

ABSTRACT

WARTIME PROPAGANDA AND THE LEGACIES OF DEFEAT: THE RUSSIAN AND OTTOMAN POPULAR PRESSES IN THE WAR OF 1877-78

by Onur Isci

Proliferation of popular newspapers during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 transformed the boundaries of public debate in Russia. Circulation of these papers brought the people into close contact with each other as well as the outer world. Printing and the press had a parallel effect on the Fin de Siecle Ottoman public sphere. Newspapers of the Sublime Porte utilized defeats against Russia to juxtapose the Sultan's cult as the sole symbol of unity with a nationalist one. "Wartime Propaganda and the Legacies of Defeat" is a comparative study of the two major newspapers – *Basiret* and *Golos* – during this period. I examine the major commonalities between these papers. My primary purpose is to shed light on the Turkish Popular Press, which weighed in on the issues of nationalism, defeat and political campaigning just as its Russian counterparts did.

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THE RUSSIAN AND OTTOMAN POPULAR PRESSES IN THE WAR OF 1877-78**

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INTRODUCTION:

The Endgame

“Following the defeat of the Serbian forces in 1876, none of us really expected another war. We did not even believe in its possibility, but one can say with certainty that every single one of us thirsted for news of it. With great curiosity, we read the newspapers to find even a small hint of war against the Turks...Every so often we came across references in the papers or heard bazaar rumors about deteriorating relations, which were taken by us to be the end of our anticipation...Finally, in 1877, when the news of mobilization arrived along with the reserves, a feverish activity began to put our battalion on its warlegs.”

*Shtabs-Kapitan Kurochkin.*¹

“History transformed our former subordinates in Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria into unified Balkan nations...Likewise; it is History that began to encourage the Armenians to conform to the contemporary nationalist fashion, which granted them the zeal for state building and success to forge their image in Europe as an ‘indispensable’ entity. In brief, the negligence of what empowered our enemies ultimately broke our wings and petrified us in Rumelia and Eastern Anatolia in the year 1293 (1877).”

*Mühimme Baskatibi Mehmed Arif.*²

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was neither the first nor the last time the two empires confronted each other. In 1877, when Russia declared war against the Ottomans, a war correspondent from the *Times* wrote: “Once more the dome of St. Sophia, by the sunny Bosphorus, is the goal of the Colossus of the North – once more the Turk has to make good his footing in Europe. Time was when Europe trembled to see the victorious horse-tails of the Pashas close under the walls of Vienna...Now the Ottoman battalions are being hurried to Danube, not to threaten, but to defend.”³ Indeed, the successors of Ivan IV (1533-1584) had been striving to secure free passage through the Turkish Straits to reach the lukewarm waters of the Mediterranean. By 1877, the two empires had fought nine times since the 18th century. The Ottoman ruling elite had become familiar with retreats following the Treaty of *Kucuk Kaynarca*

¹ Shtabs-Kapitan Kurochkin i Praporshchik Sergieev. *Opisanie boevoi zhizni 1-go Kavkazskago strielkovago ego imperatorskago vysochestva velikago kniazia Mikhaila Nikolaevicha bataliona v minuvshuiu voinu 1877-go-1878-go godov* (Tiflis: Tip. Shtab Kavkazskago voennago okruga, 1881), 6-7.

² Mehmed Arif, *Basimiza Gelenler: Rusya Muharebe-i ahiresinin Anadolu kismindan ve Mizir ahvalindan ve bu munasebetle tenkidât-i muhimme-i ahlâkiyeden bahistir* (Der Saadet: Murettibin-i Osmaniye Matbaasi, 1912), 17.

³ Wentworth Huyshe, *The Liberation of Bulgaria* (London: Bliss, Sands and Foster, 1894), 5.

(1774), which ended the war begun in 1768-1774 and was then the most humiliating defeat against the Russians.

