

[168] Y.PRK.ŞH. 3/65, 22 B 1308 (3 March 1891). *"...çalışmak üzere gitmiş olan hamallar Foskolo Mango acentesinin lostromosu tarafından kabul olunmadıktan başka haydi hükümetinize gidin gibi sözlerle arbede zuhurunu teshil edecek tefevvühatda bulunması ve zikrolunan hamalların işden mahrumiyetle bir de bu suretle reddedilmesi şer'iyen ehemmiyet-i mevaddan olduğu gibi mezkur hamallar liman idaresine ve emanet-i çakeriye müracaatla bu hal devam eder ise Cuma günü selamlık resmi aliyesinde atıbbe-i aliya-i cenab-ı padişahiye ref'-i arzuhal ile istida-i merhamet-i seniye-i mulukaneye de mecbur olacaklarını ifade etmeleri üzerine..."*

public space for the display of their protests and demands, thus making it a national problem rather than a local one.

Collective petitioning involved some significant aspects. To begin with, collective petitioning was a known and significant element in the repertoires of the workers. In other words, both the workers and the state were conscious about the impact and consequences of this action. The workers knew that, from their experience or knowledge, it was the most effective instrument in their hands to force the state to behave in favor of themselves. The state, on the other hand, knew that it would cause great disorder, severely undermining its authority and legitimacy, and could even lead the destruction of the state as a result of foreign intervention.

As they knew about the type of collective action, they also calculated their strategies in these terms, accordingly. The state used both coercive and non-coercive mechanisms to prevent the emergence of such a "disorder", as happened in the above case. While it showed the "stick" to the workers by sending additional-reserve gendarmerie and police forces into the port, this was not sufficient in every case. For instance, in the above-mentioned correspondence of February, 18, the Mayor stated that although it was declared that the Police had taken sufficient measures, those measures "could not be seen as accordingly with the significance of the matter."[169] Before the Kumkapı Demonstration, it also had been declared by the police that the necessary measures had been taken. However, because the measures were not sufficient, the event could not be prevented. Therefore, added the Mayor, the would-be leaders of a possible uprising should be exiled, referring to the concerned Article 133 of the constitution, which stated that anybody who was considered dangerous to

[169] Y.PRK. ŞH. 3/65. *"...bu babda zabıtaca tedabir mukteziye icra kılınmış olduğu bildirilmiş olduğu halde tedabir i muttehize işin ehemmiyetiyle mütenasib olmamasından dolayı ertesi gün mezkur hadise zuhur etmiş olmasına mebni..."*

the security of the state could be exiled outside of the Empire borders.[170] Besides these examples, however, the state authorities used informal negotiations with the workers, demanding that they delay any kind of collective display, or tried to persuade them, at least, not to apply to the practice of collective petitioning to the Sultan. In this case also, the Mayor said that the workers had been dissuaded from this idea, but that the higher authorities needed to be informed that he would not accept any responsibility if the case continued to remain unsolved.[171]

The workers, acknowledging the costs of such an action for themselves, used this instrument as a card, as a threatening instrument against the state authorities. In other words, the threat of collective petitioning during a holy-symbolic occasion showed how the workers possessed a coercive power, how they used their own "stick" in the negotiation process against the state. As shown above, the costs of using that power was so high that it is not surprising to see that they did not hasten to practice it immediately. However, it was also sufficient to suggest that the act of collective petitioning was a known element in the negotiations between the lower and upper classes of Ottoman society. In other words, it belonged to the collective action repertoires of the working classes. Although it is known from past studies that collective petitions, *arz-ı mazhar*, were a centuries-old practice[172] whether the presentation of them in this way, collectively in symbolic places and as a threatening instrument, was a new or older practice demands further historical studies.

However, the data at hand does not allow for the argument that the actions of workers were directly against the ruling system itself, symbolized in the persona of

[170] Y.PRK. ŞH. 3/65

[171] Y.PRK.ŞH. 3/65

[172] Halil İnalcık, "Şikâyet Hakkı: 'Arz-ı Hâl' ve 'Arz-ı Mahzar'lar," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, no. 7-8 (1988).p.41

the sultan. It is true that the workers used the presentation of their demands and protests to the sultan as a high-cost intimidating action of last resort. But the sultan here, for them, most probably symbolized not the barbaric system of capitalization which left them unemployed and also not the ruling system which failed to protect their rights against the companies.

Asef Bayat, in his study on the Iranian poor movements during and after the revolution of 1978, analyzes how the Iranian poor saw the Shah was not the same as the revolutionaries' perception of him. Contrary to the revolutionaries, for the Iranian poor the Shah was a man who was worth to be respected, though anyone should fear of him.[173] They did not see the Shah as the source of their problems, but rather saw all responsibility in the cruelty of the lower bureaucrats. For the Iranian poor, the Shah was unaware of the malpractices against his subjects.[174] In the period of Sultan Abdulhamid II, who gave much greater significance to his image as a merciful patriarch thinking only the well-being of his subjects, this analysis seems more valid. In the same way, the Ottoman workers, at least the majority of them, were less likely to attribute the responsibility for their situations to the Sultan, but to the failure of the Mayor, the police forces and the Port Chair. The reason they went to the Sultan with their problems was that they genuinely believed that only "he" could help them. They did not threaten the sultan himself, but the local authorities to make the sultan "acknowledge" their problems. So, the Sultan, in the eyes of the workers, was not a side in the class conflict, but a third judge, who would behave in favor of the interests of his miserable and helpless subjects. Therefore, collective petitioning had the function of a Zulfiqar, a two-pronged sword. On the one side, it indirectly

[173]Asef Bayat, *Sokak Siyaseti: İran'da Yoksul Halk Hareketleri*, trans. Soner Torlak (İstanbul: Phoenix Yay., 2008). p. 75.

[174] ibid.

threatened the ruling classes, the state and the companies, to create disorder and to undermine the legitimacy of the state and the interests of the companies. On the other side, they did this by directly threatening the local-lower authority, resorting to the mercifulness of the Sultan to his subjects and his punishing power against their enemy.

The workers' struggle in this case was not only for job security, but also for institutional gains. Their demands were not for some abstract principles, but for absolutely concrete and realistic aims. In other words, they argued that they could be protected against the aggression of the companies only by their involvement in the guild system. They wanted to be given a guild certificate, which would mean their formal existence as a separate economic community, and the assignment of a steward, who would represent them in their interaction with the state, making that interaction formal, easy and institutional. The guild system would also enable them job security, protecting them from the intervention of the companies, which would attempt to impose on them their own conditions, and any outside forces, which would use individuals of "vagabond-staff" to rule out their existence as a working community and to decrease or even eliminate their income.

Especially at a time in which working class unions did not exist and the attempts to found them were severely repressed, there was no way for workers but to seek shelter within the traditional mechanisms for the institutional recognition, representation and protection of their interests. So the guild here appears as a replacing mechanism for unions. Although it is true that the guild mechanism was a means of surveillance for the state to control the working classes, not to point out its "union-like" function for these classes is to deny the workers any weapons in this period. The workers did not passively accept the imposition of the guilds, but

actively "struggled" for them and considered it as a gain when they were assigned a steward. In this case also, when the commission considered the foundation of a guild as a necessity to "take them under control" and decided to assign a steward for the heavers, it was most likely perceived as a victory for the workers who had struggled collectively for this goal.

The Struggles of 1894-95 against the Istanbul Quay Company

The agreement which gave the concessions of the Istanbul Ports to a French engineer/entrepreneur, named Marios Michael, also known as Mişel Paşa, was signed on November 10, 1890. Following the agreement, in September 1891, the Istanbul Quay Company was founded and in 1894, the first part of the port went into operation. In the agreement of 1890, and in the statute of 1891, which declared the foundation of the company, both sides seemed to consider and foresee every would-be problem: the tariffs and other taxes, the supervision and the sharing of the revenues, the provision of the materials to build the ports and other facilities, the security of those facilities, the inviolability of the holy places located within the construction area, and even the formal clothes of the employees of those facilities.[175]

However, they forgot or ignored the most simple and essential aspect of the issue: the fate of the port workers there. The first article of the agreement says that the port company has the right to open tramway lines along the ports, to build floating docks, the quantity of which "would be determined according to the degree

[175] For the whole text of the agreement and statute, see Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umur-ı Belediyye*, vol. 5 (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı, 1995).pp. 2796-2817.

of demand and necessity."[176] Beyond that, there was no simple reference to the problem about the conditions of the workers who would be threatened with losing their jobs.

It is not certain whether the signers of the agreement simply did not see the importance of such a significant issue or that they thought there was nothing to do but to abandon them to their own fate. It is known, thanks to Quataert's study, that the European businessmen, observers and authorities saw the port worker guilds as one of the most critical obstacles to the operation of free competition (which meant for them, in this case, free labor). In 1891, the year that the company was founded, the French ambassador wrote about the contribution of the agreement to eliminate the monopoly of the guilds.[177] So, it is most likely that the signers, especially the Europeans, considered the workers only through the eyes of market capitalism: Here was a traditional organization, which was itself an anachronism in the era of free capitalism, and thus its destruction and elimination was a sine qua non for the economic development of any country. Hence, the treaty would enable them to "open" those markets. Whatever they thought about the workers, it is certain that they did not think that the workers there would be a "problem" to be specially negotiated among the two sides.

As the first part of the port, the Wine Dock (*Şarab İskelesi*) in Galata, started to operate, and the first ship, owned by the French Messagerie company, tried to tie up to the dock on July 21, 1894, the workers had the opportunity to remind them that they existed. In effect, according to a correspondence by the GrandVezier Cevat Pasha, the workers had already given a petition to the Port Administration about two

[176] Ibid., p.2797. *"...mikdarı lüzum ve ihtiyacın derecesine tabi olmak üzere..."*

[177] Quataert, *Social Disintegration*. p.102

weeks earlier, on July 5. However, considering the Gradvezir's statement that his special aide had received the petition from the Administration only on that day, July 21, it seems that the authorities preferred to ignore then this action of the workers. Although a full and original copy of the petition does not exist, it is understood from the same document that the workers, as they would lose their jobs, asked to be employed and compensated according to their losses by the Quay Company. The attempt of the Messagerie ship to tie up to the dock to unload its cargo was an absolute signal to the workers that the compliant actions in their repertoire had done nothing for their cause. So, they applied their last weapon, playing their most critical card against the state.

On the morning of July 21, "three-four hundred workers who [had] heard that the ship of Messagerie Company would approach the Wine Dock" came together to prevent the ship from docking.[178] Among them were also Armenians, a fact which also "attracted the special attention" of the assistant prosecutor of the Istanbul Court of Appeal.[179] As the police attempted to disband them, they responded violently, to the degree that they even attacked Mustafa Pasha, who commanded the security forces and who "admonished" them to end their action. The Pasha could only be "saved" by the help of the soldiers.[180] The same day,

> …The 300 bargemen, Muslim and Christian, from the bargemen guilds of Yağkapanı, Unkapanı and the general docks, arguing that their being kept off from the port, the construction of which was completed, will cause their impoverishment, came to Beşiktaş to appeal to the high mercy of the sultan.[181]

---

[178] Y.A.HUS., 303/62, 17 M 1312 (21 July 1894).

[179] Y.PRK.AZN., 8/2, 22 M 1312 (26 July 1894).

[180] Ibid.

[181] Y.A.HUS. 303/62, *"...Yağkapanı ve Unkapanı ve umum iskeleler mavnacı esnafından İslam ve Hristiyan üç yüz kadar eşhasın derdest-i inşa bulunan rıhtıma*

In the end the security forces disbanded the group by arresting the initiators and scattering the rest "gently and leniently", but the workers succeeded in their attempts to prevent Messagerie ship from reaching the dock. Despite their dispersion, according to the information from the Police Minister, they continued to insist and it was most likely that they would come again if they saw that the ship approached.[182] To make the situation more complex and worse for the state, the Minister said, in the instance of another event, that it was likely that arresting the protestors would further agitate the guild members. Reading the letter, the GrandVezier, considering that the situation had reached such a critical level, felt it necessary to see the petition himself and sent his special aide to take the petition from the Administration.

The workers had at last done it. They had attracted the attention of the authorities by making them fear their collective capacity, how they could unite against the state when they wanted to, how they could create "disorder" when they came together and how they were able to act and polarize along "class boundaries", leaving aside the ethno-religious dimension.This latter had been on the rise for a few decades, accelerating between 1894-95 with Armenian uprisings across Anatolia, reaching its climax in September 1895 in Istanbul, which will be discussed below. It is likely that the state and the European elite were conscious of the decades-old labor movement and its threats to the upper classes in Europe, and they wished to prevent the development of a similar wave in the Ottoman territories.

As shown in the previous chapter, the state elite utilized a combination of repressive and legitimacy practices to prevent this form of protest from taking root in

---

yanaşdırılmamaları haklarında mucib-i perişani olacağından merhamet-i seniye-i mulukanaye dehalet etmek üzere Beşiktaş'a kadar geldikleri…"

[182] Ibid.

those years, which seems to have been successful until that time. However, now with the entrance of the European capitalism, bringing with it the most modern infrastructure, its primary victims, the workers of the traditional trades, were left with no choice but to resist along class lines. It does not mean that the port workers, seeing that they were victimized by this transformation, became automatically conscious of their class positions. Rather, if class consciousness is not a thing but a process, the entrance of Western capitalism compelled them to make critical steps in this process. In other words, in analyzing the contentious actions of the workers, it would be a fruitless effort to seek a discourse which recognizes the state and/or companies as its absolute opposite. They were not a priori against the state, the capitalism, the companies or even the port modernization itself. They rather were conscious of an injustice, of an oppression of their immediate interests and when they resisted, this resistance can be abstracted and understood as "class-based" only mediating them through their actual understanding of the world. The Ottoman port workers resisted Western capitalism by attacking the facilities of the company or the ship which would leave them unemployed, opposed and threatened the state by attacking the police forces which prevented them or by simply attempting to apply and impose their own notions of justice through the various kinds of coming together.

It seems that this possible "mediation" between the local, spontaneous, collective acts and the struggles against state and capital also was acknowledged by both wings of the elite. As soon as the GrandVezier saw the petition, he invited the director of the company, M. Granet, to the Bab-ı Ali to discuss the matter. Granet complained that declared that the ship should be allowed to tie up. He referred to the concession agreement, to the notification of the Ministry of Navy and Customs

Office, which ordered that every 200 meters of the port should start to operate as soon as they were constructed, and to the fact that "it [was] occurring and habitual that the French Messagerie ships pull into the customs, which involves the office of its agency"[183]- it could not because of the obstruction of the workers and he asked that the government should take some measures in this matter, for

> …they were disbanded by the police, but as the ship was not allowed to dock, the guild of the bargemen, taking courage with this, is likely to increase their uproar in the future and this will be against the high dignity of the sublime government and contrary to the interests and concessions of the company…[184]

The GrandVezier agreed with the director, arguing that the reactions of the bargemen were "very indecent" for they were still able to carry goods between the two sides of the Golden Horn and between two ships. Again agreeing with the director that they could be "so much courage" to increase their opposition in the future, he saw it necessary to "punish a few among them to make an example to the others."[185] In return for this, M.Granet "gladly" accepted that the two requests (employment and compensation) which were included in the petition of the workers and "promised that the company will make things easier for the guild in every matter."[186]

---

[183] Ibid.,*" ...Fransız Mesajeri kumpanyası vapurlarının acentesi yanında bulunan gümrüğe yanaşmaları dahi öteden beri cari ve mu'tad (cereyan eden ve alışılmış) olduğuna mebni…"*

[184] ibid. *"...her ne kadar zabıtaca bunlar dağıtılmış ise de vapur rıhtıma yanaşdırılmamış olduğundan bundan mavnacı esnafına cera'et gelerek ilerude tezyid-i şemate etmeleri muhtemel olup bu ise hükümet-i seniyenin şan-ı âlisine mugayir ve kumpanyanın menfaat ve imtiyazına mübayin olduğundan…"*

[185] Ibid., *"...bugün muhalefette bulunanların birkaçı sairlerine ibret olmak üzere te'dib olunmadıkça kendilerine cera'et gelerek ilerude dahi bu gibi hebasete cera'et edecekleri derkar olduğuna…"*

[186] Ibid. *"...mumiileyh kemal-i memnuniyetle kabul edip her suretle esnafa kumpanya tarafından irae i teshilat olunacağı vaad eylemesiyle…"*

At least temporarily, the workers seemed to have won against the company. In an footnote to the GrandVezier's correspondence, it is understood that the Sultan ordered that before the warehouses were built, the ships should not be tied up to the docks and when those warehouses were built, the employment status of the bargemen and boatmen would have been decided by the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*). Furthermore, the company was forced to give some concessions to the bargemen, by accepting their petitioned requests. However, for the workers, this was not without costs. The authorities were urged to protect both the legitimacy and the authority of the state. While it seemed to be on the side of the workers by temporarily banning the ships and by replying affirmatively to the interests of workers, it also did not hesitate to protect its repressive authority by exiling the "initiators" to intimidate other potential protestors.[187] It tried to show that they would have no tolerance for the actions of this kind. The elites, both of the company and the state, acknowledged that from that point on against them was a labor community, stronger than they had assumed, and despite this temporary solution, this "problem" could not be solved so decisively.

Besides their number, the guild structure, which increased their collective capacity; and the triggering effect of the penetration of the European capitalism to unite them along class lines, there was one more element supporting the strength of the workers: the port officials. The GrandVezier, in the correspondence cited above, said that the port officials should be warned about not being so lenient with the workers. Here, the GrandVezier was likely referring to the officials' ignorance in their treatment of workers. He argued that those officials also should help the local

[187] Ibid.

police to prevent the instigators "whether they are foreign or citizen."[188] Five days later, however, the assistant prosecutor of the Istanbul Court of Appeals used more biting words about the officials. He wrote to the palace that, according to the investigation, the officials themselves, who had been on good terms with the workers "to the level of partnership," had provoked the workers to rise up collectively against the docking of ships in Galata, and that "it is evident and considered that [the bargemen] could not move without the support and cognizance of [the officials]."[189] He concludes his note by saying that if those officials were not disciplined those kinds of events would continue to occur.

