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Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century

Edited by
Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen

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Maurus Reinkowski

The Imperial Idea and *Realpolitik*

Reform Policy and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire

Comparative research on the Ottoman Empire is still in its early stages. What we need are inter-imperial, but also intra-imperial comparisons complementing and stimulating each other. Meanwhile, we have many works at our disposal that concern Ottoman peripheries, such as the works of Frederick Anscombe and Hala Fattah on the Gulf area, Paul Dresch on Yemen or Lisa Anderson on today's Libya, not mentioning all those works dealing with a central Ottoman perspective. However, one of the most difficult remaining tasks in Ottoman studies is to bring the regional and central perspectives into a meaningful and coherent relationship. For example, all the contributions in *Imperial Legacy. The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, edited by Carl L. Brown in 1996, fall into one of two groups. Some adopt exclusively the imperial perspective, and others discuss a clearly delimited local area without any further attempt at a comparative intra-Ottoman approach.

Historians tend to portray the specific period they are working on as a most important and decisive one. They speak of 'turning points' or 'periods of crisis' and so on – bearing out the truism that any time-sequence that a historian is going to look at more closely will turn out to be an important one for this specific historian. The period from the 1830s to the 1870s in the Ottoman Empire will certainly give any historian the impression that he is devoting himself to a period of great importance – since in these decades the Ottoman state underwent a fundamental change and the transformation from a supra-national empire to a nation-state began.

The main argument that will be developed in this article is that in the reform period of the *Tanzimat* (1839–1876) traditional Ottoman policy and strategies started to be replaced by new – one may say 'modern' – concepts that, to a certain extent, strengthened the state but were detrimental to the Ottoman experience in dealing with the various subject populations. A loss of the 'imperial routine' in the last decades of the empire was the obvious consequence.

1. The Imperial Idea and *Realpolitik*

Today one can often find reference to the argument that the Ottoman Empire was a state and not an empire.[1] Indeed, the Ottomans called their own state *devleti aliyyei osmaniyye* (exalted Ottoman state), but *devlet* may be translated not only as 'state' (as in today's Turkish), but also as 'dynasty' or 'ruling house'. Besides, terms such as 'the well-protected domains' (*memaliki mahruse*) indicate that the Ottomans had a clear idea of an imperial centre and a much more diffuse one of the various provinces and peripheries – a typical feature of empires.[2]

If we define – following Jürgen Osterhammel – an empire as an entity that extends over a large area, as a hierarchically ordered body exhibiting a polyethnic and multi-religious nature and having a working administration and indigenous collaboration at its disposal, as a universalistic idea and a stock of symbols available for an imperial elite, while the coherence of this entity is achieved by means of coercion (or at least by the threat of coercion), then the Ottoman Empire was an empire in the classical sense and well into the nineteenth century.[3] The Ottoman Empire was a non-national state. Nationality was not part of the Ottoman elite's vocabulary and imagination; integration and assimilation was not part of its repertoire of strategies to rule the empire.[4]

The Ottoman Empire comprised, on the one hand, local populations with their respective folk cultures and an ethnically heterogeneous (consisting of Albanians, Arabs, Bulgarians, Circassians, Kurds, Laz, Serbs, Turks, and so on), but religiously uniform elite with its own apparatus of civilizing institutions. The Ottoman Empire was, thus, organized around a homogeneous, amalgamated kernel, around which fragmented zones were grouped,[5] each zone detached from the next one and each having access to the centre, the way each piece of a cake meets the centre of the cake only with its very small tip.

1 See as one example A. Salzmann, "Toward a Comparative History of the Ottoman State, 1450–1850" in *Essays on Ottoman Civilization*, ed. Oriental Institute of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic (Prague, 1998), 351–366, here 364.

2 Terms such as *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu* (Ottoman Empire), imitating European terminology and conceptions, became current only in the years preceding the First World War. See M. Ursinus, "Byzanz, Osmanisches Reich, türkischer Nationalstaat: Zur Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkriegs", in *Das Verdämmern der Macht. Vom Untergang großer Reiche,* ed. R. Lorenz (Frankfurt/Main, 2000), 153–172, here 159.

3 J. Osterhammel, "Europamodelle und imperiale Kontexte", *Journal of Modern European History* 2 (2004), 157–182, here 172.

4 M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, 1997), 163.

5 E. Francis, *Ethnos und Demos. Soziologische Beiträge zur Volkstheorie* (Berlin, 1965), 101.

Imperial idea and *Realpolitik*, the two terms mentioned in the title of this article, signify different concepts of policy: Whereas *Realpolitik* is intent on exerting authority and pays heed only to the exigencies of maintaining or extending power, the term 'imperial idea' implies not merely the elements of power and rule, but stresses to a great degree the quest for legitimacy. The Ottoman state, as every other state, wanted to convey to itself and to its people more than the idea of naked power and coercion. Some sources of Ottoman legitimacy, providing the basis for imperial self-projection, are obvious: Besides the success story of having outlived the gunpowder empires of the Safavids and Mughals, the Ottomans insisted on their merit of having been the guardians of the holy cities of Islam for centuries, in particular of Mecca and Medina. But how do we achieve a better understanding of the way in which the Ottomans deemed it their inherent destiny to rule?

Many aspects of the Ottomans' production of legitimacy remain in a heuristic twilight. For example, we can say a lot about the supply of legitimacy, but we do not know much about the demand side (again, this is not a point that would only hold valid in the Ottomans' case). We can assume that legitimacy was an important commodity and that it must have satisfied a certain demand, but much remains to be done until we will really understand the mechanisms of giving and receiving the soft- and hardware of legitimacy. To give only one example, we may point to the well-known role and image of the sultans as warriors of the faith. But how did the Ottoman state elite come to terms with the fact that the Ottoman armies were less successful from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onwards?

