

## Comparison of decolonization history: a sample of Ottoman Empire

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### Abstract

*Traditional perspectives on decolonization, particularly how European states like France and Britain viewed and analyzed through during the history is vulnerable to find out the Ottomans' sample's elements of decolonization from the past. This paper encourages moving beyond Eurocentric perspectives on decolonization and adopting a more inclusive, globalized approach. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of decolonization processes across different regions and suggests that understanding these processes requires considering both European and local perspectives on behalf of experience of Ottoman Empire's experience in middle age era in decolonization. Decolonial movements are not merely about political independence but encompasses economic, cultural, and social liberation, as well. It calls for a comprehensive approach that integrates restitution, representation, and respect for all cultural heritage. This transformative process aims to restore agency to marginalized communities and ensure that they have the facilities which are necessary to chart their self destinies.*

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Ottoman Empire, Europe, Freedom

### Introduction

Historical impact of empires on human societies faces across different continents and cultures. It highlights how empires such as the Manchus, Mughals, Ottomans, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French shaped the path of history in several ways. These empires not only expanded their territories but also influenced the societies they ruled in terms of politics, trade, and social structures (Thomas and Thompson, 2014, p. 142).

Colonialism is believed to have had significant impacts on world history of western culture. European identity, which emerged with the Renaissance period, potentially led to the discovery of new lands through the initiation of industrial activities revolution. During this period, European countries, which were generally at war with each other, targeted the American continent and the Far East in the name of development and thrive. As the Ottomans weakened, Africa became fertile and

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Fertile lands for European countries looking for new colonies. From here, a new struggle for the allocation of African resources has begun in the various regions of Africa. As in Africa, America, India and the Far East, not only Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium and Germany, but especially Great Britain and France are representatives of western culture narrating the war they fought from Europe to Africa (Uygur and Uygur, 2013, pp. 273-274).

The Ottoman Empire, once a powerful and vast empire that spanned across three continents, has faced challenges in the wake of decolonization movements around the world. As nations seek independence and self-determination, it is crucial for the Ottoman Empire to adapt and support the decolonization process from past.

To what extent foreigners had freedom of religion and conscience in the Ottoman Empire? Freedom of religion and conscience was privilege in the theocratic Ottoman Empire, defined as the freedom to choose any religion or philosophy, the right to believe in any religion, the right to practice any religion, and the right to receive religious education. These freedoms were based on both some basic rules of Islamic law and on agreements (capitulations) made with privileged countries. According to these agreements, foreigners could practice and teach their religion, and go on pilgrimages, provided that public order was not disturbed. The exaggeration of rights caused serious diplomatic crises between the Ottoman Empire and European countries (Konan, 2008, p. 168).

If we consider freedom of religion and conscience as the right of a person to believe in a religion or philosophy of one's own choice, to fulfill the requirements of the religion and philosophy one believes in as worship and prayer according to the methods determined by that religion and belief, to learn and teach the ideas of the faith he/she has accepted, to prepare and distribute books for this purpose, to make propaganda and to announce them to others, we can say that foreigners who were granted the right of capitulation in the Ottoman State also benefited from this inviolable and absolute right, and even that they were free to an extent that they did not have in their own countries (Konan, 2008, p. 180).

The difference of Ottoman Empire in compare with other states' decolonization experience is its success to unify different nations such Arabs, Romans and Africans with their cultural values and religious belief.

## 1. Literature

This paper aims to outline the specifications for the Ottoman Empire to embrace decolonization, promote freedom for all nations, and foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

In essence of the highlighted scholarly evolutions in Ottoman studies, where traditional views of the Ottoman Empire as non-colonized are being reevaluated through the lens of colonial theory and postcolonial studies, offering new insights into historical interpretations and methodologies. The recent trends today from late Ottoman studies to incorporate terminology and concepts from postcolonial literature discusses the evolving nature of Ottoman sample, incorporating insights from postcolonial literature to deepen understanding of power dynamics and governance within the Empire, while cautioning against simplistic comparisons with Western colonial models (Kechriotis, 2013, pp. 40, 44-45).

The examination of how imperial heroes have been viewed and understood in the decades following the collapse of the British and French empires, highlighting their enduring impact and the shifting perspectives on their legacies (Jones *et al.*, 2017, p. 1).

Kitchen (2017, p. 1) discusses the impact of the First World War on the colonial empires of those two nations, as well as the responses to ideological challenges to colonial rule. In summary, the War had profound implications for the colonial empires of Britain and France, leading to strain on their imperial systems, partial reforms, and responses to ideological challenges that included maintaining control through violent suppression of decolonial movements.