The port workers, thus, in their uprising, possibly had the hidden support of the civil officials, who were actually given the mission to discipline and "protect" them from evil-minded influences. At least in this event, the hidden solidarity of port workers with people outside of their community is seen. In fact, Quataert shows that the guilds of the boatmen and porters had some patrons among the customs officials, who were assigned directly by the palace. The reason was absolutely interest-based: They wanted the protection and guarantee of the palace. In the Hamidian period, the autonomy of the guilds against the palace was so diminished that "court chamberlains embezzled the guild funds and the Sultan appointed members of his entourage to head stewardships."[190] It may not, thus, be misleading to suggest that during the first decade of struggles between the company and the workers, one of the

---

[188] ibid. *"...liman me'murlarının dahi böyle şeylerde gevşek davranmayıp esnafı teşvik edenleri yerli olsun ecnebi bulunsun men' etmeleri lâzıme-i halden bulunduğuna..."*

[189] Y.PRK.AZN. 8/2, *"...galatada en nazik bir mevkide nazar-ı dikkati celb edecek surette mezkur cemiyet-i azimenin vukuu liman memurlarının eşer –i teşvikinden ileri geldiği söylenmekte ve hatta onların rey ve malumatları olmaksızın bunların hareket edemeyeceği delil ve ad olunmakdadır."*

[190] Quataert, 102

reasons that the palace positioned itself more on the side of the workers was that the workers had allies among the state ranks, who were likely to resist such a sudden and massive impoverishment of the port workers in favor of foreign economic interests.

That the workers tried to make allies among the ranks of the state came to the surface after three weeks. On August 5, the Minister of Navy wrote a relatively strongly-worded correspondence to the Port Chairman. According to the information from the Mutasarrıf of Beyoğlu, the Minister says, the bargemen guild were preparing three reports, one to the Sublime Port, one to the Military Department and the last to the Council of State, in which they complained that the Port Department had forced them to sign up an enactment to promise that they would not attempt to prevent the ships that attempted to dock at the port.[191] The minister emphasized the Sultan's order that the ships would not be tied up until the warehouses had been built and that this should also be explained to the bargemen, adding that "the Port Department will be held responsible, if any kind of inconvenience occurs."[192] The following day, the Port Chairman replied that, upon the Minister's note, he had invited the representatives of the bargemen guild (the headsteward and guild board) to the Department and explained the Sultan's order. In response to this, the guild representatives promised to show loyalty to the order.[193] On that same day, August 6, the Mutasarrıf of Beyoğlu wrote to the palace that both the Sultan's order and the bargemen's rights to transport between the two sides of the Golden Horn and two ships had been explained to the bargemen, adding that they also had been warned:

> It was absolutely communicated to them that from now on, the bargemen should mind their own business and they should not come

[191] Y.MTV 102/23, 3 S 1312. (6 August 1894).

[192] ibid. *"…bir guna uygunsuzluk vukuu halinde liman dairesinin mesul tutulacağı…"*

[193] Y.MTV., 102/23, 4 S 1312 (7 August 1894)

> together again and should not apply to a formal department or any other place, preparing such kind of things like petitions or reports and if they move otherwise they will get nothing but regret to leave their jobs…[194]

Upon this warning, the Mutasarrıf concludes, the bargemen guaranteed that they would obey the decision of the Bab-ı Ali and would not move in an opposite direction.

Although there is no evidence of a direct contact between the Port Department and the company in this matter, as it appears that the upper ranks of the bureaucracy were not aware of the Port Chairman's attempts, it seems most likely that the company may have tried another strategy to "induce" the workers, using the informal influence of the Port Department there. But it is certain that the Port Chairman, despite the Sultanic order, attempted to use his own initiative on the side of the company.

Against this, workers used another strategy: To use their collective potential, not directly against the state as a whole body, but to make use of the contradictions between the separate organs of that body in favor of their own interests, to protect their gained rights. Above, it was noted that the lower classes did not view the Sultan as a part of bureaucracy, but as their "protector" who did not hesitate to be on the side of his own subjects against that body. Here, the workers' attempts to inform the upper parts of bureaucracy about the "illegal" initiative of the lower bureaucrats also can be seen as an extension of this image. As was shown above, the workers were conscious that the bureaucracy was distressed with the workers' discontent to be publicized through its symbolic displays by petitioning in the Friday ceremonies or

---

[194] Ibid., *"…artık bugünden sonra mavnacılar kendi işleriyle meşgul olup bir daha ictima etmemek ve mazbata ve arzuhal gibi şeyler tanzim ve daire-i resmiyeye ve hiçbir tarafa müracaat eylememek ve aksi halde hareket edecek olurlar ise adeta kendi işlerini bırakup nedametden başka yedlerine bir şey geçmeyeceği kendilerine kat'iyen tefhim eylemiş olmasıyla…"*

the marches to the Palace (Remember the bargemen who came to Beşiktaş, the closest quarter to the palace). The "reports" to the highest bodies like the Council of State or the Sublime Port about the oppression of the lower bureaucrats carried a simple, hidden "stick": "If you do not take care, the matter goes to the Sultan." Of course here, the perceptions between the bureaucrats may have been different: The concern of the bureaucrats may have been less the Sultan's getting aware of the matter than the violation of the disorder with the nationalization of the matter in symbolic places, which could trigger other collective actions and/or encourage the opposition, whether they were seperatists, or domestic opposition, like the would-be Unionists.

As it was perceived as a threatening stick, not only to the bureaucracy but more to the authority of the state, it is not surprising that even the act of petitioning was marked as a contentious action by the state authorities. It is seen here how a traditional element of repertoire, which was encouraged or at least tolerated, can occasionally transform into a contentious manner. In the background of the Mutasarrıf's repugnant threat not to write any kind of contentious document like petitions, the fear that it could trigger further collective actions which would be impossible to control is apparent. As shown above, the act of collective petitioning had already been discouraged by the state authorities until this period. But in this matter, the anxieties of the authorities were more apparent, and so they threatened the workers in a very direct manner. The reason was simple: The concession had been given to a European company and the ships the workers stood against also belonged to the Europeans, the countries on which the palace was economically and politically dependent. The authorities seemed to acknowledge that, in the final instance, there was no alternative for them but to submit to the companies. What they saw as the

state's economic and political interests required them to allow the abolition of the traditional labor relations. As a result, there was only one option left to the state, to appease the workers so far as not to allow those local actions to grow into a national, persistent movement, which could itself create an opposition or be used by an existing opposition against the state.

To transfer the truce between the sides into a formal document, a month later, on September 2, 1894, by means of the government's initiatives, the guild and the company signed an agreement of six principles. Accordingly, the guilds were given the rights to transport goods between Istanbul and Galata (the two sides of the Golden Horn), goods from a tied up ship to another, goods that would be transmitted by rail, goods that would be unloaded "inside" the bridge area and finally "goods that are to be unloaded from a ship edged to the port and the ones from the shore to those ships".[195] The company also promised that the boatmen and bargemen would be employed in other operations, that the ships would be tied up from their sterns and that all the barges belonging to the foreign companies would be prohibited to make transportation, in favor of the bargemen guild. The state, thinking that the workers could only be appeased by making some concessions, had forced the company, and the company had submitted. The company, and also the government, relied on the belief that the workers would not attempt contentious actions after those concessions. The company, according to a report given to the French government, faced a cost of 200, 000 franks, but emerged as a result of the agreement, to handle and solve this issue.[196] This was, for them, an expensive sacrifice and expected in return to operate the port as they liked. The state authorities, as will be seen, were sure that there was

[195] Y.A.HUS. 336/48, 28 M. 1313 (21 July 1895), *"...rıhtıma yanaşmış sefainden çıkarılacak ve sahilden bu sefaine nakl edilcek emtianın esnaf mavnalarıyla naklini..."* See also Quataert, *Social Disintegration*, p.104

[196] İbid.

no cause for the bargemen to move against the operation of the company, as they had gained significant shares of concessions in the port.

As in almost all documented forms of agreements, however, including laws and constitutions, this agreement had loopholes, which provided both the companies and the workers opportunities to continue their struggle using those spaces. The foreign companies had been using its own barges outside the harbors, but with this agreement, they were forced to submit to the guilds to transport their goods to the stores, a practice they were unsurprisingly reluctant to apply, due to the fact that it was not in their interests to submit to a system of labor relations outside their control and intervention. Thus, they did not hesitate to use whatever loopholes they found in the agreement in their own favor. On February 14, 1895, a Russian coal ship, coming from England, attempted to use its own barges, instead of the guild barges, to transport its cargo from the ship to store. The guild opposed this practice, arguing that according to the agreement, that right belonged only to the guild. However, the GrandVezier Cevat argued, the agreement concerned only ships which were at the quay, not to those anchored outside. Depending on this judgment, Cevat Pasha ordered that no opposition to the Russian-owned barges should be allowed. The Pasha also pointed out to the fact that they already had received objections from the foreign embassies.[197]

At the roots of the objections from the embassies lay the counter-attack of the workers against the company, upon the words of the agreement. On February 6, 1895, the bargemen attacked another completed part of the port in Galata, against the attempt of the Quay Company to install floating docks to unload the cargo directly to

[197] Y.A.HUS. 320/7, 20 Ş 1312 (16 February 1895).

the shore.[198] They argued that the sixth article of the agreement, quoted above, gave them the right to transfer the cargo from the land to the ship. The bargemen also gave petitions to the Port Department and Sublime Port to complain about the issue. However, the company argued that Article 6 applied to goods which unloaded to the land from the ship and loaded from the land to the ship.

In other words, the company argued, it was only after the goods were loaded or unloaded that the bargemen could take them to transfer them to other ships or other sides. The Sultan ordered that, besides taking measures to prevent any inconvenience, the problem should be solved "immediately, in a way that [would] protect the interests of bargemen who [were] themselves the subjects of the Sublime State."[199] The discontent of the workers could no longer be ignored, for the problem for the bargemen had doubled: On the one hand, the foreign navigation companies were able to overcome the agreement by anchoring outside the harbor and using their own barges; on the other, the Quay Company attempted to install floating docks, to unload directly to the land.

Upon this, on February 16, the GrandVezier entered into a negotiation, with the company director, M. Granet. Granet ensured him that he himself also wanted the problem to be solved in a good manner, for "although he is French, his company is Ottoman."[200] He said that he would end his negotiations with the foreign navigation companies in a few days so that the right to make sea transport would only be given to the guild, so that no barge outside the guild could operate inside or outside the

[198] Quataert, p.104-105

[199] Y.A.HUS. 320/10, 20 Ş 1312 (16 February 1895). *"...mavnacılar devlet-i âliye tebasından olmasıyla bunların muhafaza-i menafi'-i esbabının biran evvel istihsali..."*

[200] ibid. *"...kendisi her ne kadar Fransız ise de kumpanyası Osmanlı olduğundan..."*

harbor.[201] In another correspondence on that same day, the GrandVezier transmitted the director's words that he had signed an agreement with the Mesagerie, Pake and Fraissinet, and a German company, and that they had promised to use only the barges indicated by the Quay Company.[202] Hence the first gap was closed, in favor of the workers.

The second issue, the floating docks, was more complex. The bargemen demanded that the floating docks should be abolished, because, according to them, the goods should be transmitted to the land by them. However, the GrandVezier argued, in the existing port it was not feasible for the ships to dock horizontally, nor was it in accordance with the agreement between the bargemen and company. Thus, it seems that the sixth article was not interpreted in the same way with the bargemen. From that article, both the company and the state elites understood that the goods should first be unloaded to the port (or the floating docks) and then they should be transported to other docks by the bargemen. Cevat Pasha added that if the demands of the bargemen were realized, the ships would not put such a great effort to approach the dock, and would not afford the heavy taxes which they would be obliged to pay.[203] The GrandVezier had no doubt that their demands were irrational:

> …the reason for the bargemen complains about the floating dock problem stems from such an inappropriate desire to unload even the goods which are to be landed to their own barges and this is an offer which is so strange that it would mean, for instance, to force the passengers of the Şirket-I Hayriyye that came to the Dock of Beşiktaş, first to get into the boats and then to step on the land, and the real interest of the bargemen guild lies in their act to transport the goods,

[201] ibid.

[202] Y.A.HUS. 320/7

[203] Y.A.HUS. 320/10

> which are to be transported from the ships or the port through sea, by their own barges…[204]

The gulf between the different rationalities thus came to the surface. The elites assumed that as they knew what the interests of the state or society were, they also knew the "real interests" of the bargemen. The problem, however, arose when the bargemen displayed that their "real interests" were not what the elites' tried to impose on them. They argued that their essential benefits lay in their income from the transportation of goods between land and ships. The GrandVezier, based on his "clear" knowledge about the real interests of the bargemen, went on to emphasize the gesture of the company to give the bargemen a special concession in sea transportation (between the two sides of the Golden Horn and the ships). For,

> …in essence, all of the coal-loaded ships that have come to Istanbul have their own barges and although there has not been seen until now that the coal is transported with the guild barges, even this practice has been given to the guild, and not to appreciate this would be an injustice…[205]

In response to this gesture, the GrandVezier added that the bargemen's complaints and demands for "impossible things" could only be explained by their "effrontery." From some of the elites' perception, the state's submission to the workers was the state's indulgence of the lower-classes, and as will be seen in the following cases, the persistence of the workers' contentious actions in the coming years would be attributed, by some authorities, to the state's excessive pampering of

---

[204] ibid. *"...ve mavnacıların dubalardan dolayı sızlanmaları vapurlardan karaya çıkacak olan eşyayı bile mavnalarına tehmil etmek gibi bir sevda-i gayri makuleden neşaat edip bu ise mesela Beşiktaş iskelesine yanaşan, Şirket-i Hayriyye vapuru yolcularını evvela sandala bindirip ba'de iskeleye çıkarmağa icbar etmek gibi bir teklif-i garib demek olacağı ve mavnacı esnafının menaf'i-i hakikiyesi rıhtımdan veya vapurlardan behren başka iskelelere nakl olunacak eşyanın kendi mavnaları vasıtasıyla naklini istihsalden ibaret olup…"*

[205] ibid*."... ezcümle dersaadete gelen bilcümle kömür yüklü vapurların her birinin müteaddid mavnaları olup şimdiye kadar esnaf mavnalarıyla kömür nakl olunduğunun emsali olmadığı halde badema bunun da esnafa ihale olunacağını takdir etmemek mugayir-i insaf idüğüni…"*

the port workers throughout those years. In fact, this was partially not incorrect. As the workers' attempts resulted in their victory by forcing the elite to submit to them, though with some costs, like the exile of agitators, they became more encouraged to show their discontent openly in the following years, the peak of which would be seen in the Hunchakian demonstration of 1895, in the short term, and the strike waves of 1908, in the long term.

In any case, the elites could not undertake the risk of the reactions of the workers and they had to admit that it would be against their essential interests to impose the new form of operation in a sudden and adverse manner against them. According to Cevat Pasha, the problem could be solved by the police forces through "squeezing" the 20 or 25 protagonists who were agitating the rest of the bargemen. However, the Sultan, probably considering that it would further deepen the problem, ordered that the things had to be solved with time. Following this, Cevat Paşa recommended that Granet extend the matter over a period of five or six months, adding that within this period, the bargemen would be persuaded and the procedures to assign the sea transportation from the foreign barges to those of the guild would be completed. Thus this matter would be solved in a calm manner. The director had no way but to accept this offer, as long as the government was with them in the final instance:

> …as this aspect was offered to M. Granet, he declared his opinion that his aim was also to solve the matter peacefully and he would not hasten in the floating dock issue and although the company made some sacrifice in terms of money, it is ready to do this to serve the sultan, but if the government completely rejects the floating docks, it will essentially harm the Quay Company and the cover of the graces of the sultan will not accept this…[206]

[206] Ibid. *"…bu suret kumpanya direktörü mumiileyh Mösyö Garane'ye teklif olundukda kendisinin maksadı da işin kemal-i sukunetle tesviyesi maddesi olduğundan duba maddesinde istical etmeyüb kumpanya akçaca bazı fedakarlıkda bulunmuş olsa dahi bunun hizmet-i şahanede fedasına hazır olduğunu ve fakat mezkur duba vaz'ı hükümet-i seniyyenin külliyen reddetmesi rıhtım kumpanyasını esasından tahrip dimek olacağı cihetle buna*

Five months later, on July 21, the special commission submitted its report to the new GrandVezier Said Pasha. The report, not surprisingly, supported the company against the bargemen, arguing that the sixth article could not be interpreted as the bargemen had done, based on the French copy of the agreement which used the term "*supalan*." The commission, with reference to its communication with the Ministry of Navy, explained that "the term 'supalan' means that the good can be transferred by its owner to where he/she wants upon the sea."[207] So, against the bargemen's use of the text as a weapon on behalf of their own interests, the elites took part in this game by using their own cards. As they acknowledged that they could not win the argument upon the Turkish text, all they could do was to change the field of the game. They produced another copy of the same text, but in a language which served their own arguments and interests better. Besides this, the report also quoted the statement of Granet, who was anxious to emphasize his compromise with the bargemen, and, of course, his impatience:

> …in the last three months, a total of 63,000 tons of transportation has been made, and 55,000 of it has been made by the barges of the foreign companies and the remaining 8,000 has been made by the guild barges, and as the attempt of the company to purchase the foreign barges will be completed, even the transportation of that 55,000 will be exclusive to the bargemen's guild, and from now on, no concession can be made on this matter, and if this controversy will not come to an end, M. Granet declared, he will have to close the Quay…[208]

---

merahim-i şemle-i hazreti padişahinin razı olmayacağı fikrinde bulunduğunu beyan eylemiş…"

[207] The full text of the report can be found in Y.A.HUS. 336/48, 23.Ra.1313 (13 September 1895).

