

## The Socio-Cultural Footprint of Ottoman Governance in the Arab Provinces 1830-1914

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### ABSTRACT

From 1517 onwards, the entire Arab world, except Morocco, was placed, without much difficulty, under Ottoman influence. This study examines the profound transformations in the Arab Levant during the long nineteenth century, beginning with the military campaign of Muhammad Ali Pasha's Egyptian forces (1831-1841). This pivotal occupation shattered the old provincial order, introduced a modernizing administration, and exposed the region to intensified European political and economic influence. The study then explores the distinct era of Sultan Abdul Hamid (1876-1909), whose autocratic rule emphasized Pan-Islamism and centralized control in a calculated effort to reverse imperial decline and manage the rise of nascent Arab nationalism. Finally, the study concentrates on the period of the Committee of Union and Progress (Young Turks) from 1909 until the outbreak of the First World War. In this field, an in-depth study was carried out on the policy of centralization and Turkification adopted by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) against the Arab elements of the empire and, on the other hand, the Arab reactions against this policy. Finally, Western ambitions in Arab provinces were also studied, particularly those of France, Great Britain and the Zionist movement. Despite their distinct cultural and social profiles, the Arab provinces all experienced significant hardships under Ottoman rule, with conditions often deteriorating to an unbearable level. Consequently, the era of Ottoman domination in the Arab Levant may be considered one of the most difficult in the region's modern history.

**Keywords:** Socio-Cultural, Ottoman, Arab Provinces

### INTRODUCTION

In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was the object of two main threats; Persia in the east and Spain and Portugal in the west. The Ottomans became the protectors of Islam against both the West and the Persians (Laurens, 2000:19).

In the early 16th century, the Ottomans moved eastward to annex the Arab provinces under their influence. In 1514 and after the Battle of Chaldiran, a city located in northern Iran, the Ottoman Empire triumphed over the Safavid Empire and took immediate and permanent control of northern Iraq (Fattal and Sukari, 1988 : 51). It was not until 1534 that the Ottomans finally managed to occupy Baghdad and the southern regions of Iraq (Ḥalīl, 1983 : 43). In 1516 and after the battle of *Marj Dabiq*, north of Aleppo, with the Mamluks, the Ottomans occupied Syria. The following year, they were able to eradicate the Mamluk state in Egypt (Fraehāt, 1990 :11-12).

After the crushing defeat of the Mamluks in Egypt, *Sharif* Barakat of Mecca recognized the Ottoman Empire, and as a result, the Hejaz peacefully came under Ottoman influence. Since that time, the *Sharifs* of Mecca have declared loyalty and obedience to Constantinople (Fattāl and Sukarī, 1988 :62).

The Arab provinces were, in the name of the Caliph, under Ottoman rule for over four hundred years. This vast region consisted of different territories which were under the authority of a governor who took his orders from Constantinople, without consideration of local and regional realities.

From the 18th century onwards, the gradual weakening of the empire due to its internal weaknesses and the ambitions of the Western powers led to increasing autonomy for a certain number of territories and, from the 19th century onwards, to reflection by some intellectuals on the notion of the "Arab nation". The Arab nationalist movement played a key role in the evolution of this region. Nicknamed "the sick man of Europe", the Ottoman Empire saw its sovereignty crumble and struggled to modernize.

After the "Young Turk" revolution of 1908, which initially aroused real interest by announcing advances in the area of freedoms, particularly following the coup d'état of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1913, Turkish nationalists imposed an authoritarian power in Constantinople which developed a "pan-Turanian" ideology increasingly hostile to national and religious minorities.

For centuries, the Arab provinces of the Levant, Mesopotamia, and parts of the Arabian Peninsula were integral parts of the Ottoman Empire. While the political narrative of this relationship, centering on administration, military campaigns, and eventual decline, is well-documented, the deeper, more subtle story of its social and cultural impact remains profoundly complex and contested. To understand the formation of modern Arab societies, one must look beyond the edicts of the *Sultan* and the battles of pashas, and into the realms of everyday life: the transformation of urban spaces, the evolution of language and identity, and the quiet negotiations of power within households and local communities

### **The Era of *Sultan* Abdul Hamid**

Each Arab province had its own particular characteristics at the religious, demographic and international level. But these provinces suffered in one way or another very difficult situations under the Ottoman rule. Arabs made up half of the Ottoman population, around 12 million habitants. Despite this fact, there were only 4 arab senators and 69 arab deputies in the Ottoman parliament, which was composed of 40 senators and 240 deputies. Only one arab was part of the consular corps and none was present in the diplomatic corps (Khairallah, 1919 :43-44).