In almost every major Russo-Turkish War since 1774, the European powers, led by England, sought to “to bring to naught the fruits of Russian victories over Turkey.”⁴ Despite the likelihood of yet another European intervention, once again in 1877, Russia embarked on an odyssey to get a stronger foothold in the Balkans, control the Straits, and, perhaps more importantly, acquire the keys to *Hagia Sophia*. The bilateral affairs, which gradually deteriorated in the course of 1876, became a stalemate in 1877 when Russia unilaterally annulled the provisions of the 1856 Paris Treaty regarding the closure all naval bases in the Black Sea. Finally, on April 24 1877, under the pretext of the Ottomans’ ill-treatment of Orthodox Christians, Russia declared war against the Ottomans on two fronts – the Balkans and Eastern Anatolia. In the beginning, the outcome of the war seemed almost impossible to predict. The battles had often turned into an endgame between the irregular forces of the warring parties. While the Russians managed to build up an army that barely outnumbered the Ottoman forces in the Balkans, the Ottomans had the advantage of strong fortifications and a superior navy on the Black Sea.

Mindful of its adversary’s strengths, Russia avoided a naval battle and conducted a massive two-fold land campaign. The Turkish commander Ahmet Muhtar Pasha, after suffering several defeats in the Caucasian front, surrendered three major cities – Kars, Ardahan and Erzurum – closing the war at the Eastern Front. It was the Western Front (The Balkans) which had thus drawn the attention. Due to its geopolitical location, the tiny Bulgarian town of Plevna became front page news in most European cities. Osman Pasha’s defense at Plevna dragged the famous Mikhail Skobelev’s campaign into a prolonged stalemate, causing over 40000 casualties by the end of the war. The central war administration of the Sublime Porte, however, proved to be completely incompetent, since Osman Pasha was never allowed for a counter-offensive after thrusting Skobelev’s forces. The 1911 (11th) edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica described Plevna as “a striking example of the futility of the purely passive defence, which is doomed to failure however tenaciously carried out... Osman Pasha repelled three Russian attacks and practically held the whole Russian army. It remained for the other Turkish forces in the field to take the offensive and by a vigorous counterstroke to reap the fruits of his successes. Victories

⁴ Samuel Kucherov, “The problem of Constantinople and the Straits,” *Russian Review* 8 (1949): 205-220.

which are not followed up are useless. War without strategy is mere butchery.”⁵ The War finally ended in 1878 with General Gourko’s successful campaigns against the Ottoman irregular forces (*Bashibozuks*).

The belated Russian victory, however, was almost immediately contained by European Powers in Berlin. In many respects, the War of 1877-78 thus became another Russo-Turkish conflict with two losers. Nevertheless, there was something more to the 1877-1878 War, which made it particularly different than the previous battles for both belligerent parties. The ramifications of the war provided a fertile environment in both Russia and the Sublime Porte for the newspaper industries to prosper with an unprecedented velocity, drawing the citizens into public debates over nationalism, identity, and policy making.

Captain Kurochkin, quoted in the epigraph, of the 1st Caucasus Rifle Division depicts a remarkable picture of the Russian soldiers’ eagerness on the eve of the war against Turks in 1877.⁶ An interesting aspect of Kurochkin’s account is the role of newspapers in channeling the political milieu of the capital to the soldiers at the front. Indeed, the circulation of newspapers as a new medium of communication radically transformed the previous parameters of public debate in Russia and brought the people into close contact with each other, the front and the outside world. Through propagating popular debates about the basis of Pan-Slavist ideology and diverging perceptions on Europe, the Russian papers discovered a news-consuming public that actively participated in the construction of a new political discourse. At a time of socio-political and economic upheavals, the press gave voice to an ever-widening number of the Russian people, thus paving the way for an exponentially growing market throughout the war.

Likewise, the Ottoman newspapers sought to utilize military defeats in their publications and juxtapose – if not depose – the Sultan’s cult as the sole symbol of unity with a nationalist one.⁷ As Mehmed Arif reveals in his memoirs, officers of the Sublime State were alarmed by the weakening of their *devlet-i muazzama* (great power).⁸ Ultimately, the proliferation of periodicals on a nation-wide scale enabled both the people and the soldiers to become more aware of the war’s aims and purposes and more involved with the formulation of imperial policies. By the

⁵ <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Plevna>

⁶ See Kurochkin i Sergieev, *Opisanie boevoi zhizni*.

⁷ A classical account of “the long nineteenth century” in the Ottoman context is Ilber Ortayli, *Imparatorlugun En Uzun Yuzyili* (Istanbul: Alkim Yayınevi, 2005).

⁸ See Mehmed Arif, *Basimiza Gelenler*.

end of 1878, the Ottoman intelligentsia was acutely aware that the ‘long nineteenth century’ was closing.