[208] Ibid. *"…limanda üç ayda vuku' bulan nakliyatın mecmu'u altmış üç bin tonilato derecesinde olup bunun elli beş bini ecnebi vapur kumpanyalarına mensub mavnalar vasıtasıyla ve küsur sekiz bin bu kadar tonilatosu da esnaf mavnalarıyla taşınmakda olduğu halde şirketce ecnebi mavnalarının mübayaası için vuku' bulan teşebbüs neticepezir olduğu takdirde mezkûr elli beş bin tonilatolu nakliyat dahi mavnacı esnafına münhasır kalacağı ve*

The report concluded that the company had the right to freely carry out its operations and the claims of the bargemen could not be accepted "with respect to promise, agreement and in essence."[209] The report suggested that this should also be "explained" to the bargemen and the agitators among them should be punished with a hidden reference to the famous Article 113, considering that their contentious action was an "opposite-staff movement against the government without depending on legitimate reasons."[210]

Solidarity among the Port Workers in an Informal Sphere

The authorities were not wrong in their concerns that the problem had the potential to turn against the very legitimacy of the government. Although the state repressed the formation of modern labor unions and tried to maintain its discipline through the guild system, it could not completely prevent the development of informal communities among the lower classes. In other words, as has been shown, the workers' efforts to protect their guild-based rights did not stop them from developing more informal types of coming together, over which the state had little control, to protect their interests. One instance of it came to the surface in a correspondence from the Mayor two weeks later. At first sight, the matter seems to have been one of those ordinary, everyday conflicts between two groups of porters: the porters who carried goods on their backs (*arka hamalları*) and those who carried

---

işin bundan ziyade müsaideye tahammülü olmayup bu ihtilaf daha devam edecek olur ise rıhtımı kapamağa mecbur olacağı Mösyö Garane tarafından ifade olunduğu…"

[209] Ibid *"…ahden ve aslen ve mukaveleten…"*

[210] Ibid. *"…bu hal bir guna esbab-ı meşruiyeye mebni olmaksızın hükümete karşı bir hareket-i muhalefetkari olmağla…"*

goods on poles (*sırık hamalları*). According to the correspondence, the problem was about the sharing of wages. Traditionally, says the Mayor, the two groups of porters had gotten equal shares for the carriage of the goods coming to the customs. But "somehow" a problem had emerged among them on this matter, and to solve it, first, it was decided that the porters who carried goods on their backs would carry goods of 120- *kıyye* (nearly 153 kg), and the rest would be carried by the pole porters.[211]

However, as the disagreement continued, the numbers were modified, which did nothing to solve it. Then, the Council of State, which carried out negotiations on this matter, decided that the things should be done as before, in the traditional way, according to the "ancient custom" (*teamül-i kadim*). However, as the so-called traditional system started to operate, some of the porters, arguing that the current practice was not same as the custom, occasionally picked quarrels. Then, as the deputy steward informed the Mayor that there were some people who were agitating the porters to rise up, and a sergeant was sent to bring those agitators to the Municipality. But, as the sergeant was bringing the agitators, in a remarkable and probably unexpected way, the rest of the porters followed them to show their support to the front of Bab-ı Ali.[212]

The mayor accused the sergeant of allowing "the courage of the porters who had already been pampered," and punished him with a salary cut. It became evident, however, that the porters had built up a degree of solidarity and showed that they would not easily sacrifice it in the face of repression from the state. The Mayors' following words illustrate these informal solidarity cultures:

> Some persons who were accustomed to having interests in the porters, using their prestige at the customs, have occasionally attempted these

[211] Y.MTV., 125/122, 13 S 1313 (5 August 1895).

[212] Ibid.

> kinds of malpractice, and the porters, who are unaware of the various damages it has, are deceived their fool-cheating provocations, by swearing and compacting through jumping over a rode, a customary practice among them…[213]

Jumping over a rode, a centuries-old practice, the roots of which are said to go back to the antique Turcomans, symbolizes the mutual commitment among different persons or groups. It is understood from the document that this practice was also used within the guilds, possibly as a ritual of admission for a new member, to confirm his loyalty to the guild. Here, a different use of this practice is seen. It again symbolizes a commitment to a group, but a different one, outside the state-imposed form of solidarity. Although, in the above-discussed cases, it was seen that the workers made great efforts to protect their guild-based rights or to gain a guild certificate to possess those rights, they were not completely submitted to this form of solidarity.

The guilds were under the close surveillance of the state so that even their stewards were appointed by the state. Especially in the Hamidian period, the autonomy of the guilds was relatively diminished and there were many instances which documented the conflict between the guild authority and its members. Even in this case, it could be seen that the informant about the contentious activities of the members was the guild's leadership (the deputy steward). In other words, the stewards could be used alongside the espionage activities of the palace and it seems that the workers were conscious of this. Therefore, they developed alternative forms of networks and they applied their traditional rituals to those new communities. And,

---

[213] Ibid. *"Hamalların yüzünden temin i menfaat etmeğe alışmış bir takım eşhas gümrükler içinde kendilerine tedarik eyledikleri mezahirin tesiratıyla aralık aralık bu gibi yolsuzluklara ibtidar etmekde ve bıd'-ı zararını bilmeyen hamallar da beynlerinde kadimen cari olan değnek atlamak suretiyle ahd ve misak ederek bunların teşvikat ı eblehfiribanelerine aldanmakda iseler de…"*

as can be seen in this case, the members of those groups could defy even the state authorities in the case of an attempt of intervention from the outside.

The other side of the same coin shows that the contentious activities of the workers could not be said to be purely spontaneous, but on the contrary, were highly organized, though in an informal sphere. This informality, unfortunately, has caused these movements to be ignored by the traditional Ottoman-Turkish labor history, which has been more prone to put emphasis on the formally organized forms of labor activities, which, unsurprisingly, flourished after 1908. However, as this study tries to show, the guilds had not totally disappeared from the repertoire of the labor experience and, beyond the guilds, there were also informal groupings that had their own cultures, with unarticulated rules and rituals. There is no reason, thus, to underrate these collective actions as ordinary, unimportant, daily brawls which have no place in the grand narrative of Ottoman labor. On the contrary, as research continues on this era, the authority of which was anxious to not to allow the alternative formations in the formal-public sphere, alternative formations can be seen in the underworld of labor, which came to the surface, to the world of visibility, only at moments of crisis. Only from here can a hole be made in the high, invisible wall of 1908, which divides the life of labor movement in the textbooks of the labor/left history.

Although the state did everything to intervene and disrupt this solidarity through both the repressive policies, like exiling the agitators among them, and its "persuasive" policies, it could not meet the expectations of the companies and the foreign embassies which pressured the government to eliminate the resistance of the workers. Actually, especially in a period in which the legitimacy of the state had been shaken by the Armenian uprisings all across Anatolia, the elites were probably

reluctant to antagonize the port workers, a significant proportion of whom were Armenian. They had witnessed before, in the Kumkapı Demonstration, that Armenian militants did not need much to agitate the discontented Armenians of the city against the state. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that two months later, the report and the suggestions of the commission were still waiting to be approved and put into practice by the GrandVezier.

The foreign embassies and the Quay Company, considering the reluctance of the government to prevent the bargemen, attempted to use their own methods to dispel them. On September 12, 1895, the Minister of Police wrote to the Palace that the Quay Company, to defy the bargemen who were preventing the new-coming oil ship from tying up, had applied to the French embassy. The French embassy sent an escort to the ship and under their protection, the ship tied-up. These actions had more than one meaning: First, the mediation of the government had been skipped by the Europeans so that the very meaning of the legitimacy of the state, the monopoly of coercion, had been defied; second, the elite and the embassy had decided to break the resistance of the bargemen, by force if necessary; and last, as the mediation had been broken, the government had been driven to choose its side in the war between the company and the workers. A delegate from the embassy visited the Minister and explained that the embassy had been forced to do this because the company could not fully practice its "rights of concession" due to the resistance of the bargemen:

> …and I responded that the reason that the opposition of the bargemen continues is the company's contract with the bargemen, and although the government formed a special commission to solve the controversy in an optimum manner, the embassy attempted such an unprecedented demonstration, without waiting for the decision of the commission, is impossible to not to be considered as a cause of astonishment…[214]

[214] Y.PRK.ZB. 16/45 22 Ra 1313 (12 September 1895). *"...ve taraf-ı çakeranemden dahi mavnacıların devam-ı muhalefetine şirketin esnaf ile olan mukavelenamesi sebeb olmuş ve ma'mafiye yine hükümet-i seniyece esbab-ı ihtilafın hüsn-i suretiyle izalesi için mahsusan bir de komisyon teşkil olunmuş iken bunun kararının intizar edilmeyüb de şimdiye kadar*

It is unknown whether the embassy or the company was aware that the report and the decision of the commission had been on the desk of the GrandVezier for two months, but whatever it was, the Europeans used their own forms of protest, which the Minister also called a "demonstration," to force the government to decide on the issue at the expense of the workers. The minister reported that in the case of any kind of attack against the bargemen, the ship commander would be held responsible, and that he ordered for the necessary security measures to appease both sides.[215] As the Minister admitted, the bargemen had manipulatively used the blurred lines of the agreement in favor of their own interests for a year, but that road had come to an end. Now the government would have to choose its side, the company or the bargemen.

Every choice would lead to a dead-end. The Armenian uprisings were going on throughout Anatolia; the embassies were picking out their own sticks to force the state elites; and the workers of the city were in such an anxious state that they probably looked like the now-antiquated Janissaries, who had sought a simple excuse to rock their cauldron: boiling in it not their soup, but their furious blood. The port was completed and the government had no opportunity to waive the confrontation. Two days after the "demonstration" of the embassy-company clique, the GrandVezier Said Pasha wrote to the palace that the Sultan's decree to put the decision of the commission into practice "would be communicated to the relevant ministries."[216] The state, though reluctantly, had to choose its side against the workers. Now, the explosion of the city was only a matter of time.

---

hiçbir yerde imsali görülmemiş olan böyle bir nümayişin icrasına sefaretin müsara'atı ba'is-i hayret olmamak kabil olamayacağı…"

[215] Ibid.

[216] Y.A.HUS. 336/48.

Overlapping Struggles: The Role of Workers in the Armenian Uprisings of Istanbul

The Bab-ı Ali Demonstration

On September 28, after a long period of preparation, the Hunchakian leaders sent a telegram to the embassies and the government informing them that they were going to organize a demonstration, "of a strictly peaceful character," to present a petition about their discontent with the problems in the Armenian provinces (massacres, cruelties and injustices both by local bureaucrats and Kurdish families) and their demands, which referred to basic social and political rights and economic and administrative reforms concerning the Armenian provinces.[217] The petition was careful to emphasize that the demands were not only for the Armenians, but for all Ottoman subjects.[218] The Hunchaks were aware that those kinds of collective acts were unacceptable to the Ottoman authorities and that they would be defied by force, as in the case of this demonstration. That at least some of them had knives and revolvers with them suggests that they had envisaged such a violent confrontation and were prepared for this.[219] In fact, according to Nalbandian, there had been a disagreement among Hunchakian leaders about whether the demonstration should be violent or peaceful.[220] Although the last decision favored the peaceful side, it was most likely that this was not obeyed by all of the members.

[217] Nalbandian, p.124; Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide:Ethnic Conflict from Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997).p. 119.

[218] İbid. p.124-125

[219] New York Times, October 4, 1895

[220] Nalbandian, p.123

The chosen route for the demonstration march was again symbolically determined: From the Church at Kumkapı to the Bab-ı Ali. On September 30, Monday, approximately four thousand Armenians came together for a religious ritual, the celebration of the cross. According to the reports, after the ritual, twenty Armenian ladies, probably of the Hunchakian party, asked the Patriarch "to summon the faithful to go to the Porte to pray that it promptly enforce reforms in Armenia."[221] However, on the contrary, the Patriarch asked them not to make such a demonstration, for "it would be contrary to law." Then the crowd, the report says, shouted "we want liberty or death!"[222] Then the crowd started to march to the Sublime Porte.They were met by the police and they were dispersed. But they again came together and a mortal fight began between the security forces and the demonstrators. A gendarme major, Servet Bey, was killed during the conflict, which probably put both sides in a fearful rage. The reason for this murder was for one side, that the major had insulted the Armenians, but for the other side, the police forces had called the demonstrators to stop their action "in a very considerate and even begging manner."[223]

Both Armenian and Turkish narrators of the events agreed that the working classes of the city had been involved in this demonstration actively and in significant numbers. "Most of the participants" says Dadrian, "were humble provincials, consisting of the porters, laborers and servants, who had come to the capital to eke out a living and save enough money to support their needy families in the

[221] New York Times, October 3, 1895

[222] Ibid.

[223] Hüseyin Nazım Paşa, p.19. In fact, the narratives about the event disagreed even on how he was killed. For instance, while the New York Times says he was shot to death, Paşa argues he was killed through lynching and stabbing (p.20).

interior."[224] The role of the port workers was emphasized particularly in the narrative of Hüseyin Nazım Pasha, then the Minister of the Police. Upon the beginning of the events on Monday, the Pasha ordered that no Armenians should be allowed to cross to the Istanbul side. However, it was to no avail, as the Pasha successively took fearful news:

> Several Armenians, coming from Galata, Tophane and Fındıklı by barges and boats, are stepping to the Sirkeci Dock; also, many Armenian coal heavers and pole porters are passing through the bridge in a drunken mood. The number of police and gendarme there is so few …[225]

A porter from the Galata customs called Nisan, according to the Pasha, had incited nearly 500 Armenians to riot with words like "Let me see you, the day is today!"[226]

"A mob was a very useful supplement to the magistrates," wrote E.P.Thompson, "in a nation that was scarcely policed."[227] Several bloody conflicts in the capital's streets occurred in the following three days not only between the security forces and Armenians, but more commonly between Armenians and Muslims. According to the foreign accounts, the police had secretly armed the Muslim mobs that consisted mostly of the lower-class Kurds and Muslim theological students (*softas*) with the cudgels, an argument which the Turkish formal accounts, unsurprisingly, rejects.[228]

---

[224] Dadrian, p.120; also see the letter by M.S.Gabriel of the Armenian Patriotic Alliance in the USA, which points out that the event was organized not leadingly by Hunchakists, "an insignificant party, unpopular in Constantinople, and scarcely ever heard of in Armenia." Rather, it was the Armenian migrants in İstanbul, who were "the true representatives of the Armenian provinces", that attempted this action. *New York Times*, October 11, 1895.

[225] Hüseyin Nazım Paşa,. p.21

[226] ibid. p.27

[227] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. p.74

[228] Dadrian, p.120; *New York Times*, October 10, 1895; Hüseyin Nazım Paşa, p.48.

It is not possible to assign definitely the number of casualties, as politics, rather than the reality, prevailed in the related accounts, as well as whether those atrocities could be attributed to the conscious orders from the palace. However it was, in the last instance, the Muslim mobs were likely to know that violence against the Armenians would be permitted, or at least tolerated, by the local police, if not by the palace. Several hundred people were killed and injured, mostly from the Armenians, as a result. The GrandVezier Said Pasha, upon the reactions from the Great Powers, especially from Britain, which threatened the Sultan with occupation of the port cities if no step was taken concerning the Armenian Question, was replaced by Kamil Pasha, who was seen with more sympathy in the European public opinion.[229] Nearly a month later, the foreign pressures forced the Sultan to approve the Armenian Reform Program, which, however, "became a dead letter" in the following period.[230]

Up to now, a flawed picture may have been given that shows that the sole motive behind this demonstration of the Armenian workers was economic; that is, that the workers' reactions were against the European capitalist penetration into the ports, which led them into the "universal" process of proletarianization. In fact, it would be a subordination of political and social phenomenon into the economic one, implying that most of the reactions in the former spheres were the simple byproducts of the latter. In addition to asking what socioeconomic experiences predisposed workers to radical politics, William Sewell argues, "historians must also ask what sorts of political processes, events and ideologies induced workers to participate in

[229] New York Times, October 6, 1895.

[230] Nalbandian, p.126.

the radical social movements."[231] Similarly, the factors behind such a great reaction by the Armenian working classes, thus, were much more complex than this picture shows.

To begin with, the autonomy of politics and state from the economy must be recognized in order to understand fully why only the Armenians, rather than the Muslim, Greek, Jewish working classes, could be agitated toward such a reaction against the state throughout this process of proletarianization. As shown in the previous chapter, the tensions between the Armenians of the Empire and the state could be taken back perceptibly to the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. A decade later, it took on an organized form, in the form political parties which positioned themselves against the Ottoman State, or at least, the rule of Abdulhamid II. Thus, the radical agitation started almost on the eve of the proletarianization process. The worsening of the economic situations of the workers and their loss of traditional rights based on the guild system beyond their works made the agitation of the Armenian workers by those political organizations much easier. The recent economic struggles significantly undermined the legitimacy of the state and the loyalty of the workers, and this made them much more receptive to the organized forms of protest against the authority.

However, the factors that made the agitation of the Armenian workers easier were not limited to the economic conditions. When the Armenian rebellions that broke out across Anatolia were met with violence from the state, the workers in Istanbul became more hostile and susceptible to agitation against the state. It had a simple reason: Most of the Armenian workers, especially those in the ports, came

[231] William H. Sewell Jr., "Uneven Development, the Autonomy of Politics, and the Dockworkers of the Nineteenth Century Marseille," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (1988). p.608

from those Armenian regions of Eastern Anatolia, where they had left their families and where they planned to return after saving enough money.[232] In fact, the demands to stop the atrocities against the Armenians and to give them equal social and political rights, rather than economic demands concerning the urban workers, dominated the content of petitions written by the party leaders. These factors were not independent of or irrelevant to the feelings of the participants of the demonstration.

It was most likely that the Armenian workers felt the demands concerning the circumstances in the Armenian regions in Anatolia more urgent than the ones concerning their own economic-based struggles against the state and the companies. This had three possible explanations: Firstly, and most tangibly, their own families, relatives and general life-spaces there were under direct attack by the government and Kurdish tribes, which threatened their existence in Anatolia. Secondly, the political agitation of the Armenian political parties, the Hunchakians in this case, focused more on the economic and social circumstances in rural Anatolia than the proletarianization of the urban workers in the great cities of the Empire. And finally, the so-called urban workers in Istanbul likely saw themselves not as urban workers, belonging to the city, but as temporary migrants who would return to their rural homelands after a while, a feeling which possibly gave them more tolerance of the everyday sufferings they experienced in the city. It does not mean that they simply bowed to their fate, as has been shown and will be shown in the many cases of confrontation, but rather, they either did not see those problems as immediate that it was necessary to fight for them in the political arena against the state, or they lacked the political means to do this as such.

[232] Quataert, *Social Disintegration*, p.97.

The choice of direct action to alleviate their suffering and set answers to their demands had much to do both with the transformation of the state in the Hamidian period in terms of the repressive policies against the opposition and the language toward the non-Muslim minorities of the Empire. The repressive policies detailed in the previous chapter had an adverse effect in terms of the explosion of anti-authority discontent in an insurgent form. For, with the repression of parliament, newspapers, unions and other civil structures, the citizens of the Empire, especially the non-Muslim minorities, had little means to channel their reactions against certain policies within the legal sphere. Thus, it should not be surprising that the workers applied the same strategy they used in the so-called "under-political sphere", that was, within their struggles to protect their jobs and benefits against the company-state imposed orders, also in the "political" one. In other words, just as they defended their rights through petitions and direct actions, they defended their political demands through directly confronting with the state. This choice was certainly legitimate for the lower-classes of both Muslims and non-Muslims because the authority left them little options to voice their sufferings.