A ruler will strive to legitimize the state's order, but that order – if it is well-maintained – will have its own legitimizing effect. Order and legitimacy enhance and reinforce each other. The Ottomans were very much preoccupied with the notion of order, certainly not only for the purpose of enhancing their legitimacy. It is no wonder, therefore, that the central term of Ottoman reform policy in the nineteenth century was the word *tanzimat*, meaning literally 'measures for regulating order'.[6]

In the everyday Ottoman bureaucratic speech of the mid-nineteenth century, however, it was not the term *tanzimat* that prevailed but the word *asayiş*,[7] meaning 'public order', 'public tranquillity', 'repose', 'rest'.[8] At the heart of the Ottoman political idiom, before and during the nineteenth century, was a state ideology of order cum prosperity: Security was granted by

6 All Ottoman terms given in this article are spelled according to the modern Turkish alphabet.

7 In official Ottoman documents in the French language the respective terms for *asayiş* are *tranquillité*, *calme*, *paix publique* or *ordre*.

8 All translations of Ottoman terms rely on the *New Redhouse Turkish–English Dictionary* (Istanbul, 1981).

the state to its subjects, but the state was entitled in recompense to the subjects' complete obedience. The immediate outcome and positive product of *asayiş* was prosperity. The Ottoman terms for prosperity were based on the general notion of *mülkün mamurluğu* (flourishing condition, prosperity), which seemed nothing more than the Roman *salus publica* (public wealth) in Ottoman disguise.[9] Prosperity, hand in hand with security, would be of maximum benefit to the state's and the society's order. Although the relationship between ruler and ruled was principally reciprocal – balancing the giving (of security) and the receiving (of prosperity) – emphasis was laid on the obedience of the ruled subject.[10]

One way to stress the legitimacy of the empire was, thus, to point to the internal order and external security that the empire was able to guarantee – a promise that the Ottoman Empire from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards was less and less able to fulfil. Confronted with the intensifying phenomenon of nationalism, particularly in the European parts of the empire, the Ottomans stood before a multi-fold challenge: to ward off nationalism, but at the same time to offer a new 'package deal' of Ottoman citizenship implying additional rights and additional duties; to maintain the traditional promise of order and security, but also to build a new (military, economic, social, educational) infrastructure enabling the Ottoman state to keep pace with the European powers.

2. Reform Policy and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century

One may debate whether the Ottoman Empire was the reason why the 'Oriental Question' existed in the nineteenth century, but it was certainly the object and the target of it. There is no need to dwell on the Oriental Question in more detail, since it is quite familiar to all of us.[11] In the course of the nineteenth century the empire found itself on the painful road to a semi-colonial status. Three examples may suffice:

9 H.-G. Majer, "Wie stellten sich die Osmanen zur Wohlfahrt ihrer Länder?", in *Die Türkei in Europa*, ed. K.-D. Grothusen (Göttingen, 1979), 69.

10 B. Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago-London, 1988), 91, argues in a religious–essential vein when he says obedience is "a religious obligation, defined and imposed by Holy Law and grounded in revelation. Disobedience is therefore a sin as well as a crime."

11 But see as examples of contrary interpretations G. Schöllgen, *Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht. Deutschland, England und die orientalische Frage 1871–1914* (Munich, 1984), who argues that the inherent problems of the Ottoman Empire had destabilizing effects on the European balance of power; and M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East 1792–1923* (London-New York 1987), who sees the Ottoman Empire as a kind of European bank where every major European power had 'special drawing rights', and where the internal conflicts of the European powers could be brought to a balance.

(1) The so-called 'capitulations' once granted by the Ottoman Empire to European states as some kind of 'most favoured partners' had been converted in the course of the nineteenth century into a European instrument of economic penetration and patronizing political interference.

(2) 'Humanitarian intervention', an instrument of the European law of nations, was incessantly applied in order to intervene on behalf of the empire's Christian populations, which were – according to the European view – in dire need of European help. Because of its excessive and manipulative use, humanitarian intervention fell into oblivion during the twentieth century, only to be revived, amongst others, in the case of the Kosovo crisis in 1999.

(3) In the nineteenth century the empire was more and more absorbed into the European world economy. Excessive public debt led to the Ottoman state's bankruptcy in 1875 and to the installation of the *Dette Publique*, which was controlled by European states.

The nineteenth century was a period of Ottoman marginalization; Şerif Mardin is probably right in calling the admittance of the Ottoman Empire to the Concert of Powers in 1856 a mere "face-saving device."[12] The deeply ambivalent situation of the empire, having formally the same rights and status as the major European states but being in reality degraded to a marginalized actor, did not go unnoticed among the Ottoman-Turkish elite and has lingered on as a traumatic experience in the collective memory of the Turkish Republic in the twentieth century.

The period of the *Tanzimat* is known as the most spectacular wave of reforms in the whole of Ottoman history, starting with an imperial edict in 1839 and ending sometime in the 1870s, although clear traces of continuity up to the Kemalist reforms of the 1920s and 1930s are obvious. Under the conditions of a semi-colonized state the *Tanzimat* reforms were an attempt to install a centralized and homogeneous administration – an attempt that was everything other than a clear failure. The defensive (towards Europe) and authoritarian (towards its own population) modernization policy of the *Tanzimat* enhanced the Ottoman state's economic, political and military capacities, but it could not close the lead that Europe had won in the many decades before, and the gap became even larger in the course of the nineteenth century.