### **The Situation in the Hedjaz**

The Hejaz is the destination of all Muslims from all parts of the world to perform pilgrimage, as it is the region that contains the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The people of Hejaz benefit from the pilgrims to do trade and business during the pilgrimage season where relations between pilgrims were based on religion, not on Arab ethnicity ( Al-ḥatīb, 2015 : 53). All societies in this part of the Arabian Peninsula were fragmented. Bedouin tribes had no organizational model and were only unified when threatened by an external force.

The Hejaz had enjoyed a kind of internal autonomy since the Ottomans ruled that region. They kept the system of governance of Mecca, upon which the Sharifs were responsible for managing the holy places in Mecca and Medina. By the end of the 19th century, the Hejaz was virtually under ottoman rule, as the five main cities of the Hejaz: Jeddah, Yambo, Taif, Medina, and Mecca each had an Ottoman garrison. Authority around these cities was exercised by the Hejazian tribes who lived mainly in the desert, and thus enjoyed complete independence and autonomy. These tribes admitted neither the jurisdiction of the ottoman courts nor conscription. Not only did the members of these tribes not pay taxes, but the ottoman government paid their chiefs considerable sums each time a pilgrimage or caravan had to pass through their respective territories. Ottoman soldiers were strictly forbidden to cross the Hejaz alone. Ottoman troops could only move by taking advantage of pilgrimages or caravans (Jung,1906: 100-101).

The *Sharif* of Mecca was responsible for the application of justice in these cities according to religious law. The governors of Hejaz, appointed by Constantinople, were responsible for the military aspects, but they interfered in internal affairs (Jung,1906: 100-101).

*Sharif* Awn al-Rafeeq, one of the uncles of Sharif Hussein, was appointed by the Ottoman Sultan as the Sharif of Mecca in 1881. He was a severe individual who exploited his position to extort pilgrims for personal gain. Sharif Hussein opposed his policies and openly denounced the injustices perpetrated by him and the Ottoman governor against the people of the Hejaz. The Ottomans punished Sharif Hussein for his criticisms by exiling him to Constantinople in 1893, where he spent fifteen years (Tlāss, 1987: 91).

In this context, Emir Abdullah, one of the sons of Sharif Hussein, wrote in his memoirs:

" My father was taken to Constantinople for opposing the policy of injustice in the Hejaz and for challenging the conduct of the Sharif of Mecca, who exploited the pilgrims".

(Abdullah Ibn Al-Hussein, 1989 :19)

Ottoman policy regarding the appointment of governors in the provinces stipulated that a candidate should not be native to the province he was to administer. This measure was designed to prevent undue familiarity with the

local population, thereby ensuring the strict execution of orders from the Constantinople. The situation in the Hejaz province, however, was entirely different. The Emirate of Mecca was a privileged position in Islam's two holy cities and was traditionally held by a Sharif from the Hashemite<sup>1</sup> clan, the same lineage as Sharif Husayn and the Prophet Muhammad himself.

In 1905, following the death of *Sharif* Awn al-Rafeeq, members of the Ottoman government proposed to *Sultan* Abdul Hamid that Sharif Hussein be appointed *Sharif* of Mecca. The *Sultan* rejected this suggestion, apprehensive of Hussein's sympathies, which aligned closely with Arab aspirations for independence. The *Sultan* stated:

"I would agree to Hussein's appointment as Sharif of Mecca only on the condition of his loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. I believe he will not be content with being merely the Sharif of Mecca but will aspire to something greater" (Al-Rūssān et Al-'Ammārī 127).