The Occupation of the Ottoman Bank

The massacre of Armenians throughout Anatolia intensified after the Bab-ı Ali Demonstration in the winter of 1895. To take the revenge for and to protest those massacres, a group of the Dashnakian militants, mostly young students from Europe, occupied the Ottoman Bank building in the Karaköy district of Istanbul, with dozens of dynamites and bombs in their bags, after a long period of preparation on August

26, 1896.[233] According to their plan, as soon as the occupation had taken place, along with other Dahsnakian militias simultaneously attacking the soldiers in different parts of the city, chaos and panic would emerge, as a result of which, as Dadrian writes, "Constantinople would be occupied by European armed forces and the Armenian cause would be resolved as desired."[234] They had sent a message to the European ambassadors in which they had declared their protests of the atrocities of the Turkish government and their demands, which had also been demanded by the Hunchakian militias a year earlier: judicial reforms, a European Governor and High Commissioner in the Armenian provinces, a general amnesty, the security of body and property.[235] After long negotiations, the militants agreed to leave the bank, with the escort of soldiers to leave the city on a French ship.

As the news that an Armenian group had occupied the Ottoman Bank spread quickly throughout the city, Muslim mobs, led by "white-turbaned men," the *softas*, began to attack other Armenians in the city and they even attempted to directly attack the occupants in the bank bypassing the soldiers, to which the occupants responded by bombs.[236] The days, during and after the occupation, witnessed the murders of thousands of innocent Armenians in Istanbul, the exact number of which is unclear.[237]Although it is clear that the significant participants and leaders of the mob

[233] For how they prepared , see the memoirs of Armen Garo, one of the leaders of the group Simon Vratzian, ed., *Bank Ottoman: Memoirs of Armen Garo* (Detroit, Michigan: Armen Topouzian, 1990).. p. 90-105.

[234] Ibid. p.104.

[235] Dadrian, p. 139; Edhem Eldem, "26 Ağustos 1896 'Banka Vakası' ve 1896 'Ermeni Olayları'," *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 5 (2007). p. 114.

[236] Vratzian, p. 128-130.

[237] There has been an ongoing dispute about the number of casualties between the Armenian and Turkish historians, an over all assessment of which was made by Eldem, p.130-139.

were composed of the softas, in most of the narratives of the events, another significant group prevails: the port workers. "…At preconcert signals," tells Sir George Young, then the second secretary of the British Embassy in Istanbul, "organized bands of Moslem roughs, Laz boatmen, Softas from the Medressehs, Kurdish hamals and the dregs of the dock guilds, rushed through the streets of Galata, armed with bludgeons, and knocked on the head the panic-stricken Armenians."[238] Eldem shows that the claim that porters with bludgeons played a significant role in the massacres is not stated only in the Armenian and European sources, but also in the Turkish ones, including that of Reşad Ekrem Koçu.[239]

How can this massive participation of the "dregs of the dock guilds" be explained? At first sight, because the port workers were generally considered one of the most dangerous and problematic groups of the city, it seems easier to assume that they would be the easiest for the softa agitators to convince to hunt the Armenians. However, this may only be one part of the complete answer. As shown in the above cases, there was a strict competition between the guild workers and outsiders, from which the company attempted to benefit at the expense of the guild workers. This was a signal, in fact, that there was a significant rate of unemployment in the city, which had been intensified after 1878 with the migration from the lost Ottoman lands.

With the increasing color of Islamic propaganda and agitation both by the state and the madrasah students, this economic-based competition was mediated by religious fervor on behalf of the Muslim lower classes. The strong claims that the massacres had an organized character, with at least passive support of the state

---

[238] George Young, *Constantinople* (London: Methuen&co., 1926).p.224

[239] Eldem, p.127-129.

bureaucracy,[240] prove that, especially with the insurgencies of previous two years in Anatolia and in Istanbul, the meaning of "Armenian" became an implication of "danger" for the state elites and "hatred" for the ordinary Muslim people. That's why it became easier for the Muslim workers to "clean" their ways to access jobs and/or to save themselves from the stress that the competition for the lowering rate of employment, one of the most direct outcomes of the port modernization, created upon their shoulders. Actually, George Young, a contemporary observer of the events, pointed out this dimension of the massacres: "In the city, the massacre had one definite economic object, in that it was directed chiefly against the Armenian hamals (the porters). The Kurdish hamals replaced them much to the detriment of trading interests."[241]

Struggles between 1896 and 1908

It may be argued that the state's passive support of this "replacement" served it in the sense that it created a more loyal labor force than the one that was characterized by ethno-religiously more heterogeneous workers. However, it may well be suggested that the case had also just the opposite dimension. Up until that time, the ethno-religious heterogeneity had provided the state the opportunity to play off between the different communities, a great and useful mechanism for effective surveillance and discipline. After 1826, the abolition of the Janissaries, the government was able to use this card in impressive ways. It replaced the Muslim

[240] Eldem, p..142-144; Even the Armenian militias occupying the Bank were aware that as soon as the occupation took place, the massacres would begin, Vratzian, p.119; for the claim that this was the exact aim of the militias, based on the words of Armen Garo, see Eldem, p.120.

[241] Young, p. 225

lower classes, who had been allies to the Janissaries against the state, with the lower classes of the "loyal nation", the Armenians of the Eastern region on a widescale. At that time, it had carried out this process without alienating the Muslims or any other community as a whole, which was required to preserve the effectiveness of this card. But now, by antagonizing the Armenians as a whole, the state was giving up this card and became dependent solely on the "loyalty" of its Muslim subjects. From now on, there was no alternative for the government but to be on the alert to the threats from the lower classes or to supress them in the case of a series of collective actions, as the Sultan had to do in the summer of 1908.

Especially after the demonstration of 1895, the authorities came to believe that any discontent among the lower classes could be converted into a widespread contentious action and thus attempted to take measures against these kinds of possibilities beforehand. In April 1896, the Quay Company demanded that the buoys and the floating docks which were used to tie the boats and steamboats be abolished because they prevented the ships from tying up to the docks. The concerns of the ruling elite that the recent struggles between the port workers and the company could grow such that it could threaten the very legitimacy and authority of the state can be seen in this document from Yıldız. It is written that "the recent controversy between the bargemen and the company could turn into a political problem" and that the floating docks and buoys should be located in a place "which will not cause the existing complaints to be increased."[242]

[242] Y.MTV., 139/114, 29 L 1313 (13 April 1896). *"…ve geçende mavnacılar ile Şirket-i mezkure beyninde vuku' bulan ihtilafatın bilahare bir mesele-i siyasiye şeklini alarak bunun faysalpezir olması emrinde sebk iden ahval ve muamelatın tekrarına istidad verilmemesi nazar-ı dikkatte tutulacak mevaddan bulunmasına mebni zikr olunan dubalar ve müteferriatına şikâyet-i mevcudeyi ileti götürmekde sebeb olamayacak bir mevki' tayin ettirilmesi…"*

The existence and activities of the Quay Company not only threatened the bargemen and boatmen but also the porters in the following years. The second half of the last year of the nineteenth century witnessed struggles between the porters and the Quay Company in terms of the rights to carry goods from the customs to various points in the city. According to the concession of 1890, the Quay Company would have the right to operate the transportation of the goods along the port or between the docks and the streets using tram lines and omnibus cars. [243] On June 1899, the Quay Company made an offer which showed how it desired to interpret this concession. They offered to the mayor that the company should be given the right to transport the goods from ships to the customs and from customs to the desired places using those cars and "other means of transportation."[244] But the company had already the right to transport goods so far as it had built the lines. The key word here was "other means of transportation," which in fact consisted of human beings carrying goods:

> …the company does not have the right to transport to every locality and store outside its circle of concession and to oppose the demands of the traders' that their goods should be transported from the ships to the state-owned customs and from customs to everywhere including their own stores and to the port docks and warehouses, [because] this ancient form belongs to the thousands of porters, who are the subjects of the sublime state and who strain to earn their livings through this form of transportation…[245]

The company, in other words, was not content with the concessions along the ports, but wanted to monopolize the whole system of transportation in the city. It

---

[243] Osman Nuri Ergin, p.2797.

[244] DH.MKT 2213/145, 11 S 1317 (21 June 1899).

[245] Ibid. *"şirketin daire i imtiyazı haricinde her mahalle ve mağazaya eşya ve emval-i ticariye nakline ve tüccar tarafından kendi mallarını gümrük önüne yanaşan merakibden ve devletin malı olan gümrük mahalline ve gümrükten her nereye olur ise olsun gerek kendi mağazalarına ve gerek rıhtım dok ve antrepolarına nakl edilmek isteniliyorsa buna mümanaata hakkı olmayp bu suret el kadim bu yolda nakliyat ile temin-i maişete çalışan tebaa-i devlet-i aliyeden binlerce hamallara aid bulunmuş olduğundan…"*

would be against the interests of the state authorities to antagonize such a massive force of urban labor, so this was rejected. But the company did not give up and applied to use its own porters in the transportation. On June 29, the Mutasarrıf of Beyoğlu wrote that the Quay Company was using its own porters "even for the goods to be transported to the merchants' stores, which was in fact to be made by the guild porters."[246]

He said that, beyond violating the primary means of subsistence for the guild porters, it was also against the agreement of concession. Although he communicated the situation to the Municipality and the Ministry of the Police, however, it brought no results. The mutasarrıf concluded that the discontent among the porters was increasing day by day.[247] About two weeks later, on July 13, the Ministry of Interior reported to the GrandVezier that the situation was getting out of control. According to the correspondence, which summarized the dispatches between the ministries and the municipality, the previous evening the porters had been verbally dissuaded the porters of Mumhane from creating trouble upon the company's transportation of fifty sacks of semolina using its own porters. However, a day later, this time the company transported twenty sacks of flour using its porters, an act which provoked the porters to gather and protest. Although the crowd was disbanded, it was stated that the porters could not be calmed until a decision was taken at the expense of the company.[248]

However, the company continued to violate the rights of the guild porters due to the reluctance of the GrandVezierate and palace to take a decision. On August 8,

[246] Y.PRK.ZB. 22/117, 19 S 1317 (29 June 1899).

[247] İbid.

[248] DH.MKT., 2221/35, 4 Ra 1317 (13 July 1899).

the Ministry of Interior communicated the Mayor's and Ministry of the Police's correspondences to the GrandVezier, which told of another brawl between the company and the Mumhane porters on the transportation of wine barrels. He also wrote about the petitions of the Tophane, Mumhane and Karaköy porters, complaining that the company had brought porters from outside and about the same warnings of the mayor for a decision to be taken. However, this time, the Ministry of Interior did more than simply to passively communicate the warnings of others, and added its own voice to the last line (apparently to be put in at the last minute), which revealed the degree of discontent against the company and of the impatience and anxiety about the uprisings of the porters:

> Besides that the difficulty the Quay company has shown sooner or later is apparent in any case, this time the acts that it wanted to manifest even in the affairs belonging to the guild will be a cause of contentions, and the municipality and the mentioned Ministry (Police) have taken the trouble to inform about this situation and my ministry also exofficio declared and submitted this, and therefore if the porters in Galata causes a disorder against the sublime content, no responsibility will be accepted…[249]

Upon this threat, the GrandVezier wrote to the Ministry of Trade and Public Works to solve the situation, but the Ministry wrote that the problem had no relation to the Ministry because it emanated from "neither the company's rights of concession nor the procedure of transportation within the customs" but it was an in-guild controversy and should be dealt by the Municipality, which was communicated to the mayor by the Ministry of Interior.[250] However, the Municipality replied, in an

---

[249] DH.MKT. 2231/36, 30 Ra 1317 (8 August 1899). *"...rıhtım kumpanyasının evvel u ahir gösterdiği müşkülat her suretle zahir olduktan başka şimdi esnafa aid işlerde bile iraet etmek istediği halat badien münazaat olacağından ve emanet ve nezaret-i müşarileyha keyfiyeti bilzahmat bildirmiş ve nezaret-i acizi dahi vazife icabınca arz ve beyan etmiş olduğundan Galata gibi bir yerde hamallar canibinden hilaf-ı marzi-i ali uygunsuzluk çıkarılıyor ise mesuliyet kabul edilemeyeceği cihetle..."*

[250] DH.MKT. 2259/78, 14 C 1317 (20 October 1899). *"...ne şirketin hukuk-i imtiyaziyesinden ve ne de gümrük dahilindeki muamelat-ı nakliyeden naşi etmeyüb harf-i*

angry tone, that the problem was a direct result of the company's violation of its agreement and that it threatened the means of subsistence of thousands of porters. There was one more issue which the mayor pointed out as so critical that the company should be stopped by the Ministry of Trade and Public Works:

> … it attracts the attention that the person that was chosen and assigned by the company dismisses the traditional porters and gathers people among Greeks and Armenians and other persons the conditions of which are well-known…[251]

As a result, the mayor argued that the issue was so great, significant and critical that it should be solved by the Sublime Porte and the Ministry. This depiction of non-Muslim workers as "well-known" personas is a sign of how the Greeks and Armenians, especially after the Armenian insurgencies of 1894-96 and the Greek War of 1897, were seen as "others" by the higher authorities, which symbolized the beginning of the clean-up throughout the following decade.[252]

While the elites tried to make up a more "loyal" labor force, they paid attention to not to antagonize the workers as shown above. However not to antagonize did not mean to be on the side of the workers against the company. As soon as they perceived themselves to be strangers against the workers, they did not hesitate to act against them and hand in hand with the company. For instance, two years later, in April 1901, the bargemen applied to the Port Administration to complain about the Port Company which had installed floating docks that would

---

beyn –el-esnaf bir ihtilaf hükm ve mahiyetinde olan bu hususun nezaret cihetine taalluku olamıyacağı…"

[251] DH.MKT. 2283/23, 8 Ş 1317 (12 December 1899). *"...şirketin oraya intihab ve ikame ettiği şahsın rum ve ermeni ve saireden mechul el ahval kesanı toplayub kadim hamalları tard etmesi celb-i nazar-ı dikkat bulunduğu halde…"*

[252] On whether that the non-Muslim workers had been seen by the state elites as the "others" before or it was a completely new phenemonen, we need comparative studies in both time and spatial axes.

eliminate the jobs of the bargemen. However, they were not "taken seriously" by the Ministry of Police, which decreed for the measures against any kind of disorder attempts.[253] The courage of the Ministry to not take the bargemen seriously shows that what determined the state's stance in the struggle between the workers and the company was a kind of pragmatism which led the state to stand on behalf of the company if possible, and to remain neutral otherwise.

The reluctance of the state to act against workers lasted until 1907, when the state could no longer resist the demands of the European capital. In the summer of 1907, the Ottoman government gave in to the demands of the company to establish its full hegemony over labor relations at the expense of the port workers, in return for two agreements with European states which brought an increase (from 8 percent to 11) in the customs duties.[254] Especially in a time when the discontent among lower classes, both in Anatolia and in the urban cities, why the government took such a risk which would undermine its legitimacy along the lower classes. Perhaps, it was supposed that the necessary transformation to establish a more loyal labor force was mostly completed, although there still remained non-Muslim elements in the ports. Or it may be that it could no longer resist the demands of European states, at a time when the Empire had become more dependent on European finance, as detailed in the previous chapter. Whatever it is, the recent concession was an absolute victory for the Quay Company, which had waited for this since 1890. The Quay Company and the foreign merchants severed the links between the guilds and the state.[255]

---

[253] ZB., 361/7, 12 Nisan 1317 (25 April 1901).

[254]Quataert, *Social Disintegration*, p.109

[255] Ibid. p.110

From that time on, the workers were left to follow the only route against the state: to ally with the major dissidents of the Sultan. The Armenian political parties, which had been buried under the internal struggles among European-based leadership, flourished again in the cities and tried to benefit from the discontent of the port workers and started to agitate among them at the expense of the state once again. On May 29, 1906, the Ministry of the Police sent a circular warning that the Armenians would agitate the "persons from the staff of porters and laborers" and ordered that they should be prevented.[256]

The Hunchakian and Dashnakian parties would actively support the Revolution of 1908 and would be represented legally in the new parliament of December 1908. Whether the agitators of the Committee of Union and Progress had an organic link to the port workers is still unclear, but that they were the most active group in terms of collective actions just before and after the Revolution suggests that they at least "sympathized" with the revolution, which they celebrated and enjoyed through a series of strikes and boycotts throughout the following months.[257]

[256] ZB. 589/47, 16 Mayıs 1322 (29 May 1906). "hamal, amele ve saire takımından kişilere telkinatta bulunacakları…"

[257] For strikes see Yavuz Selim Karakışla, "1908 Grevleri," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 78 (1998). For Boycott see Çetinkaya, *1908 Osmanlı Boykotu : Bir Toplumsal Hareketin Analizi*

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PORT WORKERS' STRUGGLES AT THE EVERYDAY LEVEL

At the turn of the century, the port workers' struggles were not limited to their resistance against the state-supported European-capitalist penetration into the world of labor at the ports. Beyond those contentious forms of collective resistance, there were other struggles fought at the everyday level. In other words, workers did used more than the open, contentious means of action. They also used other daily practices, strategies and tactics to follow their interests. However, the use of those tools has attracted the attention of Ottoman historians only in recent years. Stephen Frank's observation on the peasants in rural Russia is illustrative of this manner:

> For every peasant assault, mass cutting, clash with district surveyors, hundreds of smaller if no less significant conflicts were played out in rural life. Peasants flooded courts and administrative bodies alike with petitions and suits asking, in effect, for official support of their vision of justice. If we are to reach a deeper understanding about how they experienced law and justice, or why they perpetrated deeds that this law had criminalized and how such actions reflected broader strategies of resistance, we need to focus closely on these everyday conflicts as they transpired both within the established legal system and beyond its porous boundaries.[258]

This chapter, thus, will focus on those means the port workers used to assert their mostly *class*ed interests. As Frank suggests, some of these means are simply the use and manipulation of legal mechanisms which had been enlarged by the growth of bureaucratic structures as an outcome of state-formation throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of them were means which were located by the

[258] Stephen Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1999). p. 11.

authority outside those legal boundaries and labeled as crimes. To show the use of both areas by the port workers, petitions, for the first, and the criminal conducts in the Police documents, for the second, will be used. However, like almost all the categorizations, this also has exceptions. There were also actions which were beyond those categories. The criminalized petitions that will be analyzed in the final part of the chapter show how a legal mechanism, the petitions, was used by the port workers, which was itself a form of resistance to the state-imposed definition of certain conducts of the lower classes as crimes.

Petitioning

Especially in the last two decades, a profound interest in the petitions written by lower classes has arisen, brought to the surface by a social history journal that devoted a special issue to this subject.[259] This newly emerging -though still nascent- literature suggests that petitions in the archives provide ample opportunities for social historians who are interested in bringing the subaltern classes, the voices of which have been ignored by the traditional historiography, into the center of historical analyses as history-making subjects by extracting their voices from the archival resources, rather than assuming them to have been simple passive receptors of the policies imposed through top-down processes.[260] As there are little very few resources citing the original voices of the subalterns, the so called ego-documents,

[259] See *International Review of Social History* 46, Supplement 9, Petitions in Social History (2001).