Anscombe (2014) challenges the predominant narrative that emphasizes nationalism as the primary force shaping the history of the Ottoman Empire, Balkans, and the Middle East, argues that religious affiliations were the most influential factor in shaping communal identities during the Ottoman era and continues to be significant in the region even today, still.

Augusti (2018, p. 338) appears to be a part of scholarly discourse examining how legal, geopolitical, and cultural forces intersected in 19th-century Europe, particularly in relation to the Ottoman Empire and its evolution amidst Western influences and pressures. It seeks to offer new insights into the complexities and repercussions of these interactions on both regional and global scales.

Sofos and Ozkirimli (2009, p. 46) explains how both Greek and Turkish nationalisms were influenced by Western European modernity and its perspectives on history. Both Greek and Turkish nationalisms were not identical in their emergence, but they shared a common influence from Western

European civilizations. This influenced their approaches to history, where they selectively used and repressed aspects of their past to construct national identities that aligned with contemporary Western thoughts of civilization in process.

Çapan (2022) provides a critical examination of Türkiye's positioning as a "bridge" between East and West, challenging the simplistic narrative by exploring its implications through the lens of coloniality and the modern international system and seeks to problematize and deconstruct the conventional narrative of Turkey as a bridge between East and West by highlighting the complexities of coloniality and its impact on global perceptions and power dynamics.

After reveal of this main material from the literature, it is understood that Britain and France were mainly role model for decolonization in Europe.

Story of Young Tunisian Muslim Mehmed bin Abdulcelil examines the situation of Ottoman subjects who were kidnapped and sold as slaves during the Ottoman period. Efforts to gain freedom through the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman courts, freedom trials were common in the 17th-century's Ottoman Empire. So much so that contemporary legal practice guides (sukuk) have always examples of how this happens to document them. But they have never been systematically studied throughout this period. Slave ownership was extremely common, and the legality of enslavement was only relied on religion and nationality. Using a sample of seventy-nine suits from major countries Istanbul and eleven sukuk manuscripts, how the illicit trade is carried out. The number of enslaved people, the heavy traffic of legal captives, and the theoretically preservation of Ottoman subjecthood conflicted with the practical difficulties on how to prove this, reveals the gap between slavery as a legal institution and slavery in practice. Whereas most freedom cases resulted in decisions in favor of the victims; most were illegal. Enslaved people unfortunately never got their cases heard or were turned far away of lack of information and evidence (White, 2023, p. 526).

Ottoman domination in Africa took place on the North African axis. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Ottomans advanced from the north of Africa alongside the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. In the east, they progressed along the western shores of the Red Sea and reached the shores of the Indian Ocean. Ottoman sovereignty in North Africa begins in the 16th century when Barbarossa Hayrettin Pasha enters Ottoman service. The Ottomans initially ruled North Africa, which they called Garp Ocaklari, under the same administration, but later they ruled by separating their administrations. While these provinces in North Africa were initially completely dependent on the central government, then they began to act independently of the centre with the deterioration of the management mechanism. The revenues of

the provinces of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli consisted of goods, commercial properties and slaves obtained from their piracy activities. Especially during the period when the Spanish were massacring Andalusian Muslims and had no agreement with the Ottomans, The pirates of the Garp Ocaklari were plundering the islands and coasts of Spain and seizing merchant ships. The Garp Ocaklari pirates were considered equivalent to Maltese pirates damaging Muslim ships. In the mid-19th century, when piracy was at its peak, Egyptian governors annexed the intermediate lands of Sudan and Uganda to Egyptian territory in order to unify the Ottoman lands that continued in the direction of Egypt-Somalia and Egypt-Algeria. On the other hand, they tried to establish Ottoman rule in Niger and Chad by going south from Tripolis to the Lake Chad basin. Thus, many regions south of the Sahara joined the Ottoman lands. However, the ban on piracy at the Congress of Viana in 1815 weakened the Garp Ocaklari. France occupied a strategic position in the Western Mediterranean by occupying Algeria, with which it had commercial relations since the 16th century. There upon, he invaded Tunisia in 1881 with the approval of England and Germany. Italy occupied Tripoli in 1912 and the Treaty of Ouchy ended Ottoman rule in North Africa (Toprak, 2012, pp. 224-225).