Dans son livre « Les sept piliers de la sagesse », T.E. Lawrence mentionna que le *Sharif* Hussein avait profité de son long séjour à Constantinople pour faire donner à ses fils Ali, Faysal, Abdullah et Zayd une éducation moderne qui, selon lui, les aiderait dans leurs futures responsabilités en tant qu'émirs et futur candidats à l'émirat de la Mecque (Lawrence, 1938).

In 1908, *Sultan* Abdul Hamid agreed to appoint *Sharif* Hussein as the Sharif of Mecca, concluding that Hussein's prestige and personal authority could safeguard the power of the Ottoman Empire against both internal and external opposition. However, from the very outset of his rule, Sharif Hussein pursued a policy of autonomy from the Ottoman Empire.

The construction of the Hejaz Railway was intended to connect the holy cities of the Hejaz to Syria and to develop previously neglected regions such as Transjordan. It was unique as the only railway not under foreign ownership, having been financed through contributions raised from across the entire Muslim world (Laurens, 2000 : 95).

By the end of 1908, the Ottomans had completed the railway line from Damascus to Medina. Later that same year, the Ottoman government attempted to extend this line to Mecca via Jeddah. While the Damascus-Mecca railway project was ostensibly initiated to facilitate access to the holy city, its underlying purpose, as envisioned by the Ottoman Sultan, was to serve as an instrument of military and political domination, thereby enabling deeper Ottoman penetration into the region. *Sharif* Hussein opposed this project for two principal reasons. Firstly, a significant portion of the population of Mecca and Medina depended on the transport of pilgrims and their baggage between the two holy cities, which relied on camels as the primary means of conveyance. The railway, therefore, threatened the livelihoods of these people and risked devastating the Hejazi economy. Secondly, *Sharif* Hussein understood that the Ottomans intended to use this project to consolidate their control over the Hejaz, and particularly over Mecca itself (Tlāss, 1987 : 95).

From his residence in Cairo, as early as 31 October 1914, Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, had contemplated the idea of an Arab counter-caliphate capable of instigating a revolt against the Ottoman Empire (FO 684/2/24/111).

Although Kitchener's declaration was vague and circumspect, *Sharif* Hussein had no reason not to hope and believe that he was the subject of it. From the outset of his correspondence with McMahon, the *Sharif* of Mecca raised the issue of the Arab Caliphate. In the first letter of this exchange, Hussein requested that Great Britain approve the proclamation of an Arab Caliph. It appears that he was not only encouraged by Kitchener's declaration but also motivated by his own ambitions for the position.

In his response to the *Sharif*, Sir McMahon stated that His Majesty's Government would welcome the resumption of the Caliphate by a genuine Arab descended from the Prophet's blessed lineage, an implicit reference to the Hashemites (Cmd. 5957).

### **The Situation in Syria and Lebanon**

Since 1516, Syria had been under Ottoman dominion. Successive Ottoman governors exercised arbitrary control over Syria, which led to a pervasive state of decay, weakness, and the deterioration of the Syrian people's living conditions. The Ottomans divided Syria into administrative regions linked to the capital through a highly centralized system. The people of Syria endured significant hardship due to excessive and capriciously imposed taxes. The economic sector witnessed no progress, and modern agricultural methods were not implemented. Moreover, the Ottoman governors routinely awaited the harvest season to seize and confiscate farmers' produce under the pretext of tax collection. Consequently, numerous farmers were compelled to abandon their villages (Ḥalīl, 1983 : 81-86).

The commercial sector was in an even more precarious state. In addition to the aforementioned issues, inadequate transportation and a lack of security contributed significantly to its decline. The health sector was

likewise in a dire condition; widespread poverty and hunger, compounded by a severe shortage of hospitals and healthcare, led to the proliferation of disease and a high mortality rate (Ḥalīl, 1983 : 83-86).

Furthermore, the Ottomans had neglected the educational system, resulting in a reduction in the number of schools and the widespread proliferation of illiteracy (Hatty, 1983 : 21).

In 1831, following the occupation of Syria by Muhammad Ali *Pasha*, the Ottoman governor of Egypt, a new era began for the region. The new administration under Muhammad Ali Pasha instigated developments in economic, social, and educational spheres. During this period, the feudal system was abolished and farmers were granted protection, commerce was revitalized, and schools were established (Maḥāsneh, 2000 : 147).