[260] Lex Heerma van Voss, "Introduction," *International Review of Social History* Supplement 9, no. 46 (2001).p. 10.; Yiğit Akın, "Reconsidering State, Party and Society In Early Republican Turkey:Politics of Petitioning," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 39 (2007).p. 437.

and as the most of the written documents remaining from the past centuries are restricted to resources which do not adequately represent the laboring classes, like the state archives, the petitions represent a way to reach to people, whose voices are absent in the traditional history writing.[261] Through the petitions, we can explore the living conditions of the lower classes, how the process of nation state-formation and the capitalist hegemony operated at the everyday level, how those transformations affected the ordinary people, the responses, and the means and the strategies of the lower classes against the ongoing change in their lives. In fact, petitions and other legal and less costly means of actions give more details and evidence about the dynamism of the lower classes. "Notwithstanding their high frequency," says Würgler, "revolts have remained extraordinary events…The confrontation between communities and states have more often taken the form of verbal supplication than of armed violence."[262]

Unfortunately, there are few studies devoted to the petition writing practices of the people living in the Ottoman Empire, just as in republican Turkey. This indifference may have both historiographical and source-based reasons. Firstly, this ignorance emanates from the modernist/progressive historiography with which most of the historians have been affiliated, which gives little role for the lower classes in the making of history and sees them as passive objects of the historical progress. This affiliation has caused them to show little interest in the original voices of the

[261] Despite this, because of the formalistic language and the involvement of other bureaucratic mediaries, petitions could not be easily called "ego-documents" like, for instance, auto-biographies. See Andreas Würgler, "Voices From Among the "Silent Masses": Humble Petitions and Social Conflicts in Early Modern Central Europe," *International Review of Social History* Supplement 9, no. 46 (2001).p. 32. ; also see Kabadayı, "Working for the State in a Factory in Istanbul:The Role of Factory Workers' Ethno-Religious and Gender Characteristics in State-Subject Interaction in the late Ottoman Empire ". p. 70-71.

[262] Würgler, p. 22.

ordinary people, which they probably regarded as unnecessary to analyze because of having almost no significance in the explanation of larger processes.

In addition, there is the archival difficulty, especially for the historians who seek the first-hand evidence related to the ordinary people, for, in the Ottoman archives, most of the original petitions are either absent or inaccessible.[263] Thus, in most cases, the presence of a petition is learned from a related-correspondence between the state institutions, which consists a one or two sentenced summaries of the petitions. As can be predicted, those summaries are likely to have been formed through the elimination of the parts of the content which the summarizer saw unnecessary to communicate, but which would have critical significance to social historians. Moreover, it also prevents the evaluation of the original texts and deciphering the linguistic tactics and tricks they used to persuade the reader in regard to the demands written in the petitions. Despite this alienation, even the summaries provide profound opportunities to extract aspects of the struggles and lives of the working classes. Also, as Kabadayı suggests, "the reaction of governing bodies, as inferred from archival documents, provides valuable insights."[264] In other words, through petitions, either originals or summaries, the various aspects of the struggle between the elites and the working classes in the late Ottoman era can be explained. Examples of this will be presented in the following.

Considering the fact that the use of petitioning in the last period of the Ottoman Empire was far more frequent than the use of violence, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the petitions deserve to be analyzed as a collective repertoire of the workers. The use of petitions by the Ottoman people was a

[263] Kabadayı, p. 66.

[264] Ibid., p. 67.

centuries-old practice. Written either individually or collectively, the petitions were given to high level officials or directly to the sultan and were one of the basic channels which created legitimacy in the eyes of the Ottoman public.[265] Petitions were used to ask not only for justice, but also for a wider range of topics from money for new-born babies to the appointment to a higher office. Petitions for complaints were made an institutional right for all Ottoman citizens in the first constitution of 1876, the *Kanun-i Esasi*.[266] Therefore, it is quite normal to expect that the first instrument through which workers would seek their rights would be to write petitions about their complaints.

In many states, petitions have been a widely used practice for centuries. Although they have been a way for rulers to control their subjects, they have also been an alternative in the hands of the masses to manipulate and use against the state. By opening a channel for the masses to voice their complaints, the petitioning creates a sense of legality and justice. In other words, the rulers create legitimacy by allowing the people to warn them in terms of exercising justice."[267] Especially when it became a citizenship right in the Ottoman case after 1876, it was owned by the people as an alternative means for collective assertion. Therefore, in other words, "the rulers were whether willingly or unwillingly the prisoners of their own rhetoric."[268] In this way, the petitions became a control mechanism which gave an

---

[265] İnalcık, p. 33.

[266] Article 14: "*Tebaa-i Osmaniye'den bir veya bir kaç kişinin gerek şahıslarına ve gerek umuma müteallik olan kavanin ve nizamata muhalif gördükleri bir maddeden dolayı işin merciine arzuhal verdikleri gibi meclis-i umumiye dahi müddei sıfatile imzalı arzuhal vermeğe ve memurinin ef'alinden iştikâye selâhiyetleri vardır." 1876 Kanun-i Esasi,* http://www.belgenet.com/arsiv/anayasa/1876.html

[267] Van Voss, p. 3.

[268] E.P. Thompson, "The Rule of Law," in *The Essential E.P.Thompson*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (New York: New Press, 2001). p. 437.

opportunity to oversee the state and even forced it to change when necessary. Thus it provided the option to the people to exercise "their own form of surveillance", as Fitzpatrick says for the Soviet case.[269] The Ottoman workers persistently attempted to use this practice as a first resort of action when their collective interests were threatened by other workers, higher officials and the companies.

As seen before, one of the most prevalent and significant means of contention that the workers used against the practices of the company and the state was to write petitions. They petitioned to several levels of the state to inform the state authorities about their sufferings and complaints that emerged as a result of the capitalist penetration into the labor relations in the ports. However, this was not the only paratice the port workers used against the company or in a time of critical crisis that threatened their livelihood. Long before, during and after that crisis, the workers had at the everyday level problems or desires, which they needed to communicate to the state through petitions, either collectively or individually. The collective petitions in which this study is interested show that the petitions especially triggered the incentive to come and act together, which reveals critical clues for discovering the class solidarity that was formed at the everyday level. In fact, those forms of acting together contributed very much to forming the direct actions that was analyzed in detail previously.

One of the leading topics in the petitions was complaints about the injustices of the collectors and the stewards of the guilds.[270] On September 13, 1882, the

---

[269] See Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Conversations and Listeners," in *Everyday Stalinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[270] According to Ertuğ, throughout the nineteenth century, the complaints about the stewards had increased, see Nejdet Ertuğ, *Osmanlı Döneminde İstanbul Hamalları* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2008). p. 40.

porters of the Customs of Galata wrote a petition that complained in this way. The petition began with explaining how things were done within the porters' guild. Usually, the porters submitted their daily wages and taxes to the guild stewards and collectors, who were appointed by the government, and then distribute this money after they separated a certain amount of it to safe-deposit boxes, used as a social security fund in today's terms.[271] According to the petition, everything had begun when the porters had wanted to learn about the fate of this money. They claimed that the accounts had not been seen in five years.To demand this to be done, they had written petitions to the First Department of Law and had not hesitated to put themselves into "extraordinary expenses." The Department found them right and decided to send representatives to the guild to see the accounts. However, they were forced to pay for this search for justice:

> …both the collectors and the guild steward resented our claim of our rights and scared and threatened us saying things like "at some time, we will make you imprisoned and exiled" and deceived the Ministry of Customs and some other places and succeeded at sending a letter to the Municipality for our dismissal from the trade, and the reason for our dismissal is not anything, but it is because that we sought our rights and that we did not work for the interest of the collectors and the guild steward…[272]

[271] See Ertuğ, p. 43-44. ; Quataert, *Social Disintegration,* p. 100.

[272] DH.MKT. 1339/46, 29 L 1299 (13 September 1882). *"gerek tahsildarlar ve gerek esnaf kethüdası şu hukukumuzu aramaklığımızdan dilgir ederek (gücenerek) "bir aralık sizi habs ve nefy ettiririz" gibi bir takım ihafe (korkutma) ve tehdidatta bulundukları mesellü Gümrük Nezareti'ni ve sair bazı mahalleri iğfal ederek esnaflıktan matrudiyetimize (kovulmamıza) dair Şehremaneti celilesine bir kıta tezkere istihsaline muvafık olmuşlar ve şu matrudiyetimiz ise başka bir esbaba mebni olmayıb mücerred hukukumuzu aramaklığımızdan ve bütün bütün tahsildar ve esnaf kethüdasının menfaati için çalışmadığımızdan ileri gelmiş olduğundan…"*

They demanded, in conclusion, that they should be allowed to continue at their jobs as usual and concluded that "nobody should be allowed to intervene to our rights."[273]

At first sight, this may seem to be an intra-class phenomenon that can not be completely categorized as a dimension of class struggle. This is partly true, for the lines that determine where a class begins and where it ends are not clear. Just as there is an ongoing difficulty and controversy about the criteria in distinguishing between a white collar officer and its manager along class lines (for, in the final instance, both of them are wage workers vis-a-vis the owners of the company), it is difficult to distinguish between the porters and the stewards along class lines. This difficulty, it seems, could be overcome partly by integrating class into the power analysis. In other words, it would not be absurd to suggest that whether the stewards and the porters struggle under the same flag differs according to the conjuncture. At some points, it was seen that the guild stewards played the leading roles in the collective direct actions against both the state and the company, especially in a time of severe crisis. Indeed, in those cases, looking at the cases through the lenses of class is much easier, for the lines are also determined along the owners of the port and the workers in it.

However, at other points, especially in everyday affairs, there was an ongoing struggle between different groups among those workers, some between the stewards and ordinary workers, some between the workers belonging to different ethnic and religious lines, etc. This second form of struggle, thus, shows that what is defined as working class is not a pure homogenized body, but rather consists of heterogeneous

[273] DH.MKT. 1339/6.

elements, with a hierarchical structure that could not be adequately integrated without recognizing the significance of the power dimension of these struggles.

On the other hand, reasons exist as to why these stewards and collectors can not be completely defined under the category of the "worker" of the guild, or in particular, "the porter." Besides the collectors, who, by definition, were not porters, the stewards of the porters are not generally elected or selected among the port workers. As usual, the government, according to a bidding system, assigned the stewards, but especially in the nineteenth century, they were assigned as other state officials were or the stewardship was given as "an equivalent for wages."[274]

In principle, of course, the government should have taken the views of the guild members into consideration and assigned a respected person as their steward[275] However, in practice, the guild stewards, especially in the Hamidian period, were assigned according to the personal and the networks of the clients at the upper levels, which later was considered to have brought on the destruction of the guild autonomy after this era.[276]As the leaders of the guilds were imposed from the top, the problems and discontent between the appointed men and the guild members became fiercer, as the complaints about the stewards increased. Thus, a general interpretation about the class identities of these persons can not be made without taking their immediate relations with the workers into account. In some cases, the stewards could easily identify with the workers, and thus led them to a definitive class struggle against the capital owners. In other cases, they were simply alienated from the workers and their

[274] Ertuğ, p. 31.

[275] Ibid., p. 36-40.

[276] Quataert, p. 102.

material interests, which allow to exhibit them as an arm of the state, positioning them as an antagonistic "other" from the point of view of the workers.

Another dimension that appears in this petition is that the bureaucratic expansion, or what generally is called the "state formation," despite its function as the mechanism of discipline and surveillance, also provided the lower classes critical opportunities to follow their interests or their struggles against the upper levels, by opening new spaces within the legal structure. In other words, the introduction of institutions like police, gendarmerie, courts and other state-imposed mechanisms which are related to the hegemonic establishment and expansion of the state were used and manipulated by the ordinary people in their everyday struggles.[277] Here it is seen how the workers used the existing legal structures to achieve their gained rights in the case that this desire was obstructed by the immediate top officials. It is most likely that to apply to a judicial institution with petitions was not the first choice of the workers. For, behind every formal attempt, there usually were several informal efforts that ended in disappointment. The workers most probably asked the guild stewards about their accounts in informal ways, and after seeing the impossibility of solving the problem in informal arena, by being openly rejected or in any other way, they then found it necessary to apply to the legal mechanisms. Indeed, the judicial mechanism made them victorious, but it did not protect them from the vindication of the upper clique of the guild, who attempted to use their own positions to eject those disobedient workers from the labor force. Against this, the workers used another

[277] Ferdan Ergut's conceptualization of police in Turkey by the term "double policing" presents a valuable example of this two-sided role. On the one hand, he argues,the modern police serve the interests of the ruling groups by acting upon the definition of crime made according to the ideological, class-based character of the state. On the other hand, however, the modern police seem partially as a beneficial institution for the lower classes, for as an instrument of the ruling groups, it has to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the population. See Ferdan Ergut, *Modern Devlet ve Doğası: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Toplumsal Denetimin Diyalektiği* (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2004). p. 20-21. ; p. 52-53.

mechanism, petition writing, to complain about their superiors to the upper level of the bureaucratic structure. This shows how the workers saw what is called the bureaucratic structure:

> They must have seen government as something which could be moved to decide in their favor- perhaps as a multi-layered formation, in which one layer could be encouraged to operate against another. Petitions tried to use perceived fissures within ruling classes, for instance, by addressing a central authority with complaints about a local authority, or addressing a colonial power with demands based on the metropolitan system of justice.[278]

One final point that attracts attention is that the petition displays one of the universal characteristics of petitions, that is, the deferential language used by the workers to increase their persuasive power vis-à-vis the upper levels.[279] In order to direct the elites on behalf of their own interests, the workers used rhetorical tools very effectively to show themselves as the most obedient subjects of the state and their persistent belief in that the system in which they lived would correct any injustices, because its legitimacy was beyond debate. Whether the workers really believed what they said in those petitions in terms of the legitimacy of the state is another matter, but it is certain that they had no chance but to display that they did believe in order to achieve their immediate ends. "Petitioners were always aware," writes Akın, "that the more vividly they described living conditions and the more touchingly they conveyed their demands and/or complaints, the greater the chances were that their petitions would be taken into consideration."[280]

---

[278] Van voss, p. 6. Remember in the previous chapter that the workers were mostly conscious of these fissures between the elites, and used them very efficiently, especially when they threatened them with going to the up-most level, that is, the sultan.

[279]Ken Lunn, and Ann Day, "Deference and Defiance: The Changing Nature of Petitioning in British Naval Dockyards," *International Review of Social History* Supplement 9, no. 46 (2001). p. 137.

[280] Akın, p. 444.

Indeed, the first sentence of the petition shows how perfectly they used this tool to communicate their feelings:

> His servants, for a long time, have been used as the porters in the Custom of Galata and in return have taken daily wages and these wages are collected by our guild's collectors and are pooled in the safe-deposit box of the guild and we are given only an allowance for bread from our wages, and the rest of it, by our consent and approval, was saved by the steward and collectors…[281]

Porters explained first how the "safe-deposit box" system operated, that they gave their all wages to the collector, and they got only money for bread, and that the rest of it was saved by the collectors and stewards "by their own consent." They transmit, in fact, that they lived in poor conditions, for only a little of what they gained was given to them, but immediately after, they add that they did not have any objection to the system, on the contrary, they said that they supported it. They only asked that it be more transparent and to give themselves a more secure feeling about their money. In other words, they were simultaneously able to give the message that although they lived in poor conditions due to the system, they had no problem or protest with it in essence and that their only aim was to use their legal rights in a free way, without the hostile intervention of the guild leaders.

A significant aspect of collective petition writing for the process of class formation is that it provides a remarkable space for the development of a collective culture. In other words, collectively prepared petitions could provide an opportunity and open a space for a collectively shared experience of struggle. The act of petitioning, indeed, kindled the struggles for other social and political rights in many countries. Van Voss writes, "The right to petition easily brought about the right to

---

[281] DH.MKT. 1339-46. "*Bendeleri öteden beri galata gümrüğünde hamallık hizmetinde kullanılarak hizmetimiz mukabili yevmiye almış ve almakta olduğumuz ücretler esnafımız tahsildarıları marufetiyle tahsil olunarak esnaf sandığında vaz' olunmakta ve yevmiyemize ancak bir ekmek parası verilip mütebakisi bizim rıza ve muvafakatimizle kethüda ve tahsildarlar nezdinde hıfz edilmekte olup…"*

assemble in order to draw up, discuss and sign the petition."[282] The preparation process for the petitions necessarily involves coming together, to discuss the common interests and wants of the signers and also to decide what sort of a language should be used in order to convince the receivers of acting on the behalf of the petitioners. Thus, it becomes "an exercise of politics" for the masses, especially in a setting which limits a political action to the monopoly of the higher classes.[283] In the process in which people struggle through petitioning for the injustices, they learn how to behave collectively and share their common experiences through certain forms of interaction and think, discuss and form the basis for other kinds of collective action which would enter their repertoire within some period. In other words, they create what Fantasia calls a "culture of solidarity," that is, "a cultural expression that arises within the wider culture, yet which is emergent in its embodiment of oppositional practices and meanings."[284] Furthermore, it also provides a basis for the study of "class as a process," which concentrates on the struggles of the working people.[285] The focus on local collective cultures and the struggles arising from them will allow us to "understand the class capacities of these struggles at a more generalized level."[286]

An illustrative case in this manner occurred in 1900, when a group of bargemen met in the guild room at the port and prepared a petition that complained about their worsened situation after the opening of the Galata Port. However, a

---

[282] Van Voss,opt.cit. p. 3.

[283] Ibid.

[284] Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). p. 17.

[285] See, E.P.Thompson, "Preface" in *The Making of English Working Class*, p. 9-14.

[286] Fantasia, p. 18.

record of this exists not by the evidence of a petition, but from a correspondence from the Minister of the Police, who transmitted the result of his investigation of the situation to the palace. The reason for this investigation was a tip that the nearly 500 men from the bargemen's guild had come together to prepare a document which declared the foundation of a community and that they collected money for this attempt. However, according to the minister, the information was faulty, since the so-called document was in fact a petition and the money was collected to give the former-policemen, Muhammed Ali, who had offered the bargemen to make their petition accepted at the upper offices in return for a fee. However, Muhammed Ali later gave up, for an unknown reason, and gave the money back to the bargemen.[287] This information and the eventual investigation and concern of the higher authorities show that the state officials were conscious of the potential of the collective petition-writing that paves the way for the formation of alternative-illegal communities and that could undermine the hegemony of state-imposed forms of social networks. Therefore, they were on the alert against such possibilities and considered the information related to this issue carefully to make deep investigations.