### **1.1. Garp Ocaklari and its Role on African Colonies**

The Ottoman Empire began to dominate the Mediterranean and its surroundings since 16th century. It has dominated North Africa since 19th century. With Barbarossa's entry into service to Ottoman Empire, Algeria first, then Tunisia and Tripoli came under Ottoman rule and joined its lands. Thus, sovereignty in North Africa, starting from Algeria extends to Egypt and the east of the Mediterranean. These lands in North Africa were organized into three separate states and they became important bases of Mediterranean domination of Ottoman Empire. Especially European states, they played important roles in naval wars with others.

The administration established by the Ottomans in North Africa loosened over time and administration passed into the hands of local military forces. These local forces also put all their strength into the name of "tax", which was imposed on ships trading in the Mediterranean, leading them to engage in the piracy activities. They collected tribute under it. In the Garp Ocaklari, which earned their living in this way, piracy has become the only profession and source of income for them.

Administration and military affairs in the Garp Ocaklari were completely dependent on the piracy. In seaside port cities, some of the soldiers went to the city and when they were dealing with the security of its surroundings, the other part is taken from merchant ships in the Mediterranean.

Soldiers were trying to extort money. A small portion of the money which was collected is paid in annual taxes. While some of them are sent to Istanbul as salaries, some of them are distributed as salaries to the soldiers, and the remaining money was used to cover the state's expenses.

Garp Ocaklari is an almost autonomous state and they elected a governor, however Istanbul approved it. Regarding to Mediterranean trade, they could also make agreements with other countries without needing permission from Istanbul. Thus, by collecting annual taxes from the states they made agreements with. They displayed their flags. It grants free passage in the Mediterranean to ships carrying were taken tribute.

However, in 19th century, economic and political developments in the century disrupted piracy activities. Vienna was convened in 1815. European states that banned piracy in their congresses, followed by England by sending warships to the Mediterranean under their leadership. They caused damages. In addition to Europeans who advanced in colonialism in this century, states took over most of Africa, especially since the 1870s: Germany and Italy turned to Africa to gain colonies. Africa was made by the Garp Ocaklari a target. Thus, over time, all of the Africa was conquered by England. It has been the scene of conflicts of interest in between France, Germany and Italy.

Unfortunately, the great European powers are helpless against the colonial race, The Ottoman Empire did not have the power to protect the remaining Garp Ocaklari and defeats in the wars with Russia and Austria, internal rebellions, Due to reasons such as reforms was not given the desired results and external pressures to the Northern The Ottoman Empire, which could not protect Africa, made the decision with the Treaty of Ushi in 1912. Ottomans have to accept the lost of lands (Toprak, 2012, pp. 235-236).

Although the human rights doctrine is primarily a product of the Western history, non-Western understanding and interpretation of issues associating today with "human rights" can undoubtedly enrich the discussions.this topic. The Ottoman system prioritized the interests of communities they emphasized justice rather than individuals and freedom. Ottoman sultan and the courts took great care to comply with Sharia law, of course it was understood from a Sunni perspective, it granted broad rights to both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals. These rights included: life, property, fair trial and social protection, as well as certain women rights. Contrary to some claims, in the Ottoman state unless politics comes into play, try to take control of the "public sphere." After the Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century, State predominance by European laws and institutions' public space, those narrowing the scope of civil action (Aral, 2004, p. 454).

## **1.2. Euphrates Valley Railway Project in the Framework of Britain's Colonial Policy**

Railway projects began to gain importance after the 1830s, and railway construction began to gain momentum from the second half of the 19th century. England was at the forefront in this regard. The reason why England showed particular interest in the construction of railways was its colony, India. Tigris and Euphrates Valleys have an important place in the planned railway projects. One of the projects on the Euphrates Valley Railway line was the construction of the line that will connect the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. Another project was the idea of building a railway that would pass through the same regions as ship transportation that would reach India via the Euphrates and Tigris. Names such as Sir William Andros, Doctor Thomson and Francis Chesney played leading roles in the Euphrates Valley Railway Project. England later postponed the Euphrates Valley Railway Project. The reason for this is that England established a shipping company for postal transportation in 1846. The Euphrates Valley Railway project was postponed until the Crimean War. The Ottoman Empire negotiated with different companies for the construction of a railway in the Euphrates Valley. The Ottoman Empire wanted to ensure the security of this railway. Because for this, the Ottoman Empire had to show its influence against the tribes in the region and send enough soldiers to the region. In addition, this issue is also important in terms of strengthening the influence of the Ottoman Empire in the Baghdad Gulf. England and France fought on the Euphrates Railway. However, there were also struggles for influence between England and Russia in the Euphrates Valley, located within the Ottoman borders. England supported the project to reduce Russia's influence on the Ottoman Empire and provide benefits in terms of raw materials and transportation. Russia also implemented counter policies to reduce Britain's influence in the region. It is planned to create many different lines regarding the Euphrates Valley Railway. In addition, concession terms were determined, and contracts were made between the Ottoman Empire and England regarding this project. The Euphrates Valley Railway Project could not be implemented for various reasons (Arslanyürek and Alpoğlu, 2023, p. 760).