Following an extended period of intellectual and scientific stagnation, the Syrian populace actively engaged with these new reforms. Literary and scientific societies were established, modern sciences were incorporated into the curriculum, schools were founded, and a press emerged in Syria (Qasmyeh, 1982 : 15-16).

In 1840, Syria reverted to the direct control of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans resumed their previous policies, most notably by imposing heavy taxes and enforcing mandatory conscription (Fattāl and Sukarī, 1988 : 236-237).

Given Syria's strategic importance to France, French ambitions were a constant feature in this Ottoman province. Paris regarded its traditional interests in Syria as indisputable and worked assiduously to secure their recognition by other powers. The 1912 declaration by British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, affirming Britain's respect for French interests in Syria, and the subsequent statement by French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré in the Senate, clearly illustrate France's determination to maintain a presence in the region. Furthermore, France wielded a cultural influence in Syria that no other power managed to rival. A key ideological component of its cultural policy was its famed mission civilisatrice ("civilizing mission"). France also leveraged its economic support for the Ottoman Empire to pressure Constantinople into complying with reform projects: on the occasion of a loan request or the renewal of credit, France could condition its agreement on the Ottoman government's acceptance of reforms in the Arab Levant (Khoury, 1993 : 30-31).

From 1912 onwards, the growth and evolution of Arab nationalist movements compelled France to adopt a new policy in the region. A confidential French body was established within the French Foreign Ministry, known as the "Commission for Syrian Affairs." The purpose of this commission was to define French policy in Syria. It proposed two principal instruments that would guide French policy in Syria and Lebanon in the ensuing years. According to the commission, the geographical definition of Syria was rather vague, and France's Muslim policy in Syria was not sufficiently effective. Primarily, the members of this commission proposed that Syria should comprise the Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon, the vilayets of Beirut and Damascus, a part of the vilayet of Aleppo, and the Mutasarrifiyya of Jerusalem.

Some members of the commission proposed the exclusion of Palestine from Syria. Secondly, the commission proposed that France establish close relations with Muslim minorities, such as the Alawites, the Shiites, and the Druze, and that it should purchase the loyalty of Muslims who were hostile to its policy (Cloarec, 1998 : 38-39).

It is necessary to cite Mr. Albert Defrance, the French Minister in Cairo, to fully understand France's position regarding Syria. On 19 June 1913, the representative of the French Republic wrote to Mr. S. Pichon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

*"What seems to me desirable for our interests is the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire in Asia. We must ensure that the Syrian populations are given the impression that any favourable developments they might obtain, be they political modifications, administrative reforms, or economic improvements, would come from us, from our influence, and from our action"* (Khoury, 1993 : 65).

Beyond the general hardships faced by the Lebanese people under Ottoman rule, sectarian conflicts emerged as early as 1842. The most critical of these were the violent massacres that swept through numerous Lebanese regions in 1860 (Ḥalīl, 1983 : 103-104).

European powers, most notably France, capitalized on this opportunity to intervene. The French government deployed its naval fleet to occupy the Lebanese coastline under the pretext of aiding the Christian population. This intervention ultimately resulted in a formal agreement granting Mount Lebanon autonomous status within the Ottoman Empire, establishing it as a separate province independent from Syria (Fattāl and Sukarī, 1988 : 253-255).

Through this agreement, the Organic Regulation of 1861-1864 was signed on June 9 in Constantinople between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers represented by Austria, Great Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia. The appointment of the Governor of Mount Lebanon became the subject of negotiations between these powers and the Sublime Porte. They reached a compromise whereby the Governor was to be a Christian, but neither a Maronite nor a representative from Mount Lebanon (Khoury, 1993 : 22).

French foreign policy has continually asserted that Paris possessed incontestable rights to uphold in Lebanon, rights founded upon historical titles, agreements, and treaties with the Ottoman Empire. Franco-

Ottoman relations, while originating in the 16th century, were subject to significant fluctuations influenced by diverse geopolitical considerations. These relations were suspended between 1831 and 1841 as a consequence of French support for the Egyptian viceroy Muhammad Ali in his rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. Conversely, from 1854 to 1856, the relationship grew close following French backing of the Ottomans against Russia in the Crimean War. Although France had asserted a protective role over the Catholics of the Arab Levant since the 16th century, this French patronage was decisively consolidated following its 1860 intervention in Mount Lebanon.