As the state elites' fears of such possibilities were not secret to the outside, they were open to manipulations and used as a card within the power struggles at the guilds. On July 1905, the police received similar information from the steward of the porters at Balat Dock. According to the steward, the porters had been gathering for a few days at a school or a Turkish bath under the leadership of Mustafa, the keeper of a coffeehouse at Ayvansaray, who had made them sign a protocol and threatened the ones who had not wanted to do. As the police immediately investigated Mustafa, it was understood, from the statements of Mustafa, that the porters, who had been

[287] Y.PRK.ŞH. 25/98, 24 Ra 1318 (22 July 1900).

discontent from the cruel administration of the steward, had given a petition to the municipality to change the steward. Mustafa, who learned this, had applied to the municipality to be assigned as a steward to the porters.[288] Although the police seemed to believe the narrative of Mustafa, it is unknown exactly which narrative was true. But what is important here is that throughout the process of the preparation of the petition, the porters came together in several places, not only in their work places or guild rooms, but also in the daily public spaces in order to discuss and write a petition. Thus it seems evident that the collective culture of the porters had developed to such an extent to diffuse to the daily space beyond their working areas.

However, this collective solidarity did not encompass the whole class. What seems to have been the same working group was divided into alternative solidarities accordingly with the division of labor within this area. The petitions, besides reflecting this division, were also used as an arena of struggle by those groups. Thinking through the process and the negative effects of capitalist penetration at the ports, it can be suggested that the cause of those inner struggles occurred as a result of the decreasing employment at the ports. As the company enlarged its influence year by year, the unemployment or the threat and distress of losing jobs were more felt by the port workers. As a result, the struggles over the rights to carry certain goods on certain routes increased throughout this period. From a correspondence from the Ministry of the Police to the Municipality on the last day of 1905, the existence of this kind of a struggle was seen within the porters of the Azapkapı Dock. The problem occurred when the Idare-i Mahsusa shipping company gave the right to carry coal between the warehouses and the barges, which had been under the monopoly of land porters for five years, to the coal heavers. It is most likely that the

[288] ZB 372/61, 21 Ca 1323 (24 July 1905).

problem that emerged with this could not have been dealt with by the company, the authority to bid this right was given to the municipality and the latter gave back the right to the porters. However, this time, the coal heavers applied and complained to the municipality and then, the inspector of the municipality prohibited the land porters from carrying coal at the docks. The results were so complex and chaotic that the Police Minister warned the Mayor that the discontent between both groups was "seen as unfavorable" by the police and that the municipality should give an absolute decision on the issue.[289]

A similar struggle occured between two groups of boatmen: the kayıkçıs and sandalcıs. Usually, while the kayıkçıs carried passengers, the sandalcıs were mostly used for the transfer of goods.[290] According to a document dated July 27, 1908, the heydays of the revolution, the kayıkçıs, who complained about the sandalcıs trying to take their jobs, gave a petition. The petition was in fact a second step, as usual, for the informal complaints to the guild collector were ignored and dismissed since, according to them, the collector was of the same place of origin as of the sandalcıs. In return, the sandalcıs gave a counter-petition, which stated that the claims of the kayıkçıs were inaccurate and that they had no problem with the guild collector. However, as the police investigated the situation, it was understood that the collector wanted to prevent the kayıkçıs from losing their jobs and throw them out of the work force located there. Rıza Efendi, the collector, had also personal interests in this attempt: he wanted to be the steward of the guild, and for this, it was necessary to

[289] ZB 372/127, 4 Za 1323 (31 December 1905). *"...her iki cihetin orada kömür naklinin kendilerine aidiyetinden bahisle sızıldı çıkarmakda oldukları ve bu halin devamı zabıtaca mahzurlu görüldüğüne binaen bu konuda gerekenlerin yapılmasının işarı..."*

[290] Quataert, p. 101.

make the sandalcıs, his fellow townsmen, dominant within the guild.[291] The micro instances of clientship, therefore, should not be ignored to comprehend the exact nature of the forms of solidarities among the lower classes.[292]

As seen in this example, the alternative solidarity networks against the state-imposed model of solidarity in the form of guilds operated at the ports not only on the grounds of class membership, or modeled according to the division of labor, but also they cross-cut ethnic, religious and regional affiliations.[293] In fact, In other words, the alternative group makings, which are argued in this chapter as the critical elements of the class formation, not only comprised of the networks formed along economic lines, but also social, cultural and political ones. It was seen in the previous chapter how these political-and-cultural-oriented solidarities, especially throughout the Armenian uprisings, played critical roles in the relations between the triangle of state, companies and ordinary people.

A final case that will be shown as evidence that those solidarities were active not only in macro movements, but within the daily struggles themselves, is about a problem that arose between the Muslim and Christian boatmen of Karaköy. The Muslim boatmen created problems and applied to the state, complaining that the Christians, numbered 20, had been given the right to operate along the entire port, while the Muslim boatmen, numbered 60, were constrained to a small area at

---

[291] ZB 486/151, 27 C 1326 (27 July 1908).

[292] In fact, Kırlı points out that this kind of clientship along regional affiliations were so pervasive among the *esnaf* of Istanbul that "it was rare to find a workplace where the master and his journeymen and apprentices had migrated from different regions." See, Cengiz Kırlı, "A Profile of Labor Force in Early Nineteenth Century Istanbul," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 60 (2001).,p.135.

[293] This is also paralel with Kabadayı's study on workers in the factories, which suggests that "gender, religion, ethnicity, and clientship can be utilized as parameters to map the relationships of interaction between the state and the subjects in the factories." Kabadayı, p. 8.

Karaköy. This meant an injustice for the latter, since the Muslims earned 1 or 2 piasters, while the Christians gained 20 or 30. The Muslim boatmen demanded that the number of boats be equally divided between the boatmen from both religions. However, the police considered this as "absolutely inappropriate in terms of security."[294] Thus, the minister wrote to the Port Administration that the boatmen should be allowed to operate in rotation accordingly to their religious affiliations and that to make their operation easier, the port should be lengthened.[295] This meant that the state itself did not rely on its traditional model of guilds to melt the differences among workers on the behalf of their obedience to the state, but submitted to the forms of solidarity imposed from below.

Crime

As the state views the lower classes as a threat to society, who are undesired, shamed, feared and thus, tries to marginalize and exclude them from the daily life of the upper classes, the language and behavior against them become more visible. This relation may have contradictory consequences for these lower classes. Because they are continuously feared and seen as suspicious for the security and legitimacy of the state, the state's social control practices against them become much more aggressive and intricate than they have otherwise been. These can have three forms: With social and patriotic policies it can gain the compliance of the lower classes; it can apply disciplinary policies on the everyday life of workers to the point that they prevent

[294] ZB 468/162, 28 S 1324 (23 April 1906). *"…bütün rıhtım boyunda kırk İslam ve kırk Hristiyan sandalcının bulundurulması inzibat nokta-i nazarından kat'iyen gayri caiz olmasına binaen…"*

[295] Ibid.

them from becoming a problem, thus, keeping them distant from the sight of the elites, which make these lower classes to show their discontent in their autonomous daily cultures; or the state absolutely dismisses them from its own space and applies control practices that are oppressive, which may channel the discontent of lower classes to resistant reactions.[296]

The application of the first form was seen in the first chapter, and the third in the previous one. The daily crimes that will be analyzed presently occured when those everyday practices of the workers, which paved the way for autonomous cultures, were found or "discovered" as opposing conducts to the hegemony of the state. The term "discovery" is of a conscious usage here: As the open and mostly collective contentious actions had too great a cost for the lower classes, like losing their jobs and being deported from Istanbul, the contentious and mostly individual actions of the workers were usually aimed at remaining hidden and invisible to the upper strata. When these contentious actions are analyzed thoroughly, as will be shown in this section, it must be understood that these actions can not be disregarded as ordinary, individual infringement of law and order. These actions implicate an opposition to and negotiation with state-imposed definitions of social issues, and thus, they deserve to be treated alongside the other repertoires of the class movement.

Of course, it is significant to note that such criminal practices did not emanate from class interests per se. On the contrary, most of them had to do with the personal interests of the individuals who did them, but those personal interests were not completely independent from the class of the "criminal" people. In fact, those crimes were mostly related to the economic and social necessities and the sufferings of the lower classes. As they found the opportunity to improve their conditions, they tried

[296] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. p. 17.

to do it at the least cost, which led them to what Scott calls "guerilla-style campaigns":

> Two specific observations: First, the nature of resistance is greatly influenced by the existing forms of labor control and by beliefs about the probability and severity of retaliation. … The second is that resistance is not necessarily directed at the immediate source of appropriation. Inasmuch as the objective of the resisters is typically to meet such pressing needs as physical safety, food, land, or income, and to do so in relative safety, they may simply follow the line of least resistance.[297]

One of those guerilla-style campaigns was against the law and regulations of the state which made the unemployed migrants potentially criminal and prohibited their entry to the capital city of Istanbul. In the eyes of the state elites, immigrants were "upsetting the neighborhood life of Istanbul."[298]The idea of the state elites, especially of the Sultan was that those people formed a potential threat to the security of the city, especially following the Armenian uprisings in the city, and that they were "lazy and self-indulgent people, who would not not be able to support themselves in Istanbul."[299] As Özbek suggests, this was related not only to the security problem that the elites wanted to solve with social exclusion. Those people were, at the same time, potential beggars and layabouts, who were considered to be violators of the new definitions of society made by the Hamidian regime. According to Özbek, this new definition put "work and job" as the basis of the wealth of a society. Therefore, "to work and to produce is a necessary duty for every individual who lives in the society, as a requirement of the social contract."[300] Thus, the

---

[297] Scott, p. 34-35.

[298] Kırlı, "A Profile of Labor Force in Early Nineteenth Century Istanbul." p.135.

[299] İ.HUS. 128, 19 Ra 1311, quoted in Vahdettin Engin, *Sultan Abdulhamid ve İstanbul'u* (İstanbul: Simurg, 2001). p. 59.

[300] Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet:Siyaset, İktidar, Meşruiyet, 1876-1908*. p. 85.

increasing population of the urban, unemployed and undeserved poor in Istanbul was accompanied by a process of social exclusion that the elites, led by Abdulhamid, applied especially with the 1890s.[301]

This fear was more apparent when those lower classes who wanted to come to Istanbul were Armenians. The legacy of the Armenian uprisings of 1895 and 1896 in Istanbul led to a constant and special exclusionary practice against the lower class Armenians. Immediately after the Bab-ı Ali Demonstration, the Sultan ordered that "poor and unemployed Armenians in Istanbul should be returned to their homelands and the entry of the vagabonds coming from the countryside to Istanbul should be prevented."[302] Especially in the eyes of the Sultan Abdulhamid II, it was impossible anymore to trust the lower class Armenians as loyal subjects. So much so that, four years later, when he learnt that the Ministry of Interior allowed those kind of Armenians to enter the city, he immediately and strictly intervened by reminding them of the 1895-96 events in Istanbul, and ordered that "the Armenians whose conducts [were] unknown and of the improper kind" should be absolutely stopped from entering the city.[303] On June 3, 1900, the palace sent another order to the Police Minister, which stated that the number of "Armenians like porters, workers" was increasing and that they should be kept under surveillance because of "their vagabond actions."[304]

---

[301] See İlker Cörüt, "Social Rationality of Lower Class Criminal Practices in the Late Nineteenth Century İstanbul" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2005).p. 3-8.

[302] İ.HUS. 85, 19 R 1313 quoted in Engin, p. 60. *"İstanbul'da bulunan işsiz ve güçsüz Ermenilerin memleketlerine iadeleri ve taşradan gelecek serserilerin dahi İstanbul'a girişlerine engel olunması…"*

[303] İ.HUS. 9, 7 M 1317 quoted in ibid.

[304] ZB 30/26, 21 Mayıs 1316 (23 April 1906).

The fear was at such a high level that the Armenian workers who came even to the periphery regions of the city were kept under close surveillance. According to a police document dated June 12, 1907, twelve Armenians who had been brought to work at the coal mine in Gebze were investigated because they were suspected of entering the city and bringing other Armenians with them in the following days. However, at the end of the investigation, they were understood to be "reliable" and allowed to work at the mine.[305] What is striking here, in other words, is that the practice of social exclusion towards the unemployed and vagabond kind of urban (undeserved) poor did not only have to do with the "moral and economic principles" that Özbek and Cörüt suggests. Or, to explain in more concrete terms, the definition of society that the state imposed in this era involved not only moral and economic terms. The degree of danger and threat against the ideal society the state-elites had in their minds was not independent from the ethno-religious identity of the urban poor. The social exclusion, therefore, had also an identity dimension which imagined a secure and obedient society as belonging to certain ethno-religious identities and excluding the certain ones as "others." Throughout the last decade preceding the revolution of 1908, there was a state-imposed exclusionary and disciplinary practice especially against the Armenian lower classes trying to enter Istanbul. However, it was not exempt from the dismissive reactions of the lower-classes, be them Muslim or Christian, who made a hole in this hegemonic wall through smuggling those kind of people to the Constantinople.

One of the most popular ways to enter the city in safety was to take a boat from the periphery areas near Istanbul. Thus, expectedly, the heroes of this type of adventure were the boatmen. On May 19, 1906, the Ministry of the Police sent a

[305] ZB 55/106, 30 Mayıs 1323 (12 June 1907).

correspondent to the Municipality of Istanbul. According to the document, Armenians from Gebze and the surrounding localities, had been smuggled into Istanbul by Greek boatmen. To prevent this, the Ministry wrote for the establishment of an extra police station with an extra police force there.[306] At first sight, it may be argued that what led to this kind of solidarity between the fugitives and the boatmen was their belonging to the same religious identity. In other words, a conservative point of view would analyze this as a hostile plot among the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire against the Turco-Muslim state. However, the motive behind this collaboration was not the ethno-religious identity, but the mutual (economic) interests of each side. For instance, Dimitri, a boatmen-carpenter from Pazarköy, Bursa, were smuggling Armenian women to the periphery docks like Dobruca, from where the women would be smuggled to Istanbul, by his boat in return for a fee of between 4 mejidiye and 1 lira for each woman. [307] The police document about this person wrote that the smuggling of the Armenian women from that region, "who have been escaping to Istanbul since before now," could not be stopped, and that Dimitri had made this smuggling a kind of "trade for himself."[308] The document also stated that this person was such an immoral man that he raped the women while sailing on the sea, merging his disobedience against the state with his personal immorality and thus, creating the perception that the two conducts were inseparable with each other. [309]

---

[306] ZB 373/49, 6 Mayıs 1322 (19 May 1906).

[307] ZB 434/53, 4 Kanunisani 1322 (17 January 1907) *"...beher kadın için dört mecidiyeden bir liraya kadar ve daha ziyade miktar paralar alarak..."*

[308] Ibid. *"... kendine ticaret .... ittihaz etmiş olan ..."*

[309] Ibid. *"...başka sui ahlak ı siyahi olması cihetinden....deniz üzerinde bir çok zaman kalarak istediği kadına tasallut ederek..."*

The reason for migrating to the city for those women was to find jobs and work to sustain their lives. However, the elites saw their existence in the city as a potential problem of security, because they were both poor and Armenian. So what we are witnessing here, in fact, was a conflict between different rationalities. While the state did not accept them as citizens equal to the rich and Muslim people, they had to drill into those restrictions through the space where the hegemonic system accepted as illegal, according to its own rationality. In other words, the criminal conduct here became a space for the negotiation of those hostile but "legal" practices imposed by the government. In this space, the boatmen played a critical role for the use of this space, which made them collaborators to those people. On April 14, 1908, the Ministry of the Police wrote to the Province of Hudavendigar that ten Armenian women had been smuggled by two boatmen, whom, it seems, had been hired by a mediator and after landing, they had scattered to work as maids.[310] There were also many other instances in the police archives about boatmen who smuggled Armenians who were migrating to and from Ottoman lands. According to a correspondence from the Ministry of Trabzon, a certain Mustafa Reis and his friends were caught smuggling nineteen Armenians to Russia. The correspondence asked to take measures to prevent them, as "it attracts the attention that such kinds of incidents are not missing in such a locality that is near to Russia."[311] On July 16, 1907, the Ministry of the Police sent a correspondence to the provinces of Beirut and Halep, stating that Armenians who had gone to the USA in the past and had been rejected by the Ottoman government when they wanted to return, had landed with the help of the

[310] ZB 430/112, 1 Nisan 1324 (14 April 1908).

[311] ZB 460/71/, 22 Ağustos 1323 (4 September 1908). *"...Rusya ya civar olan böyle bir mahalde bu gibi vukuatın eksik olmaması nazar ı dikkati celb olduğu..."*

boatmen at the Beirut Dock and had been smuggled from there through the province of Halep by a certain bobbin maker (*makaracı*) Hüseyin Ağa.[312]

It may be a hasty and ungrounded analysis to suggest that it was evidence of the solidarity among the persons of the same classes. However, as class is not independent from the real experiences of people, class solidarity is not also exempt from these experiences. Of course, what motivated the boatmen to smuggle people from one place to another was not a feeling of solidarity (either along ethno-religious or class lines) but the economic gains that those exchanges brought to them. What they had in common, however, was that both sides were conscious that what they were doing was a kind of opposition to the state and its laws and both sides were opposing, though most probably without realizing, the state-imposed definition that a secure and moral society was one that excluded a certain class or community. In other words, the boatmen, through their practice, dismissed the rationality of the state-elites that had been imposed upon them.