## **1.3. Starting Point of Regulation of Ottoman: Battle of Marj Dabiq in 1516**

The regional presence of Ottoman rules begins with the victory of Battle of Marj Dabiq in 1516. Ottoman authority adopted management styles in different regions. First, unless it contradicts the basic policy of the states that preceded, accepted Ottoman's administrative and economic systems. In

addition, they did not apply the same administrative system to the whole region. Egypt had a special status. The Ottoman administration provided peace in Palestine.

Arab countries experienced rapidly developing colonialism starting from the end of the 15th century with Ottoman rule protected against their activities. Because especially the Spanish and Portuguese first in the past, and in the following centuries The British and French spread to all the seas of the world. Ottoman Empire saved the Arab countries' sovereignty from the colonization.

On the other hand, according to Öztürk since there was never a distinction between the Motherland and the Colonies in the Ottoman administration style, all the country's lands were with the same value. Crimea and Cairo, Bosnia and Basra, Trabzon and Tripoli, Yemen and Yanya had no difference, no superiority over others. Likewise, people from all races, religions and sects were living within the Ottoman borders. People were under the supreme sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire and were entrusted to the Sultan by Allah. The state was very sincere. Because the deputies from all over the nations, from all languages and religions, were elected to the 1876 Constitutional Assembly. For the Ottoman Empire, all its people were of equal identity. But in the same period, the British or French Parliaments would be unimaginable for an Algerian, Senegalese, Australian or South African, because these places are colonies, in the eyes of Europeans,

Because of this thought, according to the period and conditions it is spread throughout the country throughout the period, as much as possible. It has made major investments in education, public works, health and other various areas. The region's cities and roads, railways, ports, educational institutions at all levels, post, telegraph, tramway, electricity and municipal services were developed.

However, there are specific results of Western states, especially England, France and Russia in compare with the Ottoman Empire's way of decolonization. This is richness of common history's outputs (2010, p. 325-326).

#### **1.4. Ottoman Empire's Decolonization from the Romani Literature**

The emergence of Romani literature and media in the Balkans during the Ottoman Empire can be better understood within the broader framework of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the modern era. This movement manifested in various ways, shaped by the specific contexts of different regions within the diverse Ottoman Empire.

In some instances, especially among Roma Christians, this movement was closely intertwined with the national liberation struggles of the Balkan Orthodox peoples. In contrast, among Roma



Muslims, it reflected the broader social developments within Ottoman society. This duality can be attributed to the unique status of Roma in the Empire's socio-political hierarchy.

Unlike their counterparts in Central and Western Europe, who often faced severe marginalization, the Roma in the Ottoman Empire—officially referred to as *Kıptı* (Copts) or *Çingene*—were recognized as full subjects of the Sultan. They possessed civil rights as early as the fifteenth century (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001). However, the socio-political landscape of the Empire was marked by religious divisions, with society largely categorized into Muslims and non-Muslims.

Roma were distinctive in that they were classified by ethnicity under Ottoman law, a rarity within the Empire. Their categorization as either Muslims or Christians created divergent pathways for civic emancipation. This led to different expressions of Romani literature and media, reflecting the complex interplay of ethnicity, religion, and the sociopolitical context of the time. The resulting literature and press thus emerged as vital components of the broader movements for identity and rights within the Ottoman framework, highlighting the multifaceted nature of Roma experiences in the Balkans (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 23).

Among Muslim Roma in the Balkans, a distinct civic emancipation movement emerged, diverging from the narrative of Roma Christians linked to national revival. Instead, Muslim Roma were integrated into the broader social evolution of the Muslim population within the Ottoman Empire, particularly during the transition to the Turkish nation-state in the early twentieth century, following the Young Turk Revolution.

This shift involved a significant departure from Ottoman identity, with Muslim communities—including the Roma—seeking their place in the new national framework. Some Muslim Roma began to pursue civic emancipation by establishing their own identities and communities, leading to the creation of the newspaper *Laço*. This publication marked a pivotal moment as it was the first Roma newspaper produced independently, without reliance on external influences like religious or state institutions, showcasing their aspirations for greater visibility and agency within society. (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 28).