Ottoman demand for the commodity of 'legitimacy' greatly increased when it had to face the ever more deadly competition of the European powers. At the same time, the Ottoman state aimed at a more thoroughgoing order for the whole of its society, or – more correctly – societies. The state was more and more obliged to win acceptance among its own population

12 Ş. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought. A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Oxford, 1962), 16.

and to find an answer to the challenge of nationalism. We cannot tell for certain whether the Ottomans, when they began to be confronted with the phenomenon of nationalism, did understand its nature and its inherent capability for mobilizing people, or whether they preferred to misinterpret intentionally the respective nationalisms as mere tokens of disloyalty.[13]

In any case, in the second half of the nineteenth century the Ottoman state initiated the idea of a state-sponsored supra-national patriotism: 'Ottomanism', a largely abstract concept that could not be filled with the kind of emotion that is typical for nationalism and that makes it so powerful. With Ottomanism the Ottoman political elite did not aim to create many other Ottomans profiting to a full extent from the privileges that so far only the Ottoman elite had enjoyed. It rather wanted to generate a sort of lesser Ottomans – one may call them 'Ottomen' – people willing to leave behind their respective national folk cultures and communal groups in order to join a largely fictitious Ottoman nation. However, the idea of a common Ottoman citizenship with a strong injection of what one might call 'common Ottoman subjectship' stood in stark contrast to the well-established mechanisms of organizing Ottoman society and specifically the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Whenever the relationship of the Ottoman state to its population is under discussion, in particular to its non-Muslim parts, the term *millet* is omnipresent. In the widest sense, *millet* means a religious community organized along communal criteria and officially acknowledged as such by the Ottoman state. The fetish-like character of the millet has been rightly criticized for implying a concreteness, ubiquity and full institutionalization that never existed.[14] One further disadvantage of the mantra '*millet, millet, millet*' is that it tends to disregard all other people whose principal social affiliation was not along communal–religious lines. One should seek, therefore, for a more encompassing term such as *ethnic containment*, which can hint at the complementary Ottoman strategies of threat and coercion on the one hand and co-optation on the other. Whereas the Ottoman state classified the population according to confessional criteria in towns and regions with agricultural production, it applied tribal criteria in more remote places and mountain areas.

13 R. H. Davison, "Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem and the Ottoman Response", in *Nationalism in a Non-National State*, ed. W. Haddad and W. Ochsenwald (Columbus/Ohio, 1977), 25–56, here 38, 51.

14 See the still valid critique of millet as a "historiographical fetish" by B. Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System", in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1: *The Central Lands*, ed. B. Braude and B. Lewis (New York-London, 1982), 69–88, here 74.

Traditionally, the Ottoman state did not interfere in the affairs of its peripheries as long as a certain minimum of stability and loyalty was guaranteed – a key element of ethnic containment. Ethnic containment encompassed the '*millet* system', which stressed the element of inclusion (including these parts of the population into the larger orbit of Ottoman society), whereas tribal policy was clearly meant to exclude and control. Both groups (millets and tribes) were told that they should know 'their place', in the literal sense of living in a certain area, but also in the sense of knowing one's status in the empire.

In order to give these somewhat speculative arguments more substance, let us look at a specific case: Northern Albania, where during the middle decades of the nineteenth century Ottoman authorities experimented with a policy of simultaneously co-opting and disciplining the subject population.

3. Ottoman Borderlands in Northern Albania

If we speak about Ottoman borderlands, we need to be aware that many different kinds did exist. Borderlands may have possessed the character of a blurred and transitional zone between cultivated areas and desert lands under Bedouin control. In the nineteenth century Ottoman authorities attempted to extend their control into these areas, which in some cases had not been exposed to direct Ottoman administration for hundreds of years. We may find, on the other hand, rather clear-cut military borders as well, such as in the Balkans between the Austrian and Ottoman empires.

A peculiar case was the Montenegrin–Ottoman borderland. Here a border *within* the Ottoman Empire existed. Montenegro – at that time much smaller than nowadays and with no outlet to the Mediterranean – had been able to reach the status of a de facto independent entity in the eighteenth century, under the leadership of princely bishops, the *vladika* (Ottoman: *ladika*).[15] Montenegro had two Ottoman borders – one looking towards Herzegovina, the other towards Northern Albania. The main orientation of Montenegro's expansionism was to the south. Only here could it hope to attain direct access to the Mediterranean; in the north the coast was inaccessible to the Montenegrins because of the Austrian presence around the Gulf of Kotor from the early nineteenth century. Throughout the rest of this article only the Montenegrin–Ottoman border in Northern Albania will be dealt with.

15 For a general overview see G. Heer, *Territorialentwicklung und Grenzfragen von Montenegro in der Zeit seiner Staatswerdung, 1830–1887* (Bern, 1981).

Military campaigns in the 1830s had returned the North Albanian lowlands, including its main urban centre Shkodra (Shkodër), to Ottoman control, whereas the Albanian highlands and mountain regions to the east of Shkodra were still left to their own devices. Montenegro was never again to lose the quasi-independent status it had attained in the preceding decades and, what is more, it was now a constant threat to the adjacent lands under Ottoman rule. Montenegro finally gained international recognition as an independent state with the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.

Ottoman authorities traditionally relied on the tribally organized population in the regions adjacent to the mountain principality to counter Montenegrin inroads and attempts to enlarge their territory to the detriment of the Ottoman state. The imperial authorities fully realized that a 'benign' policy of co-optation towards the tribal population in the border region was necessary to avoid their breaking away. On the other hand, the local population understood that the constant push-and-pull between the two sides increased their bargaining power. Ottoman policy until 1878 clung to the official position that Montenegro was part of the Ottoman Empire. All measures and actions by local officials were taken under the premise of not damaging Ottoman claims on Montenegro within the framework of international law. Thus, Ottoman authorities in both Istanbul and Shkodra had to master two tasks of very different nature: to uphold the fiction of Ottoman sovereignty over Montenegro and to maximize the returns of a traditional co-optation policy under the conditions of protracted low-scale warfare.