To sustain this practice and to camouflage their illegal activities, the boatmen had to apply some tactics against the threat of security forces. On December 12, 1906, the Ministry of the Police emphasized in a correspondence that the boatmen from Izmit, a district near Istanbul, were absolutely forbidden to come to Istanbul for fishing. At the first glance, it may seem to be an ordinary and traditional restriction for the violation by one guild of doing trade in another's area. However, when thought of together with above-mentioned cases and others, it is likely it had to do with a popularly used tactic to mask the smuggling activities. As mentioned above, Izmit and other periphery regions of the capital city provided useful areas from

[312] ZB 474/52, 3 Temmuz 1323 (16 July 1907). . The rejection of Armenians were ordered by the sultan *"...bu gibilerin iskelelerde kabul edilmeyerek radde i iadeleri hazreti padişahın iradesi gereği bulunduğu halde..."*

which the excluded classes could enter the city.[313] Fishing was a useful method for hiding the real intention of smuggling persons and things from one place to another. Actually, it was used not only by the boatmen in and around Istanbul. A police document from September 1907 wrote about the boatmen from Sürmene, a town of Trabzon, who had sailed to Romania pretending to hunt bothus, a precious kind of fish, but with the real aim of smuggling arms from there.[314]

Indeed, the boatmen played a critical role in the smuggling of not only persons, but also goods and guns. Again, the fact that the boatmen were active in the smuggling of arms did not show the prima facie suggestion that they were members of terrorist organizations. Instead, that the arms were smuggled along with other goods such as tobacco suggests that the motive was mostly economic.[315] For instance, on May 1906, the Police Administrator of Istanbul wrote that in a police search of a boat near Çatladıkapı a revolver, seven cartridges, 2200 grams of tobacco and 1200 grams of *tumbak*, tobacco used for nargilah, had been found.[316] Another police document reported that a certain boatman, Yusuf Şükran, had been understood to smuggle gunpowder, arms, dynamite and tobacco from the foreign ships coming to Cyprus.[317] Furthermore, the ethno-religious identity did not again prevail here as a necessary base for solidarity. For, the boatmen from different identities could also serve to transfer of guns for the militant organizations. For instance, on July 1907,

---

[313] For a similar case, see the document about the arrest of a boatmen who smuggled a man with his boat from İzmit ZB. 434/3, 9 Eylül 1322 (22 September 1906).

[314] ZB 460/8484, 8 Eylül 1323(21 September 1907).

[315] For a study on the tobacco smugglers in this period, see Donald Quataert, "The Regie, Smugglers and the Government," in *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance, 1881-1908* (New York and London: NYU Press, 1983). p. 13-40.

[316] ZB 379/43, 13 Mayıs 1322 (26 May 1906).

[317] ZB 467/121, 17 Şubat 1322 (2 March 1907).

the police learned that the Armenian militants in Crimea had sent sixteen bombs to Istanbul by three Muslim boatmen. It was declared that the officials who caught those boatmen would be awarded 100 liras.[318]

Those activities of the boatmen became so frequent that they were held under close surveillance by the security officials of the state. Especially the boatmen had contacts with the foreign ships to carry persons and goods were treated as potentially criminal subjects. On April 29, 1906, the Ministry of the Police sent a correspondence to the Port Administration, which stated that there were eight boatmen in the Ahırkapı Dock in Istanbul, and

> since they can have contact with the foreign ships and ferries which are held offshore of Kızkulesi and Salacak and in front of Ahırkapı, and can land goods and persons, it should be inferentially notified whether there is any necessity to keep boatmen at that dock and if it is, what kind of measures are to be taken so that they will not venture into any kind of improperness.[319]

Against this surveillance by the security officials, the boatmen used their own weapons. In addition to giving violent replies to the officials,[320] they also applied manipulative tactics on the legal means that were in their hand. On August 1907, a policeman named Kamil Efendi wanted to search a boat that supposedly was loaded with timber. According to the regulations on the search of boats, the policeman was required to give pratique that referred the permission for inspection

---

[318] ZB 597/44,17 Temmuz 1323 (30 July 1907).

[319] ZB 468/175,16 Nisan 1322 (29 April 1906). *"...Ahurkapı iskelesinde bulunan sekiz nefer kayık ve sandalcıların Kızkulesi ve Salacak açıklarındaki ve Ahırkapı pişgahında tevkif etmekde olan ecnebi vapur ve gemilerle ihtilat edip eşhas ve eşya çıkarabilecekleri cihetle mezkur iskelede kayık ve sandalcı bulunmasına esasen lüzum ve ihtiyac olup olmadığının ve olduğu surette bunların bu yolda bir güna uygunsuzluğa cüret etmemeleri için ne gibi tedbir ittihaz olunacağının muhammen inbası..."*

[320] For a case about smugglers of gunpowder and tobacco, who fired against the policemen that wanted to search the boat, see ZB 415/66, 1 Kanunuevvel 1320 (14 December 1904).

and had to have a port sergeant with him. The narratives of both sides differ for the rest of the story. While the boatmen wrote a petition that complained about the police official who searched his boat in an arbitrary way contrary to the regulations and found nothing, the Port Administration confirmed this claim with its own interrogation relying on other witnesses and wrote to the Istanbul Police Administration that the policeman should be punished. However, the policeman, whose written deposition was taken by the Police, wrote that he had done everything in accordance with the regulations and that the boatmen had in fact illegal goods and arms, but he had thrown them to the sea when he saw the police. Relying on this deposition, the Police Administrator replied to the Port that everything had been done in accordance with the laws.[321] Of course, it cannot be known which narrative reflected the reality, but what is critical here is that the boatman used (or manipulated) a legal means in his hand in an effective way, to follow his interests.

Conflict over Meaning

Two spaces of everyday resistances in the previous two sections have been discussed: One was the legal means of petitioning, which the workers used as a legal right to solve their problems against the power holders. The other was through criminal practices, which were again pervasively used against the state-imposed definitions on what makes the society ideal and moral. However, these categorizations, legal and illegal, ignore the liminal circumstances in which the practices applied by the workers could be defined clearly as neither legal nor illegal. The practice of petition writing, despite the displeased reactions of the authorities

[321] The corrospondences and depositions dated between 8 Ağustos 1323 (21 August 1907) and 29 Ağustos 1323 (11 September 1907). can be found in ZB 59/5.

occasionally, was regarded as a legal means of dialogue between the authority and its subjects that had a traditional and ideological legitimacy in the eyes of both sides.

Criminal practices, on the other hand, despite reflecting an opposite rationality against top-down definitions, were recognized as illegal and "criminal" by both sides. In other words, the workers who committed those crimes certainly were conscious that what they were doing was not in accordance with the law. However, the case that will be presented in this section shows that a formally legal tool, petition-writing, could have not only an oppositional character, but also an illegal one and thus the very legitimacy of that means became liminal throughout the struggle itself.

On Saturday September 14, 1895, at a time when the capital city was like a boiling cauldron with the opening of the ports and the rumors of a great Armenian uprising, a petition was left in front of the gate of the Istanbul Mayor at around 5:30. The petition was signed by a most likely pseudonym (considering that he could not be found), Mustafa bin Hasan bin Salih, in the name of the bargemen. After leaving the petition, the persons immediately fled and could not be found as this event was communicated by the Mayor to the GrandVezier the next day. The Pasha wrote, in an apparently anxious tone, that a few days earlier, the bargemen had opposed a French ship which had attempted to tie up to the port, and the events following this had been stopped by the intervention of the state institutions and through their stewards. Now, the Pasha continued, some of them had left a petition and disappeared, "in a literally attracting manner" and "although the guild had no engagement with the municipality", referring angrily that the legally defined hierarchy, to which the workers should have obeyed in petitioning, had been completely dismissed and

ignored by the petition-givers. According to the Pasha, this "impertinence" was due to the tolerance that had been shown to those bargemen in the previous period.

He reported that as he had ordered the necessary places to find the petition-writers, he also had sent a copy of the petition to the GrandVezier. Its language was so informal that it provides a rare opportunity to the researcher who wants to hear the real voices, purified of the formality, of the workers' themselves. Thus it will be necessary to quote the petition in full in order to empathize with the feelings and thoughts of the workers, reflected in those words:

> Although the transfer of a guild from one place to another or to force a guild do a certain work depends on a decree of the Sultan, this time the Ministry of the Police and its official at the port, Tahsin Kapudan, by putting our whole guild down into confinement and enchainment, ruined all of us and broke most of our barges by allowing them to be operated by the soldiers, and they also practiced what the significantly accepted article on torture in the Constitution.. Nevertheless, Tahsin Kapudan, by force and gratuitously, had us carry the stones and the sand and the lime which were necessary to the halls that he built, and now for the sake of God, be we are protected from this ruin by the implication of the justice of the laws. [322]

To begin with, the way the petition presented is itself an opposition to the state-imposed way of solving problems. The bargemen, in fact, had a guild structure through which they could communicate their complaints to the authorities by legal channels. Moreover, they also could have petitioned to the local authority, the Port Administration, to reflect their discontent and relieve them from this difficulty. Also, they could have petitioned through legal channels directly to the Sultan or to the GrandVezier. However, since those channels, most possibly, were seen as so

---

[322] Y.MTV 128/89,25 Ra 1313 (15 September 1895). "*Bir esnafın bir mahalden diğer mahalle nakli veyahud bir esnafın küreğe konulması irade-i seniyeye mutavakkıf olduğu halde bu kere umum esnafımızı Zaptiye Nezaretiyle limanda bulunan Tahsin Kapudan habs ve zencire vaz'ıyla cümlemizi perişan ve mavunalarımızı esakire işletdirerek ekserisini kırmış ve Kanun-i Esasiye'nin kabul ettiği mühim işkence hakkında da icra eylemekdedirler. Mamafi Tahsin Kapudan inşa eylemekde bulunduğu kendi konaklarına lüzum görünen taş ve kum ve kirec ve saireyi cebren ve meccanen çakerlerine nakl etdirmiş artık Allah rızasıçün hakkında da adalet-i kanuniyenin icrasıyla işbu perişaniyetten vikaye buyrulması babında."*

corrupted, they saw the solution of their problems only in petitioning another authority. And they did not use legal channels to make the Sultan or the GrandVezier directly aware of the situation, most likely because they were conscious that their petitions that complained about a great ministry and its officials would not be transmitted by the mediating bureaucracy to the highest authorities. Thus, if they had used legal channels, their petitions would not have gone to the places where they aimed, their problems would not be solved, and most critically, their sufferings might further be increased by the local authorities to such a level that they could even loose their jobs and be sent into exile, as were their peers, as seen in the previous chapter. Therefore, the workers applied to a method which they thought would be the least costly and the most effective. They left a petition to a high authority to which they were not legally engaged, in a hidden way that would not risk their identification, but would make those authorities aware of their problems and intervene to the situation on their behalf.

The linguistic tactics used by the workers in the petition also deserve to be mentioned. The bargemen referred to two different sources of justice: The law and the conscience. They tried to justify their own positions by arguing that what they were exposed to by the police contradicted with the special regulation on the guilds, which required the Sultan's decree to move them from one place to another or to force them to do a certain job. Furthermore, they also emphasized that what the police did was torture and that it was against to the related Article of the Constitution which banned torture. The article to which they referred here was Article 26 of the

Constitution of 1876, which says that "torture and other kinds of maltreatment are absolutely and completely forbidden."[323]

It is meaningful that, in a political conjuncture, in which the Constitution and the parliament were left practically inefficient by the palace authority, the port workers, belonging to one of the economically lowest and the most illiterate groups of the empire, and who were expected to be the people least interested in political issues, were conscious of their constitutional right and legal standing and used this as a critical weapon in their struggles. On the other hand, the bargemen did not solely rely on the effect this legal reference would create on power holders, so that they made sure to emphasize their legal justification, and they also addressed the conscience of the authorities by emphasizing that they were in a desperate situation, and that their means of livelihood was seriously harmed, and used such begging words like "For the sake of God" when they wanted to be saved from their sufferings. In short, they attempted to use every channel to manipulate the means of legitimacy in the hands of the power holders to achieve their ends.

"A ruling class," Hay argues, "organizes its power in the state."[324] To get the legitimacy of the whole population, it is necessary to dominate, regulate and shape the everyday life of the citizens. The modern state, as the only legitimate coercive power able to exercise this function, is the primary institution for the legitimization of the ideas of the ruling classes. In this attempt, "the logic, practices and agencies of the modern state had become so pervasive that even acts of resistance to them

---

[323] *1876 Kanun-i Esasi*, http://www.belgenet.com/arsiv/anayasa/1876.html "İşkence ve sair her nevi eziyet katiyen ve külliyen memnudur."

[324] Douglas Hay, "Property, Authorithy and the Criminal Law," in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson, and Cal Winslow. (London: Penguin Books, 1975).p. 62.

necessitated resorting to these same practices and agencies."[325] Within this environment in which all available institutions, in the final analysis, served to the survival of the existing class-based system, it seems that the only available option before the port workers was to manipulate the existing institutions. In this case the reference to the Constitution and to the regulation about the requirement of the sultanic decree was the most prevailed linguistic weapon used in the petition.

As Thompson shows, although the law is an ideological instrument to "mediate and reinforce existing class relations", it is an institution which gives the opportunity to the ruled to manipulate it for their own cause.[326] The law, as an instrument of the legitimization of the hegemonic system, has to seem just and non-discriminative. Thus, the ruled, instead of turning its back on the law because of its class-based structure, tries to capture some clauses of it as part of their own rhetoric and fight for their rights by means of law.[327] If not possible, even then they "still felt a sense of legal wrong: the propertied had obtained their power by illegitimate means."[328]

The transgression of the legitimate channels to defend their constitutional rights caused a sense of legal wrongness for the bargemen because the practices of illegal forced labor were not intelligible within the hegemonic language and it stigmatized them as the offenders. The bargemen could only express their experiences with reference to the being other and the universal premise of equal citizenship attached to this category paradoxically. This paradox, embedded in the

[325] Khaled Fahmy, "The anatomy of Justice: Forensic Medicine and Criminal Law in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society*, 6, 1999. p. 23.

[326] E.P. Thompson, "The Rule of Law" p. 436.

[327] İbid.

[328] Ibid., p. 434.

hegemonic system, enabled bargemen to turn the disciplinary channels like the law against the ruler, who aimed at utilizing the law to strengthen its hegemony by pacifying the workers. Yet, the port workers actively used the legitimate channels for the sake of their own benefits, so in return the law became an instrument to fragment the hegemony of the state, not to renegotiate with the system.

This was also similar of other movements in the world. For example, Ranajit Guha, who conducted field work in Utar Pradesh to reveal the multidimensionality of power relations, explains how the universal premise of equality before law to legitimize the new property relations was utilized by the colonized to rupture the hegemony of the colonizer. " … the historic paradox of colonialism – the paradox that law, intended to serve as a basic defining principle of colonial rule … became itself an instrument of misunderstanding about the very nature of this dominance…. Distortions of the ruler's knowledge of the ruled, and vice versa…"[329] The colonial legacy is historically contingent. Not only the colonized, but also the European culture itself, includes contradictions and alternative visions, which makes possible for the latter to manipulate them.

Nevertheless, returning to the petition of the bargemen, this attempt by them seemed to be ineffective from the perspective of the power holders. It appears from the correspondences that the state elites were baffled and angered at such a "courageous" enterprise by the workers. After reading the correspondence sent by the Mayor, the GrandVezier's anxiety about and anger at the situation was directly reflected in his words to the Minister of the Police. Following his reminder that he also had made the Ministries of the Navy, the Public Works and Interior, besides the

[329] Ranajit Guha, "Introduction," in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).p. 19.

Police, aware of the petition and that he had ordered things to do on the issue, he wrote that the claims ”about a state institution as reliable and critical as the Ministry of the Police”, written in the petition, “all of them and especially that the guild was enchained and tortured,” were “such offensive things” that the persons who wrote and left this petition and “the others whose protests have been seen” should be arrested immediately. [330]

As can be seen in this angry language of the Mayor and the GrandVezier, this kind of an action created great anxiety among the state elites, especially in a period in which the discontent among the working classes was high within the city. Thus, in spite of the order that those bargemen should be caught and judged, the GrandVezier also ordered an investigation into the content of the petition and that the result of it should be directly reported to the Sublime Port.[331] In short, although the immediate aims of the bargemen to bring the higher elites on their side to oppose their suffering, their way of presenting their discontent, their tactics of justifying themselves and their brave opposition to a ministry of the state, sufficed to show that what is called hegemony is not without weak points, built on fragile columns of legitimacy, which can be shaken when the lower classes aggressively play on those points.

[330] Y.A.HUS. 336/81, 25 Ra 1313 (15 September 189). *“...yazılan şeylerin cümlesi ve alelhusus esnaf merkumunun zencire rabtı ve haklarında işkence icrası maddelerinde Zabtiye nezareti gibi devletin mu’temet bir dairesinin ithamda teşrike dair müftereyat-ı cerime pek ağır şeyler olub…”*

[331] Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study started out with a simple assumption that there is no one way to write history, and in particular, the history of the late Ottoman Empire. In fact, as a response to the common depiction in the eyes of most of the new and old, popular and academic historians who almost exclusively have emphasized the role of elites, and particularly the sultan, in the developments of the Hamidian period, and related with it, in the formation of the Revolution of 1908. On the one hand, especially for the old historiography and the popular historians, this period has been characterized either by the repressive, bloody autocracy or by the enlightened, merciful and transformative rule of Sultan Hamid. The new historians, on the other hand, seem less interested in the influence of the subaltern classes on "big structures and large processes," a la Tilly, than to focus on either the aspects of modern state formation, with its disciplinary practices, or the autonomy of the subaltern classes with their own autonomous mentalities.

The desire to put the common people at the center of history necessarily requires discovering, analyzing and constructing the roles they played, not only in the effectiveness of the power of the elites, but also in the transformation of the aspects of that power. Therefore, this thesis examined the Hamidian era, one of the most attracting time periods with the dominant emphasis on the role of elites, by stressing the active participation of the working classes, and particularly the port workers, in what we still can not keep ourselves from calling the "Hamidian" period

of Ottoman history. The struggles between the workers and the elites (of both the companies and the state) provide valuable space to extend this form of historical understanding to further lands.

To construct a history focusing on this struggle, first the basic cornerstones of the arena of this struggle were presented, namely, the emergence and development of Armenian nationalist-socialist politics, the penetration of the European capitalism into the Empire and then, in particular, to the ports, and the specific hegemonic practices of the state which used both the tools of repression and the means of legitimacy to assert its power. As all these factors themselves had emerged and been shaped through historical processes, they were presented in separate sections in the chapter. Armenian political parties, which represented a new way for Armenians to show their discontent against the system, which threatened their jobs and livelihoods and massacred their relatives in their homelands, could not be isolated from at least a half century of power struggles within the Armenian community. This, in turn, created or activated a new meaning of "danger" to the identity of Armenian, both in the eyes of state elites and in most of its Muslim lower-class citizens.

The entry of European companies to the Port of Istanbul was shaped through the net of unequal power relations between the Europeans and the Ottomans, and the hegemonic way of thinking which attributed the dynamics of "development" without taking notice of the lower-classes gaining their livelihoods through the "old" system of labor relations. The more the companies attempted to establish their own understanding of labor relations at the port, the more desperate the workers felt, seeing that there was no way out but to openly resist and threaten the system with instability and illegitimacy. This, in turn, forced the elites to take notice of the workers in their projects. Finally, the power policies of the state in this era

influenced, and were influenced by, the tactics and strategies of the working classes. Through repressive policies, it tried to deter and limit the contentious alternatives of the workers, by criminalizing any kind of collectivity, emphasizing security and stability, underlining the role of religion in creating a "moral" society, and through homogenizing the production and circulation of ideas. Instead, it weaved hegemony around the personality of the Sultan, with his social policies, and directed the workers to play off the seeming distinction between the bureaucracy and the sultan himself. In other words, while this limited the methods of contention, it also created new spheres of contention, both in the legal and illegal arenas.