France established a significant network of charitable schools and hospitals throughout the Levant. This policy was designed to propagate the French language through its educational institutions and to win the sympathy of the local population through its charitable hospitals and health services. According to the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Quai d'Orsay), between 65,000 and 90,000 children from the Ottoman Empire were enrolled in French missionary and secular schools by 1914. France expended more than 2.5 million francs on these projects. This network of educational and sanitary services was dedicated primarily to the Christians of the Levant, particularly those in Mount Lebanon. However, Muslims, notably notables, and other minorities within the Ottoman Empire also benefited from these services. Concurrently, France held substantial economic interests in the Ottoman Empire and contributed to the development of its industrial, commercial, and financial sectors, especially in Lebanon. Numerous companies with French capital were established across the empire in the fields of transport, natural resources, energy, and commerce. On the eve of the First World War, French capital accounted for 65% of the total foreign investment in the empire, amounting to 1.15 billion francs (Cloarec, 1998 : 17-18).

After the 1910 massacres of Armenian Christians in Adana, the situation for Lebanon's Christian population became more precarious. This deterioration prompted them to seek the support and protection of the French government against Ottoman Turkish repression.

### **The Situations in Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine**

The social structure of Iraq presents a dual character, being profoundly shaped by both tribal affiliations and a sharp sectarian division, with a Shi'a majority and a Sunni minority. After gaining control of Iraq, the Ottomans divided it into four major provinces: Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, and Al-Ahsa. The administrative organization of the provinces of Baghdad and Mosul was similar to that of the provinces in Syria. The other two provinces were under the control of local Bedouin families, who governed these provinces on behalf of the Ottoman Empire (Cloarec, 1998 : 69).

The Ottoman governors of Iraq wielded absolute military and judicial authority, which led to a deterioration of the economic and social situation (Cloarec, 1998 : 313-314).

The Iraqi people were subjected to extortion, which particularly targeted farmers. The country suffered from feudalism and tribal conflicts. Iraqis endured misery and poverty due to the taxes and levies that were imposed upon them (Fāḥūrī, 1996 : 120-123).

The education sector was in a dire state. A shortage of teachers and schools led to widespread illiteracy. Women suffered more severely in this regard than men. The health sector was in an even more critical situation, and dangerous diseases were spreading. For instance, only three hospitals, with a total of merely sixty beds, existed in Iraq (Fāḥūrī, 1996 : 124).

Consequently, there was no longer sufficient room for thought or creativity, and the population's sole objective was to remain alive.

As for Transjordan, it held a distinct role within the Ottoman Empire due to its essential geographical position as the route for pilgrims and trade caravans travelling between the Arabian Peninsula and the rest of Asia. The Ottomans were invested in ensuring the security of pilgrims against attacks by thieves and bedouins during their journey to the holy sites in the Hejaz. The reputation of the Ottoman Empire depended on its ability to safeguard these pilgrims, which is why numerous Ottoman garrisons were established throughout Transjordan along the Damascus-Medina railway (Peake, 1935 : 162).

In addition to the taxes imposed on the Transjordanian population by the Ottoman authorities, farmers and villagers were compelled to pay a further levy to the bedouins in order to protect themselves from their persistent attacks. The Ottomans failed to provide the people of Transjordan with protection against these incursions (Mūsā, 1987 : 50-51). Agriculture and commerce were also threatened by a lack of modern transportation, high taxes on agricultural and commercial activities, and an absence of security and stability (Al-Māḍī and Mūsā, 1956: 6).

The Ottoman Empire governed the region of Palestine beginning in 1517. Throughout this period, Palestine never constituted an independent administrative district. By the 1870s, the region was incorporated within the province of Syria. In 1887, Jerusalem was designated an independent district, administered directly from Constantinople, while the remainder of Palestine fell under the jurisdiction of the Vilayet of Beirut. Towards the

end of the 19th century, the Zionist movement began purchasing land in Palestine. As these land acquisitions began to displace Arab villagers from their homes, the initial tensions emerged between Arabs and Jews.