From the 1850s onward the situation was further complicated as *Tanzimat* ideology had a decisive influence on the perception and comportment of central and local Ottoman authorities. Now they were determined to install direct control and a full-fledged administrative apparatus in the virtually autonomous mountain regions of Northern Albania (Ottoman: *Kiğalık*). Ottoman policy in the borderlands next to Montenegro was stuck in a dilemma between the exigency of *Realpolitik* and the ambitious *Tanzimat* reform policy. Only secure borders against the Montenegrin mountain principality could provide the necessary conditions for breaking the resistance of the Catholic tribes in the Albanian highlands against their incorporation into the Ottoman administrative and fiscal regime. Paradoxically, in order to attain this aim, Ottoman authorities had to revert once again to their proven policy of co-optation and refrain from forced taxation and conscription.

4. The Ottoman Conflict with Montenegro and its International Setting

In the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Paris in 1856, the Ottoman Empire was once more able to defend its claims to the mountain principality. Ottoman sovereignty over Montenegro was formally confirmed by the European powers.[16]

Russia had held a traditionally strong position in Montenegro dating back to the eighteenth century, based on the fact that the Montenegrins saw themselves ethnically and religiously as one with the Russians. Ottoman authorities were well aware of these close ties between Russia and Montenegro.[17] However, French influence on Montenegro became strong from the late 1850s onward, after Russia had been unable to defend Montenegrin interests at the Paris conference in 1856. Furthermore, in 1851 the Russophile Petar II Njegoš (d. 1851) was followed by Prince Danilo (r. 1851–1860), who had received a Western European education and enjoyed close contacts with the enormously active and increasingly anti-Ottoman minded French consul in Shkodra in the 1850s, Hyacinthe Hecquard.[18] Russia was able to regain, to a certain extent, its former influence in Montenegro in the 1860s, but the dominant position it had enjoyed in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century was permanently lost.

The manoeuvrability of Ottoman policy towards Montenegro was severely hampered by the European powers. When Ottoman armies moved forward successfully into the Montenegrin heartland in 1852, the European powers forced a halt to Ottoman military advance and made the Ottomans consent to the so-called Leiningen Convention of 1853, abrogating Ottoman territorial gains. However, when a military campaign of the Ottoman army against Montenegro ended unsuccessfully in 1858, the European powers forced upon the Ottoman Empire the installation of a delimitation commis-

16 Protocol of the sessions on 25 and 26 March 1856; reproduced in I. Testa, *Recueil des traités de la Porte ottomane avec les puissances étrangères depuis le premier traité conclu, en 1536, entre Suléyman I et François I jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1864–1911), here vol. 5, 88ff.

17 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı: 'Head Office of the Ottoman Archives Department in the General Directorate of the State Archives of the Prime Minister's Office of the Turkish Republic' (the official title of the Ottoman archives in Istanbul gives, by the way, an idea of the difficulties in reading Ottoman administrative correspondence), in short: 'Başbakanlık Arşivi', further on given as 'BBA': BBA İrade Dahiliye 20618, leff 1, instructions issued by the Sublime Porte on 20 April 1855 to the incoming governor of Shkodra, Agah Abdülaziz Pasha, accusing Russia of "stretching out its hands with the excuse of being of the same confession and nationality."

18 Hyacinthe Hecquard is also the author of *Histoire et déscription de la Haute Albanie ou Guégarie* (Paris, 1858), a still indispensable book for historians.

sion that would determine the exact borderline between Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire – with territorial gains for Montenegro included. France and Russia, with the support of Austria and Prussia, maintained that most of Montenegro was not fit for agriculture, and the Montenegrins were, thus, obliged to make their living by robbery. Extending the borders of Montenegro by including fertile plains, so they argued, would mollify the aggressive comportment that the Montenegrins had shown during the preceding decades.[19]

On the whole, we can observe an ever-widening gap between the formal sovereignty that the Ottoman Empire exerted over the mountain principality on the one hand, and Montenegro's road towards becoming a centralized and viable state on the other. Besides insisting on the diplomatic plane that Montenegro still formed part of the Ottoman Empire, the preeminent aim of Ottoman policy was rather down-to-earth: to prevent a Montenegrin break-through to the Mediterranean Sea in the region between Budva and Ulcinj and to avoid any development that would lead to European intervention and an official recognition of Montenegro's sovereignty.

The frustration of the Ottoman political and administrative body with this state of affairs was succinctly expressed by the prominent Ottoman religious scholar, court historian and politician Ahmed Cevdet Efendi, later Pasha (1823–1895), who had been sent as a special commissioner to Shkodra in 1861.[20] After his return to Istanbul he gave a detailed report on the conditions in the region and described Montenegro's privileges:

> "If one gave me Bosnia and the same privileges that Montenegro enjoys, I could conquer the whole of Europe. The Montenegrins can strike wherever they want, and retreat behind their frontiers if a counter-force threatens them. It is impossible to encircle the Montenegrins completely with a military cordon. As long as the Montenegrins can come over, strike the villages they want to attack, and we cannot enter their territories and punish them, we will not save our country from their evil-doings."[21]

Unsurprisingly, local Ottoman authorities had difficulties in finding the appropriate stance towards Montenegro. They had to be constantly admonished by the central authorities in Istanbul to prevent any breach of the diplomatic status quo. In 1845, for instance, the Porte cautioned local authorities to note explicitly the Ottoman citizenship of Montenegrins in their travel documents. Ottoman authorities in the region had carelessly accepted the self-description of Montenegrins as Russian citizens.[22]

19 See BBA İrade Meclis-i Mahsûs 1016, instructions for the incoming governor of Shkodra, Mehmed Raşid Pasha (1861).

20 See for biographical details Y. Halaçoğlu and M. A. Aydın, "Cevdet Paşa", in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 7 (Istanbul, 1993), 443–450.