The second chapter dealt with the collective struggles of the workers in an era when the proletarianization, the Armenian movement and the deepening of the Sultanic hegemony intersected. Beginning with the Kumkapı Demonstration, the Chapter tried to show that neither the Armenian movement, nor capitalist penetration and its influences on the workers, nor the power policies of the Hamidian era can be thought of in isolation to each other. All three, in one way or another, affected and shaped each other throughout this period. It was seen that the emergence and development of the Armenian political movement can not be separated from the contemporary discontent of the port workers which emanated from the modernization of the port, which threatened their very livelihoods. The workers used collective actions, especially direct action, to remind the authorities, who did not seem to consider the fate of the port workers after the modernization, their existence. Furthermore, they also used it to threaten the state elites, who had to stay, at least neutral, considering the undermining role of these collective actions on their legitimacy and authority. The gate Armenian political activists opened, merged with the cultural discontent, was used at a time when the state elites had to tend towards

the side of capital, submitting its increasing pressure threatening the state's sovereignty. The active participation of the workers in the Bab-ı Ali Demonstration might stop this inclination towards capital, but it also increased the disciplinary practices against the Armenians, which resulted in their purge and displacement by Muslim workers. The increasing unemployment and the increasing hostility of the state towards the Armenians played critical roles in the massacre the following year, during the Occupation of Ottoman Bank by the Dashnak militias. During these days, the Muslim porters attempted to wipe out the Armenian existence in the ports, undoubtedly, not only because the ethno-religious hostilities, but also for economic reasons. However, this replacement also restricted the state's ability to maneuver against the workers, for it lost the opportunity to play off the cultural differences among the workers. This made them, in return, powerless against the workers' increasing collective actions, while the capitalist penetration deepened, with increasing violations of the traditional labor relations in favor of an attempt to create a proletarian labor force. The Revolution of 1908 can not be read and understood comprehensively without taking the struggles against this process into account.

The final chapter examined the struggles which continuously occurred at the everyday level. The limitation of the class struggle to the arena of open, collective actions leads researchers to overlook the vast ocean of struggles that took place at the underground level. Especially under such repressive governments as of this era, efforts were made to hide the struggles against the system as far as possible, for the reasons related to individual politics. These struggles, thus, took place either through the manipulation of legal loopholes, or they were done secretly and in a clandestine way, if the action involves features that were seen by the system as criminal. Following this, the chapter was divided into three sections: First the petitioning

practice, which was used by the workers especially against the power of guild-or local-leaders as a means to claim their rights, was analyzed. Secondly, how the workers used crime as a powerful weapon in negotiating the state-imposed definitions, especially on a secure and homogenous society, was discussed. Lastly, an example was given of how these two ways intersected: The workers used the criminal arena to claim their legal rights and to negotiate their definitions of that legality.

Looking throughout these cases, I hope to show sufficiently at least the tip of the idea that the lives and struggles of the working classes provide a vast opportunity to rewrite the history of the Hamidian era and the Revolution of 1908 from the perspective of the ordinary people. The late nineteenth century cannot be bypassed simply as the rule of Abdulhamid II, overemphasizing his dominant role on the history of late Ottoman Empire. It was rather shaped and reshaped by the ongoing struggles between the lower classes and the elites. "The July Revolution" was not a simple coup d'état in which the ordinary people had no role. On the contrary, it is no exaggeration to argue that the working classes prepared the ground for this revolution to take place. To recognize this, it first should not be forgotten that history is not a monument designed and built by a few architects. It is rather the work of the living, ordinary people. The Ottoman archives from which this study obtained its cases could be extracted in a very efficient way for this purpose. What is needed then, is not the sufficient archival resources, but the passion to write history by recognizing the central role of the lower classes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi)

DH.MKT. 1339/46, 2213/145, 2221/35, 2231/36, 2259/78, 2283/23

Y.A.HUS. 303/62, 320/7, 320/10, 336/48, 336/81.

Y.MTV. 102/23, 125/122, 128-89, 139/114

Y.PRK.AZN. 8/2

Y.PRK.ŞH. 2/47, 3/65, 25/98

Y.PRK.ZB 16/45, 22/117

ZB. 30/26, 55/106, 59/5, 361/7, 372/61, 372/127, 373/49, 379/43, 415/66, 430/112, 434/3, 434/53, 460/71, 460/84, 467/121, 468/162, 468/175, 474/52, 486/151, 589/47, 597/44

Newspapers

New York Times, October 3, 1895 - October 11, 1895.

Online Sources

Belgenet.com. (23 Nisan 2001). *1876 Kanuni Esasi.* Retrieved 20 December 2008. http://www.belgenet.com/arsiv/anayasa/1876.html

Marxists.org. (14 June 1851). *The Constitution of the French Republic Adopted November 4,1848*. Retrieved 8 January 2009 http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1851/06/14.htm

Trotsky.org. (3 January 1909), *The Young Turks*, trans. Ted Crawford, Retrieved 24 April 2009. http://trotsky.org/archive/trotsky/1909/01/1909-turks.htm

Books and Articles

Akın, Yiğit. "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihçiliğine Katkı: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar." *Tarih ve Toplum:Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 2 (2005): 73-11.

———. "Reconsidering State, Party and Society In Early Republican Turkey:Politics of Petitioning." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 39 (2007): 435-57.

Akkaya, Yüksel. "Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık-1." *Praksis*, no. 5 (2002): 131-76.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Mapping Ideology*, edited by S. Zizek, 100-40. London Verso, 1994.

Başkaya, Fikret, ed. *Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları: 1908 Darbe mi? Devrim mi?* Vol. IV. Ankara: Özgür Üniversite, Türkiye ve Ortadoğu Forumu Vakfı, 2005.

Bayat, Asef. *Sokak Siyaseti: İran'da Yoksul Halk Hareketleri*. Translated by Soner Torlak. İstanbul: Phoenix Yay., 2008.

Chalcraft, John T. "The Coal-Heavers of Port Sa'id: State-Making and Worker Protest, 1869-1914." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 60 (2001): 110-24.

———. *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories : Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Cörüt, İlker. "Social Rationality of Lower Class Criminal Practices in the Late Nineteenth Century İstanbul." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2005.

Cronin, Stephanie, ed. *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

Çetinkaya, Y. Doğan. *1908 Osmanlı Boykotu : Bir Toplumsal Hareketin Analizi* İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2004.

Dadrian, Vahakn N. *The History of the Armenian Genocide:Ethnic Conflict from Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*. Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997.

Deringil, Selim. *Simgeden Millete: II.Abdülhamid'den Mustafa Kemal'e Devlet ve Millet*. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2007.

———. *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* London ; New York: I.B. Tauris 1999.

Dirks, Nicholas B., Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner. "Introduction." In *Culture, Power, History:A Reader in Contemporary History*, edited by Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, 3-46. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Downes, Brant. "Constructing the Modern Ottoman Waterfront:Salonica and Beirut in Late Nineteenth Century." Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 2007.

Eldem, Edhem. "26 Ağustos 1896 'Banka Vakası' ve 1896 'Ermeni Olayları'." *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 5 (2007): 113-46.

Eley, Geoff. "Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later." In *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, edited by Terence J. McDonald, 193-243. Ann Arbor: Michigan State University, 1996.

Elmacı, M.Emin. "1908 Avusturya Boykotu'nda Liman İşçileri." *Kebikeç*, no. 5 (1997): 155-62.

Engin, Vahdettin. *Sultan Abdulhamid ve İstanbul'u*. İstanbul: Simurg, 2001.

Erdoğan, Necmi. "Devleti İdare Etmek: Mâduniyet ve Düzenbazlık." *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 83 (1999-2000): 8-31.

Ergin, Osman Nuri. *Mecelle-i Umur-ı Belediyye*. Vol. 5. İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı, 1995.

Ergut, Ferdan. *Modern Devlet ve Doğası: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Toplumsal Denetimin Diyalektiği* İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2004.

Ertuğ, Nejdet. *Osmanlı Döneminde İstanbul Deniz Ulaşımı ve Kayıkçılar*. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 2001.
———. *Osmanlı Döneminde İstanbul Hamalları*. İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2008.

Fahmy, Khaled. *All the Pasha's Men : Mehmed Ali, His Army, and the Making of Modern Egypt* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
———. "The anatomy of Justice: Forensic Medicine and Criminal Law in Nineteenth-century Egypt." *Islamic Law and Society*, no. 6 (1999): 1-48.

Fantasia, Rick. *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Femia, Joseph. *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony,Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. "Conversations and Listeners." In *Everyday Stalinism*, 164-89. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Frank, Stephen. *Crime, Cultural Conflict and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1999.

Geras, Norman. "Ex-Marxism Without Substance: Being A Real Reply to Laclau and Mouffe." *New Left Review*, no. 169 (1988): 34-61.
———. "Post-Marxism?" *New Left Review*, no. 163 (1987): 40-82.

Göçek, Fatma Müge. "Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society " *Poetics Today* 14, no. 3 (1993): 507-38.

Göral, Özgür Sevgi. "19.Yüzyıl İstanbul'unda Suç, Toplumsal Kontrol ve Hapishaneler Üzerine Çalışmak." In *Osmanlı'da Asayiş, Suç ve Ceza*, edited by Noémi Lévy and Alexandre Toumarkine, 17-32. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007.

Guha, Ranajit. "Introduction." In *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Gülmez, Mesut. *Türkiye Belgesel Çalışma İlişkileri Tarihi (1936 Öncesi)*. Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 1983.

Güzel, M.Şehmus. *Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketi, 1908-1914*. İstanbul: Kaynak Yay., 1996.

Harris, George S. *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1967.

Hay, Douglas. "Property, Authorithy and the Criminal Law." In *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, edited by Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson, and Cal Winslow. . London: Penguin Books, 1975.

Hüseyin Nazım Paşa. *Hatıralarım*. İstanbul: Selis Kitaplar, 2003.

İnalcık, Halil. "Şikâyet Hakkı: 'Arz-ı Hâl' ve 'Arz-ı Mahzar'lar." *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, no. 7-8 (1988): 33-51.

İpşirli, Mehmet. "Osmanlılarda Cuma Selâmlığı (Halk-Hükümdar Münasebetleri Açısından Önemi)." In *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan*, 459-71. İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1991.

İrtem, Süleyman Kani. *Ermeni Meselesinin İç Yüzü*. İstanbul: Temel Yay., 2004.

Issawi, Charles. *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Işık, Yüksel. *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İşçi Hareketinin Evrimi (1876-1994)*. Ankara: Öteki, 1996.

Kabadayı, M. Erdem. "Working for the State in a Factory in Istanbul:The Role of Factory Workers' Ethno-Religious and Gender Characteristics in State-

Subject Interaction in the late Ottoman Empire " Unpublished PH.D. Diss., Munich University, 2008.

Kansu, Aykut. ""Hürriyet, Müsavat, Uhuvvet, Adalet": 100. Yıldönümünde 1908 Devrimi'ni Anlamaya Çalışmak." *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 175 (2008): 22-35.
———. *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey*. Leiden ; New York: Brill, 1997.

Karakışla, Yavuz Selim. "1908 Grevleri." *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 78 (1998): 187-208.
———. "Osmanlı Sanayi İşçisi Sınıfının Doğuşu, 1839-1923." In *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine İşçiler, 1839-1950*, edited by Donald Quataert, and E.J. Zürcher, 27-54. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1998.

Katznelson, Ira and Aristide R. Zolberg, ed. *Working-class formation : nineteenth-century patterns in Western Europe and the United States* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Kırlı, Cengiz. "Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire." In *Public Islam and the Common Good*, edited by Dale F. Eickelman, and Armando Salvatore 75-97. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
———. "A Profile of Labor Force in Early Nineteenth Century Istanbul." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 60 (2001): 125-40.

Kurkjian, Vahan M. *A History of Armenia*. New York: Indo-European Publishing, 2008.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy:Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London Verso, 1985.
———. "Post-Marxism Without Apologies." *New Left Review*, no. 166 (1987): 79-106.

Levy, Noémi and Alexandre Toumarkine, ed. *Osmanlı'da Asayiş, Suç ve Ceza*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007.

Lockman, Zachary, ed. *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East:Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.

Lunn, Ken, and Ann Day. "Deference and Defiance: The Changing Nature of Petitioning in British Naval Dockyards." *International Review of Social History* Supplement 9, no. 46 (2001): 131-50.

Makal, Ahmet. "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi ve Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme." *Tarih ve Toplum:Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 3 (2006): 215-64.
———. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çalışma İlişkileri, 1850-1920 : Türkiye Çalışma İlişkileri Tarihi*. Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1997.

Minassian, A. Ter. *Ermeni Devrimci Hareketi'nde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm:1887-1912*. Translated by Mete Tunçay. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1992.
———. "The role of the Armenian Community in the Foundation and Development of the Socialist Movement in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1876-1923." In *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1923*, edited by

Mete Tunçay, and Erik Jan Zürcher 109-56 London & New York: British Academic Press, an Imprint of I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994.

Munger, Frank. "Contentious Gatherings in Lancashire, England 1750–1830." In *Class Conflict and Collective Action*, edited by Charles Tilly Louise A. Tilly, 73-109. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981.

Nalbandian, Louise. *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century*: University of California Press, 1963.

Onur, Hakkı. "1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler." *Yurt ve Dünya*, no. 2 (Mart 1977): 277-95.

Owen, Roger. *The Middle East in the World Economy:1800-1914*. London ; New York: Methuen, 1987.

Özbek, Nadir. "Alternatif Tarih Tahayyülleri: Siyaset, İdeoloji ve Osmanlı-Türkiye Tarihi." *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 98 (2003): 234-54.
———. "Modernite,Tarih ve İdeoloji:II.Abdulhamid Dönemi Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme." *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (2004): 71-90.
———. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet:Siyaset, İktidar, Meşruiyet, 1876-1908*. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2002.

Pamuk, Şevket. *Osmanlı Ekonomisinde Bağımlılık ve Büyüme*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1994.

Quataert, Donald. "The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914." In *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire: Vol.2*, edited by Halil İnalcık, with Donald Quataert, 759-934. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
———. "Labor History and the Ottoman Empire, c.1700-1922." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001): 93-109.
———. *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire : The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822-1920*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006.
———. "Ottoman Workers and the State, 1826-1914." In *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles,Histories, Historiographies*, edited by Zachary Lockman, 21-40. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.
———. "The Regie, Smugglers and the Government." In *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance, 1881-1908*. New York and London: NYU Press, 1983.
———. *Sanayi Devrimi Çağında Osmanlı İmalat Sektörü*. Translated by Tansel Güney. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1999.
———. "Selanik'te İşçiler, 1850-1912." In *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine İşçiler, 1839-1950*, edited by Donald Quataert and E.J.Zürcher, 97-122. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1998.
———. *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908*: New York University Press, 1983.
———. *Workers, Peasants, and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire, 1730-1914* Istanbul ISIS Press, 1993.

Quataert, Donald, and E.J. Zürcher, ed. *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine İşçiler:1839-1950*. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1998.

Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

Sencer, Oya. *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı:Doğuşu ve Yapısı*. İstanbul: Habora Kitabevi, 1969.

Sewell Jr., William H. "Toward a Post-Materialist Rhetoric for Labor History." In *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis*, edited by Lenard R. Berlanstein, 15-38. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

———. "Uneven Development, the Autonomy of Politics, and the Dockworkers of the Nineteenth Century Marseille." *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (1988): 604-37.

Shaw, Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, vol.2*: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Somel, Selçuk Akşin. "Osmanlı Ermenilerinde Kültür Modernleşmesi, Cemaat Okulları ve Abdulhamid Rejimi." *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 5 (2007): 71-92.

Şanda, Hüseyin Avni. *Yarı Müstemleke Oluş Tarihi/1908 İşçi Hareketleri* İstanbul: Gözlem, 1978.

Şimşir, Bilal. *Ermeni Meselesi: 1774-2005*. Ankara: Bilgi Yay., 2006.

Şişmanov, Dimitir. *Türkiye İşçi ve Sosyalist Hareketi: Kısa Tarih (1908-1965)*. İstanbul: Belge, 1978.

Tanör, Bülent. "Anayasal Gelişmelere Toplu Bir Bakış." In *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, edited by Murat Belge, 10-26. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1985.

Tarrow, Sidney G. *Power in Movement : Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge [England] ; New York Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Thompson, E. P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. Harmondsworth Penguin Books, 1968.

Thompson, E.P. "The Rule of Law." In *The Essential E.P.Thompson*, edited by Dorothy Thompson. New York: New Press, 2001.

Tilly, Charles. "Introduction." In *Class Conflict and Collective Action*, edited by Louise A. Tilly, and Charles Tilly. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981.

———. *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge ; New York Cambridge University Press, 2003.

———. "The Web of Contention in Eighteenth-Century Cities." In *Class Conflict and Collective Action* edited by Louise A. Tilly and Charles Tilly. Beverly Hills Sage Publications, 1981.

Toprak, Zafer. *Türkiye'de "Milli İktisat": 1908-1918*. Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982.

Tunaya, Tarık Zafer. "Midhat Paşa'nın Anayasa Tasarısı: Kanun-ı Cedid." In *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, edited by Murat Belge, 30-31. İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 1985.

Tunçay, Mete. *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, 1908-1925*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, 1967.

Uzun, Ahmet. *Tanzimat ve Sosyal Direnişler*. İstanbul: Eren Yay., 2002.

Üstün, Mahmut. "Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketi Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler." *Praksis*, no. 8 (2002): 227-54.

van Voss, Lex Heerma. "Introduction." *International Review of Social History* Supplement 9, no. 46 (2001): 1-10.

Vratzian, Simon, ed. *Bank Ottoman: Memoirs of Armen Garo*. Detroit, Michigan: Armen Topouzian, 1990.

Wood, Ellen Meiksins. "İlişki ve Süreç Olarak Sınıf." *Praksis*, no. 1 (2001): 92-119.
———. *The Retreat From Class : A New "True" Socialism*. London;New York: Verso, 1998.

Würgler, Andreas. "Voices From Among the "Silent Masses": Humble Petitions and Social Conflicts in Early Modern Central Europe." *International Review of Social History* Supplement 9, no. 46 (2001): 11-34.

Young, George. *Constantinople*. London: Methuen&co., 1926.