This thesis will seek to explore the role of newspapers in the emergence of a public discourse in Russia and the Sublime Porte during and after the War of 1877-1878, when people began to point out the problems of their societies, formulate new solutions, and usually fell in sharp contradiction with the imperial terminology. I seek to reflect on major commonalities between the two major Russian and Ottoman newspapers – *Golos* and *Basiret* – in shaping their respective public spheres throughout the War of 1877-78. The primary purpose will be to shed light on the Turkish Popular Press, which weighed in on the issues of propaganda, defeat and political campaigning just as its Russian counterparts did. I will focus on the major themes, such as; perceived images of the enemy, the emergence of national interests wedged between the Eastern question and strong resentments towards England, as well as a growing public criticism against the decisions of the ruling elite.

By doing so, I also seek to question the preexisting assumptions on urban middle classes, a large portion of which take the influence of newspapers on the formation of public sphere for granted. Indeed the growing publishing trade and popular printing in urban centers challenged the established political-religious authorities, who sought to curb the independent channels of knowledge production. Yet, certain questions pertaining to the nature of Russian and Ottoman public spheres remain unanswered. To what extent does Jurgen Habermas’s model of public sphere, which is strictly confined to the model of European urban classes, or Benedict Anderson’s theory of *Imagined Communities*, which particularly takes into account the burgeoning literate masses, fit within the Russian or Ottoman cultural milieu? This thesis seeks to examine the structural transformation of Russian and Ottoman public spheres in their local contexts and to answer these questions.

The scholarship on the printed press has had a propensity to perceive the proliferation of propaganda and the role of newspapers in political campaigning mainly as a twentieth century phenomenon.⁹ In fact the very conception of propaganda itself is often viewed through the lenses of the Great War, and regarded as an instrument to draw in the public for change on a global scale at a time when the European empires ceased to exist. Wolfgang Schivelbusch in his

⁹ See for example, Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, *European Culture in the Great War: Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The Culture of Defeat, for instance, suggests that the term *propaganda* rarely appeared in encyclopedias and dictionaries before 1914, “nor was the term especially popular in its commercial sense, as a synonym for *advertisement*, a word that enjoyed far greater currency.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, this rigid confinement to the Great War, solely emphasizing its dichotomized social and political forces, could be misleading in understanding the transformation of Russian and Ottoman Empires in the late 19th century, an intrinsic chapter of which was the emerging popular printing and propagandistic papers during and after the War of 1877-1878.

The number of Ottoman periodicals rose from 109 in 1878 to 1190 in 1909, while the number of published books increased by almost 300 percent between 1878 and 1914 from 6351 to 17428 respectively.¹¹ Likewise, the Russian newspaper industry gained an impetus after the war, with a drastic rise in the number of daily papers from 22 in the 1880s to 684 in 1908.¹² The gradual recognition of the Russian and Ottoman presses as instruments of mass propaganda obviates the frequent periodization between 19th and 20th century political campaigning patterns based strictly on the dividing line of the Great War. Therefore, this thesis will reexamine the radical transformation of printing industries in Russia and the Sublime Porte, with an attempt to understand the ways in which the Young Turks and Pan-Slavists utilized defeat in their formulations of national identity in the post-1878 period.

I will focus on different representations of defeat – both diplomatic and military – respectively, and analyze their impact on the public psyche. *Basiret*'s editorial line embraced the defeat because the loss to Russia justified their arguments about the Empire's urgent need for reform and regeneration based on a new Ottomanist ideology. Hence defeat in the war “was also a defeat for the modernist-Europeanist wing of middle classes,” as Kemal Karpat suggests, “especially of the urban bureaucratic, liberal intelligentsia.”¹³ Conversely, St. Petersburg's victory at the battle front was concealed at the diplomacy table in the 1878 Berlin Congress.

¹⁰ For the usage of the term ‘propaganda’ in English before 1914 see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2004), 214-216.

¹¹ The increase in the number of publications was mostly witnessed after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, with the abolishment of Abdulhamid's censorship laws. See tables 1 through 5 in Ö. Mehmet Alkan, *Olculebilir Verilerle Tanzimat Sonrası Osmanlı Modernleşmesi* (Ph.D. diss., İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1996), 411-413.