21 A. Cevdet, *Tezâkir*, ed. Cavid Baysun (Ankara, 1986–1991), vol. 2, 190.

22 BBA Bâb-ı Alî Evrak Odasi: Sadâret Mektûbî Kalemi 27/59 (1845).

5. Co-optation in the Ottoman–Montenegrin Borderlands

One way to compensate for the helplessness experienced with regard to the Montenegrin question was to discredit the Montenegrins morally and reduce them to a mere pack of scoundrels. The official Ottoman terminology named the Montenegrins *usat* (rebels),[23] but the term *eşkıya* (bandits) was preferred in most cases,[24] in an attempt to disregard the extent of the independence Montenegro had already gained. The wide-spread practice of cutting off enemies' heads and planting them on sticks before one's own home was found to be especially abhorrent by the Ottoman administrative elite. During his mission to Shkodra, Ahmed Cevdet had tried to persuade tribal leaders on the Ottoman side to refrain from such practices, for example by pointing to the possible dangers of infection from the corpses.[25] Mehmed Raşid Pasha, the incoming *mutasarrıf* of Shkodra, was admonished in 1861 that "to retaliate such a comportment on the same level would mean to show the same level of inhumanity and would not correspond to the obligations of the Sharia and the sublime compassion of the Ottoman state."[26] The purpose of the argument was evident: Ottoman rules of conduct were rooted in a highly developed civilization and state, while European powers supported barbaric mountain tribes for the sake of their egoistic aims.

From the instructions (*talimatname*) given to the incoming Governors of Shkodra – to Agah Abdülaziz Pasha in 1855, to Menemenli Mustafa Tevfik Pasha in 1856[27] and to Mehmed Raşid Pasha in 1861 – it is clear to what extent Ottoman policy in the province of Shkodra was determined by the question of Montenegro. The strategic importance of Northern Albania in the defence against Montenegro was stressed again and again. The necessity to station sufficient forces in the border regions adjacent to Montenegro was clearly understood by the Ottoman state but could not be realized because of military involvements in other parts of the empire.

23 BBA İrade Dahiliye 16273: The Ottoman governor at Shkodra, Osman Mazhar, opening a letter from 1852 with the phrase: "Danilo, leader of the Montenegrin rebels." For examples from the 18th century, see H. Hadžibegić, "Odnos Crne Gore prema Osmanskoj državi polovicom 18. vijeka", *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju i istoriju jugoslovenskih naroda pod turskom vladavinom* 3/4 (1953/1954), 485–508, here 497 and 500.

24 BBA İrade Dahiliye 20618: The instruction for the incoming governor of Shkodra, Agah Abdülaziz Pasha, from 1855 uses the term 'mountain bandits' (*eşkıyayı cebeliyye*) almost as a synonym for 'Montenegrins.'

25 M. C. Baysun, "Cevdet Paşa'nın İşkodra me'muriyetine âid vesikalar", *Tarih Dergisi* 17 (1967), 190 (document no. 20) in a report to the Sublime Porte on 9 January 1862 after his return from an inspection tour to Shkodra.

26 BBA İrade Meclis-i Mahsûs 1016 (1861).

27 BBA İrade Dahiliye 23192, leff 1.

Besides these realistic assessments, one finds almost utopian policy aims as well. For example, Ottoman authorities, central and local, obviously did believe, and not only feigned to believe, that the Montenegrin *vladika* might consider rejoining the Ottoman realm. In 1844 the *vladika* assured the Ottoman Governor in Shkodra, Osman Mazhar,[28] that he was loyal to the Ottoman Empire.[29] In the same year Ottoman authorities appeared convinced that it was possible to redirect the loyalty of the Montenegrin princely bishop towards the Ottoman state – a completely unrealistic stance given the Montenegrin pride in independence and anti-Ottoman warfare.[30]

The maximalist approach, that is, the aim to absorb the Montenegrin principality completely into the Ottoman state, can be found once again a decade later in the instructions for Agah Abdülaziz Pasha. The Porte urged the incoming Governor to follow a double-tracked policy. On the one hand Agah Abdülaziz should treat the people on the Ottoman side of the border in the best way possible in order to present to the pro-Montenegrin parts of the borderland population and even to the Montenegrins themselves a picture of an ideal Ottoman commonwealth that would entice them to shift their allegiance to the Ottoman side.[31] The other part of the strategy – a clear example of the Ottoman policy of divide and rule – was to sow discord among the Montenegrins themselves and among their various leaders. Secret Ottoman investigations had come to the conclusion that part of the Montenegrin tribal elite was not content with the leadership of Danilo. These opponents were to be drawn to the Ottoman side. The Ottomans were indeed able to win over Montenegrins of minor stature. The venture, however, to drive a wedge between the Montenegrin leaders, as late as the 1850s, was completely unrealistic.

Five years later, in 1861, the instructions for Mehmed Raşid Pasha reflected a more sober approach. The *talimatname* stated that principally the most effective way to quell the unrest in the border regions would be to advance into the interior of the mountain principality and to strike the Montenegrins decisively. But because of the international political situation, such an option was not available. The only feasible alternative was to contain Montenegro by an effective system of border control and fortifications.[32]

28 Osman Mazhar Pasha Skopljak (?–1861) served as governor of Shkodra from 1841 to 1854.

29 BBA Bâb-ı Alî Evrak Odası: Sadâret Mektûbî Kalemi 12/85, Osman Mazhar on 2 June 1844.

30 See for example BBA BEO Bâb-ı Alî Evrak Odası: Sadâret Mektûbî Kalemi 14/90, report by Osman Mazhar on 8 August 1844 about the prospects to regain the loyalty of the Montenegrin princely bishop towards the Ottoman Empire.