From the time Palestine came under Ottoman dominion in 1517, the Palestinian people endured the same difficult conditions as those in the other Arab provinces (Ḥalīl, 1983 : 38).

After Mohamad Ali Pasha's occupation of Palestine from 1831 to 1840, all economic, social, and educational activities in Palestine improved. Unfortunately, when Palestine returned to Ottoman rule in 1840, the suffering of the population reappeared simultaneously (Ḥalīl, 1983 : 160-161).

Palestine was a significant province for both Muslims and Christians. Owing to its historical and religious importance, and that of Jerusalem in particular, European powers took a keen interest in the region (‘Awad, 1983 : 15-16).

When addressing the situation in Palestine, it is of great importance to examine Jewish ambitions in this province of the Ottoman Empire. From the outset of the empire, all Israelites were placed under the authority of a chief rabbinate and were financed by donations from Jews worldwide. The majority of the empire's Jewish population was located in Palestine, notably in Jerusalem.

Changes in Europe, such as the persecution of Jews in Russia and the rise of antisemitic sentiment, fostered the idea of finding a national homeland for the Jewish people. The Zionist movement also held historical ambitions for Palestine; it sought to establish its national home there. This movement proposed to the Ottoman authorities that it would settle the empire's debt in exchange for permission to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire, particularly Sultan Abdul Hamid, was not receptive to their proposal (‘Awad, 1983: 29-30).

In his book *The Oriental Origins of World War*, published in Paris in 1937, Jean Pichon asserts that Sultan Abdul Hamid also opposed Zionist plans to establish a Jewish national home in the regions of Gilead and Moab in Transjordan. Furthermore, Pichon notes that although Abdul Hamid refused these Zionist requests, he proposed that the Jews purchase land in Mesopotamia to realize their project there (Pichon, 1937: 182-184).

The first waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine began as early as 1880. After Theodor Herzl organized the Basel Congress in 1897, Zionism evolved into a political movement.

Indeed, both the Arab and Jewish renaissances began at the end of the 19th century. The Zionist movement emerged at the start of the 20th century, which is why the initial Arab reactions to Jewish immigration into Palestine were based more on practical considerations than on the ideology of Zionism itself. Although Jews were protected by the capitulations system, they lacked protective states like those enjoyed by the Christians. Despite their influence in Europe, Jews did not call for Western support, as they wished to maintain their credibility with the Sublime Porte. Their strategy until the early 20th century was to obtain the approval of the Ottoman Empire to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine (Lacouture, Tuani and Khoury, 2002 : 37-45).

### **The Young Turks Era**

Most of the provinces lost by the Ottoman Empire were predominantly Christian. This loss increased the proportion of Muslims within the empire from 68% to 78%. In the wake of this demographic shift and the continuous territorial losses in Europe, the Ottoman government adopted a new strategy to counter Western interests in its domains. Abdul Hamid believed that the policy of decentralization had been the primary cause of these losses. He sought to re-impose a policy of centralization without losing the provinces that remained under his rule, even as they opposed this very policy. Making Islam his primary political weapon, and in an effort to prevent further fragmentation within the empire's provinces, he attempted to transform the empire from Ottomanism to Pan-Islamism. This strategy was designed to ensure the integration of the Arab provinces into the empire. In essence, Sultan Abdul Hamid adopted the strategy of Pan-Islamism, which meant defending the Islamic nation against Western Christian ambitions (Laurens, 2000 : 94).

Sultan Abdul Hamid's strategic shift, however, was belated. A new and different political order, that of the Young Turks, had already been established in Constantinople.

Opposition to Sultan Abdul Hamid's regime emerged from a younger generation of reformers and liberals, who called for the reinstatement of the 1876 Ottoman constitution that Abdul Hamid had abandoned. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was founded in Constantinople in 1889 by students from the military medical school. The founders of this committee drew inspiration from the French model. Instead of relying on Islam as a source of legislation, the CUP adopted a thoroughly secular approach (Laurens, 2000 : 111).