¹² Several monographs appeared in the 1960s – published by LGU – on the history of journalism in the Russian empire. See for statistics V.A. Alekseev, *Istoriia Russkoi Jurnalistiki* (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1963) and *Ocherki po istorii Russkoi zhurnalistiki i kritiki* (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1965), 2:449.

¹³ Kemal Karpat, *Politicization of Islam* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 154.

Through Bismarck's mediation, various terms of the Treaty of San Stefano were rectified in favor of the European balance of power in the Balkans.

In the immediate aftermath of Russia's diplomatic defeat in Berlin, public debates about Russian identity and its place in the West exacerbated along with the dissemination of anti-European sentiments through Russian newspapers. Generally speaking, most Pan-Slavists believed that the Congress of Berlin was a defeat, while others saw the naked Russian Pan-Slavist aims as a defeat for reform. Pan-Slavist newspapers created new symbols of national unity, and gradually replaced the old ones – those of the Tsar and the Church – after the Berlin Congress. In other words, defeat ensured that competing ideologies now had new outlets and sources of power that in turn rivaled imperial ones.

CHAPTER I:

Golos and the Russian Public Sphere

The influence of Pan-Slavism as a vigorous source of motivation for the Russian soldiers becomes crystal clear within the reminiscences of Captain Kurochkin and the war letters written by other officers. In 1877, Major F. Barkovskii of the 15th Grenade Division in Tiflis portrayed images of young riflemen competing with each other and waiting anxiously for Alexander's declaration of war to finally liberate their Slavic brothers from the Turkish rule in the Balkans. "Our troops possessed the same heroes, who won dozens of victories in Central Asia," wrote Barkovskii, "and they were getting impatient since the assault order was being delayed since last summer."¹⁴ While the reminiscences of Kurochkin and Barkovskii reflect a popular surge of nationalist enthusiasm shared by the majority at home, most banners in Eastern Europe read 'Emancipation of the Christians of the East,' exposing the religious aspect of the Pan-Slavist propaganda abroad.

Pan-Slavist fervor in the Russian Empire reached its pinnacle during the last major battle of the 19th century. As Alexander Herzen puts it, Slavophilism had embraced the *natsionalnaia problema* (national problem) "not as a theory or teaching," but mainly "as a reaction to the foreign influence, [and] had existed from the moment Peter I caused the first beard to be shaved."¹⁵ Yet, Russian Pan-Slavism emerged as an extension of Slavophilism and as a national quest following the Crimean War, which had left abysmal marks on the Russian public psyche and national pride. After 1856, the Orthodox Church and members of the Pan-Slav committees became increasingly influential in the foreign policy apparatus, seeking primarily to revise the unfavorable conditions of the Paris Treaty.

The opportunity finally presented itself at the 1876 conference in Constantinople (*Tershane Konferansi*), which was summoned in the aftermath of the short-lived Serbian resistance suppressed by the Ottomans. During that year and the following winter, however, a disturbing ambiguity haunted the awaiting soldiers at the front due to the contention between the Pan-Slavist press and the Tsar's chancellor, Gorchakov, who opted for a peaceful settlement of the dispute. The ill-fated foreign minister sought to solve the problem through the

¹⁴ Borkovskii, F. *Opisanie boevoi zhizni v minuvshuiu voinu 1877-1878 godov 15-go grenaderskago Tiflisskago ego imperatorskago vysochestva velikago kniazia Konstantina Konstantinovicha polka* (Tiflis: Tip. Shtaba Kavkazskago voennago okruga, 1881), 27.

¹⁵ Herzen quoted in Taras Hunczak, *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 84.

Dreikaiserbundis, at a time when public pressure swiftly grew through the nationalist papers – led by A.A. Suvorin of *Novoe Vremia* – to fulfill the Russian soldiers’ aspirations. In this regard, Kurochkin and Barkovskii’s accounts are useful sources in understanding the ramifications of competing ideologies on the soldiers’ morale. Perhaps the most striking aspect of these accounts is the growing importance of newspapers in reflecting the official news and rumors in this period, and how their sketches of the War of 1877-78 helped transform the incipient Russian printing workshops into a lucrative industry that advanced nationalist ideas.