31 BBA İrade Dahiliye 20618, leff 1, instructions for Agah Pasha (1855).

32 BBA İrade Meclis-i Mahsûs 1016; leff 1 (1861).

One major component of this policy of containment was the attempt to install an effective blockade on Montenegro, which led to a shortage of grain and other important food in the area.[33]

The Montenegrin–Ottoman border seemed to be a clear-cut one: the Montenegrins being a Slavic-speaking population of Greek Orthodox confession as opposed to the Albanian-speaking Muslim and Catholic population. Ottoman authorities naturally relied on the tribally-organized Albanian population of Muslims and Catholics in the borderlands to repulse Montenegrin attacks on Ottoman territories. It was, thus, supposed to be possible to find the 'natural' border if Montenegro was to incorporate the few tribes remaining on the Ottoman side of the border that were of Greek Orthodox denomination and spoke South Slavic.

But things were more complicated. Particularly disputed between the Montenegrins and the Ottomans were areas with a population professing various confessions (Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic), who were of Albanian and Montenegrin descent, such as the tribes of Vasojevići (Ottoman: 'Vasovik') or the Kuči (Ottoman: 'Koç'). The Kuči, for example, were a young tribal unit that had come into existence during the fifteenth century and was comprised of Albanian and Montenegrin elements, including Greek Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Catholics. These tribal conglomerates repeatedly shifted their allegiance. When interrogated by the Governor of Shkodra Mustafa Atallah in 1856 about the cause of their recent inclinations towards Montenegro, the leaders of the Kuči answered that they would repeatedly and habitually shift their allegiances, but now – after they had been presented with gifts and honorary clothes – they would return under the Sultan's protection.[34] What Cemal Kafadar has said about the Ottoman–Byzantine borderlands of the thirteenth century, "that the socio-cultural formations on both sides developed their traditions during many centuries of close contact and intensive exchange, which does not preclude the role of violence,"[35] holds also some truth for the Montenegrin–Ottoman borderlands in the nineteenth century.

Ottoman day-to-day policy on the ground towards Montenegro and the population in the borderlands between the province of Shkodra and Montenegro was, to a large extent, determined by the traditional interplay of cooptation and confrontation. In order to describe the aim of drawing the population back to the Ottoman side, terms were used such as *istimalet*

33 On earlier attempts in this vein see BBA BEO A.MKT 8 / 23, Osman Mazhar to the Porte (1843); see also Hecquard, *Histoire*, 83.

34 BBA Bab-ı Alî Evrak Odası: Sadâret – Mektûbî, Umûm Vilâyât 195/31. On the volatility of Kuči allegiance, see also Hecquard, *Histoire*, 90.

35 C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds. The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, 1995), 81.

(gaining of goodwill, coaxing), *dehalet* (taking refuge), or more specifically *teba'iyyet* (being the subject of a sovereign or state, allegiance, submission). However, the population in the borderland region understood that the interest shown and the benefits offered by both sides meant an increase in their bargaining power – and they took profit from it. In the instructions for Menemenli Mustafa Tevfik Pasha from 1856, the Porte clearly utters its suspicion that border warfare was not only in the interest of the Montenegrins, but also of the notables on the Ottoman side, who thus made themselves irreplaceable.[36] In essence, Ottoman authorities oscillated between fairly unrealistic attempts to win back Montenegro, or at least parts of the Montenegrin population, to the Ottoman state and a kind of minimalistic day-to-day policy of co-optation.

6. Turning Allies into Barbarians: The Case of the Mirdites

One further case study may help to elucidate what a substantial change Ottoman political strategies and rhetoric underwent from the 1860s onwards as a result of *Tanzimat* ideology. The Mirdite tribal confederation was situated in a mountainous and largely inaccessible area south-east of Shkodra and, thus, somewhat remote from the Montenegrin borderland. The Mirdites were one of the numerous tribal groups of Catholic denomination in the North Albanian Alps formally bound to the Ottoman governmental unit of Shkodra.[37] The Mirdites were well known for their "great intensity of feeling of patriotic solidarity."[38] Hyacinthe Hecquard called the Mirdita, the region where the Mirdites lived, a "kind of aristocratic republic" and the "most remarkable" of all the tribal entities in Northern Albania.[39] Strategically situated as they were, the Mirdites could easily block the roads from Middle Albania and Kosovo to Shkodra.[40]

36 BBA İrade Dahiliye 23192, leff 1 (1856).

37 The population of the Mirdita must have numbered around 20,000 persons in the middle of the 19th century. Hecquard, *Histoire*, enumerates in his *tableau statistique* attached to the enclosed map 22,300 inhabitants. An Austro-Hungarian *enquête* in 1918 counted 16,926 inhabitants, see P. Bartl, "Die Mirditen: Bemerkungen zur nordalbanischen Stammesgeschichte", *Münchener Zeitschrift für Balkankunde* 1 (1978), 27–69, here 28.

38 L. von Thallóczy, "Türkischer Gesetzesentwurf betreff Kodifizierung des albanischen Gewohnheitsrechtes", *Illyrisch-albanische Forschungen*, ed. L. von Thallóczy, vol. 1 (Munich-Leipzig, 1916), 484.

39 Hecquard, *Histoire*, 10, 228.

40 Even at the beginning of the 20th century, the Mirdites were well-known for their habit of sabotaging the telegraph line to Shkodra when their salaries as 'street guardians' were not regularly paid; see E. Durham, *High Albania* (London, 1985), 323.