In 1907, hoping to establish a new, modern state, most Turkish political movements that opposed the absolute power of the Sultans and their manner of governing the empire merged within the Committee of Union and Progress. This coalition subsequently became known as the "Young Turks" (Fraehāt, 1990 : 35).

On April 14, 1909, the Young Turks deposed the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid, and seized power in Constantinople, sending the Sultan into exile in Thessaloniki. Abdul Hamid was replaced by his brother, Mohammad Rashad, who was both elderly and weak (Qal‘ajī, 1967 : 66).

The Young Turks aimed to transform their weakened empire into a modern and powerful state. Many Arab officers within the Ottoman army joined this movement hoping it would improve the situation in the Arab provinces. Notably, the armed forces that deposed Abdul Hamid in 1909 were under the command of Mahmoud Shawkat, an Arab officer in the Ottoman army (Qal'ajī, 1967 : 66).

The Young Turk revolution in Constantinople provided a new impetus for Arab separatist movements. The Young Turks initially promised certain concessions, notably regarding the teaching of the Arabic language, whose use in courts they declared they would now tolerate, and in the appointment of officials, who could henceforth be Arab. An initial harmony existed between Arab and Turkish secret societies, such as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), as both were anti-Hamidian. However, once the CUP consolidated power in Constantinople, it adopted a Pan-Turanist policy, which subsequently led to a rupture between Arabs and Turks.

The Young Turks fought against Islam and attempted to eradicate it from their new state. For instance, one of the movement's leading intellectuals declared:

"Reverting to the worship of the white bear would be more beneficial for us than the religion of the Arabs"  
(Fraeḥāt, 1990 : 42).

Following the implementation of this new policy by the Young Turks, the Ottoman government abdicated its responsibility to uphold the rights of the Arabs. For instance, it granted exclusive navigation rights for the Iraqi waterways of the Tigris and Euphrates to a British company. This agreement completely disregarded Arab interests and severely damaged the economy of Iraq (Fraeḥāt, 1990 : 41).

The Ottomans suppressed civil liberties, and their prisons were filled with political suspects. Interrogated detainees were kept in chains to the point where their clothing adhered to their bodies. They were given bread and water only once every two days. According to the memoirs of the head of the intelligence service of the Ottoman 4th Army in Syria, his office expended the sum of 182,500 Turkish gold pounds in 1914-1915 and received 4,131 reports implicating 8,938 suspects (Eliezer, 1993 : 38).

The population of the Arab Levant was both traditional and religious, with a deep affinity for its language, which it revered as the language of the Quran. However, Turkish was made the official language of the Ottoman government in 1864. Consequently, it became the language of the courts, government administrations, and ministries (Fraeḥāt, 1990 : 39).

In the Arab provinces, Turkish curricula were imposed on public schools, and the teaching of Arabic was also prohibited in numerous educational institutions.

The Young Turks also sought to suppress the Arabic language beyond the empire's borders. An example of their policy of Turkification was the regulations implemented within Ottoman administrations. In 1909, the Turkish ambassador to Washington instructed his embassy staff not to accept any documents or petitions from Ottoman nationals in the Arabic language. He required these nationals to address the embassy in Turkish only. It is noteworthy that the number of Syrians and Lebanese in America at that time exceeded half a million (Qal'ajī, 1967 : 73-75).

The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) controlled the distribution of the empire's revenue in a discriminatory manner. Although Arabs constituted half of the empire's population, 80 percent of the total imperial budget was expended in Turkish regions, while the share allocated to the Arab provinces was a mere 20 percent (Zibyān, 1994 : 64).

The general situation in the Arab provinces had become intolerable, leading to the emergence of political movements in Beirut and Damascus, which aimed to foment nationalist revolts against these Turkish policies. Arab nationalists began articulating a vision for a political order that would eventually replace the Ottoman framework. During this period, Arab intellectuals disseminated their ideas through the establishment of political parties and committees, both clandestine and public.