The "Letter to the Editor" underscores a critical aspect of Roma integration within the Ottoman Empire, particularly for Roma Christians, whose social and civil status mirrored that of other Christian subjects (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001). This integration fostered a shared trajectory of development, allowing some members of the Roma community in the Balkans during the nineteenth century to advance their national consciousness.

This evolution marked a departure from traditional internal frameworks, as they sought recognition and equality within the broader socio-cultural landscape. The Balkan context played a crucial role in shaping their public identity, driving Roma to actively seek validation of a "glorious" historical past. They aimed to craft a national historical mythology that would bolster their claims for civic emancipation, positioning themselves as a distinct but equal community alongside their Balkan neighbors.

The aspirations articulated in the letter reflect a broader pattern seen among other Balkan nations during the nineteenth century, characterized by the establishment of educational systems, the creation of churches offering services in their own language, and an implicit vision of self-determination. This development signifies the Roma's quest for recognition and rights, echoing the national movements around them while highlighting their unique identity (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 26).

The rise of Romani literature and press, alongside the movement for civic emancipation within the Ottoman Empire, represents a significant historical process marked by shared goals, despite the initial division between Christian and Muslim Roma. This dual track did not undermine the unity of their aspirations. Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, these distinctions quickly faded in the context of newly formed nation-states.

In Turkey, most Roma Christians left during the population exchange after the Lausanne Agreement, leaving predominantly Roma Muslims. In the newly independent Balkan states, the emphasis shifted from religious differences to the pursuit of ethnic unity among Roma. While early efforts toward this unity were often sporadic and led by individual community members without widespread impact, they reflected a broader trend seen across Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe during the rise of modern nationalism.

This pattern of nationalism involved the emergence of a small national elite that spread its ideas to the wider population. For the Roma in the Balkans, evidence from the Ottoman period indicates they were still in the initial phase of this development, characterized by the birth of Romani literature and print media. These early cultural expressions laid the groundwork for a collective identity that would evolve as the community sought recognition and rights within the changing political landscape (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 33).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper claims the Ottoman Empire could succeed the embrace decolonization, promote freedom for all nations, and build an inclusive and equitable society for different nations, cultures and religions in its land compare with other colonial states in history.

Said Halim Pasha is an important thinker and statesman who lived in the last century of the Ottoman Empire. He was the grandson of Governor of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Pasha of Kavala and son of Mehmed Abdulhalim Pasha, a member of the Council of State. Said Halim Pasha, who grew up in his distinguished environment and received a good education, served in various positions at the highest levels during the most depressed periods of the state. He held various positions and demonstrated his extensive intellectual knowledge through the works he wrote as well as the tasks he undertook. Said Halim Pasha, who had an important place in the Islamist movement of the Ottoman period, said, "Western colonization means intellectually benefiting from "civilization" and "alienating one's own culture and values". It opposed an understanding of Westernization at the level of "imitation" in Ottoman Empire. This opposition of Said Halim reflects the thought of Islamism. It is about anti-colonialism, which is one of its main themes (Şahin, 2022, p. 1215). This means Islam is freedom. Ottomans made benefit with civilization from Europeans. But it is not clear that it resulted successful. It was the better way to reach civilization era for Ottomans, but the Empire couldn't do that.

Missionary activities not only led to Christianization, but also to become good Christians, they devoted themselves to the service to white people. This also aimed to create societies dedicated to contentment. Religious legitimacy was also provided to people's "master" status. Language and cultural policy carried out together with missionary activities. It forms an important point in colonial activities. Moreover, it would be appropriate to exemplify this policy with Africa and South America. As a result of studies carried out on the axis of English and French presence in Africa; Portuguese and mostly Spanish languages in South America became the official language of societies (Uygur and Uygur, 2013, p. 280).

Modern Republic of Türkiye has rich history because of Ottoman Empire from past. This Empire is inspired by different countries in the world today, from its experience. This is wisely for the developing of the history of world. There is a quote in Türkiye that, if the lessons couldn't take from the past, the history would repeat once again. Ottoman Empire succeed the different nations were lived in peace together in the middle age era.

For instance, Portugal guided geographical discoveries, when United Kingdom, France, Italy was issued colonial experiences. Today decolonization takes place of colonization. The policy makers should consider works of academics, when they take decisions. Because science is once that we can all trust in without prejudices.

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