The Ottoman attitude towards the Mirdites was traditionally based on the principle of co-optation, signified by the term *istimalet* (with many variations such as *celb*, *imale*, *tatyib*, *teklif*, *ülfet* and *imtizac*). The technique of co-optation aimed at a rather loose control over an untroubled and agitation-free coexistence of various ethnic groups. In compensation for rendering military services and being engaged in military campaigns in the European parts of the Ottoman Empire, the Mirdites were exempted from tax payments and granted a high degree of autonomy. Their loyalty towards the state was not defined as obedience, as would be the case with regular subjects, but was designated with the standard term "good services and loyalty" (*hüsn-i khidmet ve sadaqat*) – very often supplemented with the phrase "from olden times" (*öteden beri*).

However, the picture slowly changed with the 1860s. In the 1850s unruly behaviour of the Mirdites was still accepted to a certain extent and only major transgressions were deemed deserving of punishment.[41] From roughly 1865 onwards, however, Ottoman impatience with Mirdite autonomy and anarchy began to grow. The autonomous status of the Mirdita was no longer accepted, and the insistence of the Mirdites on their privileges was now pronounced to be unfounded.

From the late 1860s onwards, the old privileges that Ottoman documents had confirmed in the 1850s without reservation and even proudly were now refuted as self-aggrandizing and unfounded Mirdite claims.[42] The Mirdites were characterized as notorious rebels. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the phrase *öteden beri*, which had been always used in connection with the Mirdites' good services and loyalty, was now linked with an ingrown tradition of Mirdite rebelliousness and brigandage.[43] The Mirdites were furthermore denounced because of their alleged barbarian character (*vahşi*) and complete ignorance (*cahiliyyet*), both of which were presented as the major reasons for their habit of disobedience.[44]

41 Examples of impatience with the Mirdites can already be found in the 1850s, see for example BBA İrade Meclis-i Mahsus 405, leff 4, writ of the Sublime Porte from 22 May 1857. But these rebukes did not yet lead to a basic change in the Ottoman attitude towards the Mirdites.

42 See for example BBA İrade Dahiliye 40955, leff 1, Ahmed As'ad, governor of Shkodra, to the Sublime Porte on 24 February 1869; almost identically reiterated in the concluding writ of the central administration from 14 March 1869.

43 See for example BBA İrade Şura-yı Devlet 1218, writ of the central administration from 8 March 1873.

44 BBA İrade Dahiliye 42799, leff 1, İbrahim Derviş, governor of Shkodra, on 23 May 1870; İrade Dahiliye 42799, writ of the central administration from 6 July 1870; İrade Dahiliye 43198, İsma'il Hakkı, governor of Shkodra, on 20 September 1870; İrade Dahiliye 43198, writ of the central administration from 15 October 1870.

The necessity to punish and castigate the unruly Mirdites was expressed by the terms *te'dib* (chastening, a punishment for a fault, teaching polite manners, moral education) and *terbiye* (correcting, chastising, punishing, educating, good manners), both carrying the twofold meaning of punishment and education. The way to correct Mirdite corruption was not simply to strike the population and make them obey. The aim was now more ambitious: to make them succumb completely to *ıslah* (amelioration, betterment, correction; improvement, reformation) and *inzıbat* (discipline).[45]

The old concept of the sovereign guaranteeing prosperity and granting security had been superseded by the far more ambitious project to civilize the Mirdites and provide a higher standard of education and living. İsma'il Hakkı, governor of Shkodra, argued in 1870 that the Mirdites had turned to robbery because of their dire need and poverty. They would, therefore, have to be inculcated with the principles of civilization through newly established schools, and then made to adapt slowly to agricultural work.[46] The relationship between disciplining and civilizing was made clear more than once. In 1873, a memorandum of the state council argued that the installation of local councils and the introduction of the Ottoman administrative system would help to civilize the Mirdites.[47]

In the 1870s Ottoman authorities strove to finally break the resistance of the Mirdites. Governor Şevket Pasha forced upon the Mirdita the installation of an administrative unit and officially abrogated the use of Albanian customary law. During his second term in office from June to November 1873 his attitude towards the Mirdites stiffened even more, and he had several officers and forty privates of the Mirdite gendarmerie arrested during their visit to Shkodra. When the Mirdites rose in a revolt against the Ottoman authorities, a military expedition was organized and sent to the Mirdita. Soon afterwards the campaign had to be called off. Şevket Pasha drowned in the Boyana, the first of the many rivers that had to be crossed on the way from Shkodra to the Mirdita. The abortive expedition was symptomatic for the overall failure to establish solid Ottoman institutions and control, not only in the Mirdita but in many other areas of Albania, up until the end of Ottoman rule in 1912.

45 BBA İrade Dahiliye 42799, leff 1: İbrahim Derviş, governor of Shkodra, on 23 May 1870; İrade Dahiliye 43198, İsma'il Hakkı, governor of Shkodra, on 20 September 1870; İrade Dahiliye 44244, İsma'il Hakkı, governor of Shkodra, on 8 July 1871: İrade Şura-yı Devlet 1218, writ of the central administration on 8 March 1873.

46 BBA İrade Dahiliye 43198, İsma'il Hakkı, governor of Shkodra, on 20 September 1870.

47 BBA İrade Şura-yı Devlet 1218, writ of the State Council on 26 February 1873.

7. Towards a New Order

From the vast material of Ottoman bureaucratic correspondence, a traditional cyclical conception of order can be extracted: The Ottoman mind sees an incessant alternation between order and disorder. The ideal order of security cum prosperity is always endangered by negative events and evildoers. By admonition and, as a last resort, by physical violence, order is to be restored. Culprits are chastised and the old equilibrium is regained.