France, specifically Paris, provided an ideal environment for secret societies where Arab intellectuals could operate freely. In reaction to the policies of the Young Turks, a multifaceted resistance movement emerged, taking the form of submitted petitions, organized demonstrations, and initiated revolts. This opposition was further structured through the founding of secret societies and political parties, the convening of conferences, and sustained engagement in negotiations and correspondence.

Regarding the Palestinian question, the Ottoman position underwent a significant shift. Following the Young Turks' rise to power, the Ottoman government became increasingly supportive of the Zionist project in Palestine. Despite Arab opposition to this project, the Ottoman authorities ratified the sale of over ten thousand acres of Palestinian land to Jewish entities in 1911 without the consent of the Arab landowners (Ḥaldī, 1978 : 42).

From 1914 onward, following the Ottoman Empire's entry into the First World War on the side of the Central Powers, the Arab provinces experienced a profound economic and social crisis. The Ottomans mobilized all available resources from these provinces for the war effort, including human resources through widespread conscription.

Exhausted by extensive military campaigns, the Ottoman armies required sustained logistical support, leading the government to impose a new levy known as the "war expenses tax." This tax amounted to approximately fifty percent on properties and twenty percent on land. Furthermore, the population of the Arab Levant was compelled to surrender a quarter of its produce, including cereals, sheep, and cheese. The war effort also had a devastating environmental impact, with many fruit trees being cut down for fuel for military trains transporting soldiers and materiel; even mosques were converted into military barracks (Al-ğoşayn, 1956 : 44-45).

The Ottoman government imposed a law mandating compulsory military service for the entire population of the Empire. Arabs were consequently conscripted to fight on the front lines between the Ottoman and Allied forces, where a majority of them perished (Al-Kurdî, 1993 : 20).

The plight of Lebanon during the First World War stands as a prime example of the suffering endured by Arab peoples in this period. Under the pretext of logistical difficulties, the Ottoman authorities in Lebanon prevented the importation of wheat and grain from Syria; in reality, they were seizing these supplies to feed their own troops. Furthermore, they prohibited neutral American ships, laden with food aid, from delivering their cargo to the starving Lebanese population. Consequently, while Turkish troops were adequately supplied, Lebanese children starved to death. Contemporary accounts from Americans and European newspapers estimated that nearly two hundred thousand Lebanese perished from famine during the war (Mūsā, " Hussein Ibn Ali" :44).

## CONCLUSION

The Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire endured severe living conditions under Ottoman rule, where governors wielded absolute authority. Politically, the Ottomans shackled civil and press freedoms, while their economic policies were the primary cause of a profound socio-economic deterioration. Ultimately, the collective policies pursued by the Ottomans in the Arab provinces resulted in the systematic underdevelopment of the Arab nation, plunging it into a state of widespread ignorance, poverty, and economic backwardness (Gawanmeh, 1995 : 11-12).

*Sultan* Abdul Hamid sought to adapt his strategy of Pan-Islamism in response to the territorial losses of the Ottoman provinces, a shift that was driven by pragmatic imperial concerns rather than by a favoritism towards the Arabs, as some believed.

The period of Young Turk rule over the Ottoman Empire can be considered the most arduous for the Arab nation. The situation in the Arab provinces deteriorated to an intolerable level, which ultimately served as the primary catalyst for the Arab rebellion against the Turks in pursuit of their freedom.

The Arabic language, as the language of the Quran representing Arab culture and civilization, also became a target for the Young Turks. Their policy of Turkification aimed to eliminate the Arabic language by all possible means. Consequently, Arab opposition to the Young Turks assumed a religious character, as the linguistic question was interpreted as an Ottoman desire to suppress the language of the Prophet.

The Zionist movement also pursued its own interests in the Arab Levant to realize its dream of a national home in Palestine. While Jews sought Ottoman assistance for this objective, the era of the Ottoman Sultans was marked by a refusal of their requests. Although the Young Turks proved more flexible than their predecessors, the Zionist movement ultimately failed to achieve its goal under Ottoman rule.

Ottoman negligence of the Arab provinces served to heighten European colonial ambitions in the region. It should be clarified that Western interest in this part of the world was an inevitable consequence of the foreign policy of great powers like Britain and France, as the area was a vital zone for their interests, which in turn fueled economic and military rivalries.

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