There has been an exponentially growing body of literature on the emergence of printing and the press in Russia in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁶ Since the 1970s scholars have been seeking to reveal the major factors that had led to the development of the Russian Press in the face of a highly fluid and changing society. These monographs focus on the ways in which printers and journalists managed to attract the attention of both the public and the Tsar by publicizing their demands for social unity and political change. With the exception of Louise McReynolds’ *The News under Russia’s Old Regime*, however, the impact of the Russo-Turkish War on transforming Russia’s printing industry from small artisanship into news agencies remains as an overlooked phenomenon.

This is not to suggest that the transformation of the commercial printing industry in Russia should be attributed merely to the events of 1877-1878. By 1877, the Russian press already possessed both the technical basis and the clientele for expansion toward the periphery. The national and boulevard papers were able to supply the rising demand on account of three major developments within the past decade: The establishment of the Russian news agency in 1866, (*Russkoe Telegrafnoe Agenstvo*), the transition from pre-modern printing techniques to electronic news transmission (telegraph) during the 1870s, and the softening of censorship restrictions on publications in 1865.¹⁷ All three of these developments are usually associated

¹⁶ Unlike the history of the Ottoman press, there seems to be a wealth of secondary sources on this topic. The three major examples used in this paper are: Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulated Press* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature 1861-1917* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), and Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral communities : the culture of class relations in the Russian printing industry, 1867-1907* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁷ The codification of censorship laws in Russia went through a different process than that of her European contemporaries. Until 1796, when Catherine issued the first censorship statute, the only existing de facto regulations were those imposed by the Holy Synod. With the exception of Nicholas I’s reign, who severely reacted to the Decembrist revolt, there was an uninterrupted, albeit slow, process of codification. It was Alexander II, who established the *Obolenskii* Commission to pass the Press Statute of 1865. Source: Terhi Rantanen, *Foreign News in*

with the entrance of foreign news agencies in Russia; namely, the French HAVAS, the Prussian WOLFF, and the English REUTERS.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the Russo-Turkish War brought the increasing demand for newspapers in Russia to the international agencies' attention, hence accelerating the transition process. By 1877, there were 20 private owned journals and 62 papers in Russia, 22 of which were on daily circulation.¹⁹

Private owned printing businesses in Russia were quite late to emerge – in the 18th century – but grew at an outstanding velocity in latter half of the 19th century. As Mark Steinberg suggests, “this growth reflected an increasingly dynamic social and cultural environment: a rich literary and intellectual life among educated elites, the spread of reading among lower classes and the softening of official censorship laws and practices.”²⁰ Indeed, the transformation of the Russian society after 1861, rapid urbanization and the emergence of literate masses generated an unprecedented demand for publications. It was the emergence of a newspaper consuming public, which permanently altered the Russian printing industry, creating new genres for the different segments of the society. In 1877, these trends came together as the new Russian public that coalesced into a body of warmongering advocates.

The social dynamics of the 1870s in Russia cannot be fully understood without examining the Russian public sphere and the interaction between the educated elite and the lower classes. Unlike the Ottoman case, the secondary sources on this topic are abundant. Hence, urbanization in the late Russian Empire appears to be an extensively studied chapter. As Joseph Bradley suggests in his *Muzhik and Muscovite*, “like a prism that scatters rays of light, urbanization as an object of study reveals a broad spectrum of problems confronting a society in the process of modernization.”²¹ Despite the abundance of secondary sources, however, the origins of the new Russian public that emerged during this period – and Russia's own path to modernization for that matter – still seems to be puzzling historians. The arguments often revolve around Jurgen Habermas's definition of the public sphere. A common question in these works is whether or not the commodification of literature and the press in Russia “heralded the

Imperial Russia: The Relationship between International and Russian News Agencies, 1856-1914 (Federation of Finnish Scientific Societies: 1990), 68-70.

¹⁸For a detailed account of the foreign news agencies operating in Russia see: Rantanen, *Foreign News in Imperial Russia*.

¹⁹ See Table 3:2, Rantanen, *Foreign News in Imperial Russia*, 68.

²⁰ Steinberg, *Moral communities*, 7-8.

²¹ Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (University of California Press, 1985), 4.

arrival of the public,” in the same way as it did in Europe.²² And if public “as a cultural and political arbiter, an entity to which contemporaries increasingly refer as a sovereign tribunal,” indeed arrived with the newspapers, to what extent it possessed sovereignty over state authority as described in Habermas’s model of public sphere.²³ In order to understand the influence of popular printing and the press in Russia throughout the War of 1877-78 questions of this sort should be addressed briefly.