From the third decade of the *Tanzimat* onwards, however, one can observe a fundamental change – the emergence of a new notion of order that partially complements, partially supersedes the old one. The cyclical image of order was completely replaced by a 'one-way' concept: Instead of being continuously obliged to restore the always-precarious order, the Ottoman state and authorities were now firmly resolved to establish a new and final order. The various peoples had to be brought to their senses; once and for all the eternal cycle of order–disorder–order had to be broken.

Tanzimat rhetoric was – even in its later stages – deeply embedded in the tradition of Ottoman patrimonial rhetoric. The traditional stress on obedience, however, was transformed into a quest for control and discipline as reformed variants of obedience. The peripheral societies of the Ottoman Empire, which had earlier been respected as carrying a certain burden in the service of the state (e.g. service in military campaigns) and, therefore, had been left alone, were redefined as backward societies that had to be reformed and civilized. Now Ottoman authorities strove to be the demiurge of a new society.

Ottoman policy in Northern Albania was, to a large extent, determined by the presence of the de facto autonomous mountain principality of Montenegro and its ambitions to extend its territorial possessions and obtain an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea at the Ottoman Empire's expense. The Ottomans reacted by upholding the fiction of Ottoman sovereignty over Montenegro and, on the local level, fighting back Montenegrin inroads and attempting to stabilize the borderland region. Obviously, the Ottoman military and administrative personnel seem to have mastered the task of following a two-tracked course without great difficulty. Although Ottoman documents are silent about this question, the split notion of sovereignty – defending it officially, but accepting its nonexistence in daily politics – does not seem to have been strange at all to Ottoman political tradition. It would, nonetheless, be worthwhile to speculate what effects this contradiction between sovereign rights, which were stubbornly defended on the international and diplomatic level, and daily political practice had on the Ottoman political mind in the nineteenth century – at a time when the Ottoman state was vigorously trying to make its presence felt throughout the empire.

One compensation for the feelings of frustration on account of the self-assertive mountain principality backed by European powers was to conceive of the struggle against Montenegro as a confrontation between a civilized state and a barbarous and unruly tribal people.

Yet in the inner-Ottoman regions of Northern Albania such as the tribal region of the Mirdita, which were at some distance from Montenegro, Ottoman policy was less lenient and tried hard to press the *Tanzimat* institutions upon the population. In the 1840s and 1850s Ottoman authorities had still judged the whole of the Catholic population in the province of Shkodra (still representing the majority compared to the Muslim inhabitants) as loyal towards the empire. But with the 1860s the picture changed radically: The tribal population was now judged as an unruly people deserving to be punished, disciplined and civilized. This general Ottoman discourse, which intensified from the 1850s onwards, stressing the need for reform, centralization, control and civilization, contrasted remarkably with the very pragmatic political practices in the borderland regions.

Ottoman policy in the Ottoman–Montenegrin borderlands of Northern Albania was confronted with a Gordian knot. In order to implement the *Tanzimat* and to transform Northern Albania into a region where the Ottoman state would see a net return on its investments in military security and infrastructure, the borderlands next to Montenegro had to be secure and stable. However, such an aim – given the limited military and financial means of the Ottoman state as well as the international setting – could only be obtained with the cooperation of the local population. But according to *Tanzimat* ideology, exactly these same people had to be chastised and civilized.

Confronted with this dilemma, Ottoman policy in the Montenegrin borderlands seems to have resorted, and resigned itself, to its traditional policy of bargaining, co-optation, limited military pressure and playing the various tribes off against one another. One must say, however, that the necessity to adjust to the particular conditions of the struggle against Montenegro in the borderlands saved the Ottoman authorities from executing some of the rigid and even partially self-defeating measures of the *Tanzimat*, which in other parts of Albania and elsewhere in the empire contributed substantially to the alienation of the people from Ottoman rule.

8. Conclusion

The *Tanzimat* can be understood as the paradigmatic attempt of the state to build up and extend its infrastructural power.[48] The Ottomans' attempt to regain control of their peripheral regions was motivated by the enormous financial needs of a modern state with its steadily growing bureaucracy and its array of self-imposed tasks. Furthermore, the peripheries of the Ottoman Empire were endangered by the encroaching European imperialism. Despite all of this, historians still tend to interpret Ottoman *Tanzimat* policy as completely rational, and they typically underestimate its ambiguities. Inquiries into Ottoman political concepts in the *Tanzimat* period suggest that ideological motives, for example the Ottoman claim to a *mission civilisatrice* in its own peripheries, should also be considered. It will be worthwhile to enquire whether the rigidity of many *Tanzimat* measures and actions are not indications of a specific Ottoman modernity, with its specific traits of irrationality.

The project of rigid order cum civilizing mission had to end in disappointment because it was, to a large extent, not realistic. The Ottomans offered the empire's people a 'reform package' that promised to raise them to a higher level of civilization and to a common Ottoman identity. The price the people were expected to pay was to conform to the new order and discipline. This package, as the new idea behind Ottomanism, was not completely beyond the bounds of possibility, but it was much less practical and more fragile than the flexible praxis of ethnic containment. What is more important: The vision of a final and complete order, which the Ottoman elite propagated and in which it began to believe, reduced the state elite's capability to cope with disappointment and frustration. When the empire's population turned down this 'generous' offer, the state elite interpreted that as betrayal. A process of radicalization began, which would escalate so violently in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

48 See for example E. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire. Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge, 1999), 3f., who builds his argumentation on Michael Mann's differentiation between 'despotic' and 'infrastructural' power and applies the latter term to Ottoman policy from the middle of the 19th century onwards.