At the core of Habermas’s study lies the set of circumstances under which a rational and critical public debate becomes possible. For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere (*Bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*) may be conceived as the sphere of private individuals, “who come together as a public, [soon claiming] the public sphere ... to engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.”²⁴ Hence the “literary precursor” of the public sphere – the bourgeoisie that operated in the public political domain – learned “the art of critical-rational public debate” through its interactions with the “elegant world.”²⁵ While Habermas defined the “elegant world” strictly within the European context, his theory has also attracted the attention of historians exploring non-European Empires that were late to emerge from feudalism. In the case of Russia, historians sought to explain whether or not the Russian middle classes experienced modernity in the same way as its European contemporaries had done a century earlier.

Unlike the history of Western printed press the Russian newspapers lacked an electorate. This fact poses a challenge to the application of Habermas’s model to Russia. The absence of electoral politics, however, does not follow the conclusion that Russia also lacked rival interest groups. The financial basis of the independent printing industry was the newspaper advertisements, which the Tsarist Government permitted as long as the editors conformed to the imperial discourse – in other words, developed a self-censorship mechanism. The gradual commodification of newspapers through advertisements was welcomed by a broader and much diverse group of clients, fundamentally changing the readers’ roles in what could be termed as

²² James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (The MIT Press (reprint), 1991), 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

the Russian public. Ultimately, different newspapers with different audiences, positioned themselves on a wide array of ideological factions ranging from conservative to liberal.

Jeffrey Brooks, in his *When Russia Learned to Read*, defines this new Russian public as a “more fluid society,” which was an outcome of “the gradual erosion of pre-modern social and legal constraints including the division of the population into corporate groups, such as the gentry, clergy, merchants, lower middle classes (*meshchanstvo*) and the peasants.”²⁶ The inclusion of the *meshchanstvo* ultimately brought a new popular culture to the forefront of the Russian social life. Unlike the daily papers, which appealed to those with a more modern and cosmopolitan taste, the new popular reading materials soon became widespread in both villages and urban areas, securing a wider audience. Despite the abrasion of the dividing line between villages and urban centers, the Russian reading public was dichotomized within mutually excluding low and high cultures. In Brooks’ words, “the appearance of the commercial literature signified a kind of cultural diversity that was new for Russia,” something which the national press of the educated masses found difficult to absorb.²⁷

In a similar vein, Daniel Brower suggests that the Russian national press “set ambitious cultural objectives, [and] offered an encapsulated version of a ‘newsworthy’ world that extended far beyond the mundane events and ordinary practices.”²⁸ The emergence of a ‘penny’ or ‘boulevard’ press in Russia in the second half of the 19th century – just like its European contemporaries of a century earlier – was based on “the commercial formula of low prices, mass sales and advertising,” and soon became a “key ingredient in setting the tone of public opinion.”²⁹ The Russian public opinion (*obshchestvennost*) was particularly shaped by the sensational journalism and Pan-Slavist propaganda of the boulevard press during the War against the Turks in 1877. With exciting events afoot in the Ottoman Empire, Russia’s first war correspondents traveled to the front and reported back in picturesque narratives, helping the readers imagine themselves in the theater of war. With the exception of *Golos*, objectivity had hardly been the primary goal of the Russian journalists, who often took sides, to enable their

²⁶ Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, xiii.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 295. Jeffrey Brooks further suggests that the educated Russians, who condemned the popular commercial literature, actually “feared that it would hasten the deterioration in the values and character of the lower classes.” (Source: *Ibid*, 291).

²⁸ Daniel R. Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 170-171.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

fellow citizens “sympathize with their Serbian and Bulgarian brothers, taking to heart the old Slavophil myth of Slavic fraternity.”³⁰

The insularity of village life in Russia ceased with the gradual dissemination of popular printing products such as the boulevard press. The independent channels of knowledge production encouraged people to imagine themselves in relation to a larger world “and to ponder what it means to be Russian within that world.”³¹ The term “imagined community” has become a common citation in almost every study on print capitalism— including in this paper – referring to Benedict Anderson’s model on the social construction of nationalism. Taking on the Hegelian perception of newspapers “serving as a substitute for modern men’s morning prayers,” Anderson argues that “the obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing...creates a mass ceremony: the almost simultaneous consumption (imagining) of the newspapers as fiction.”³² According to Anderson’s model, print capitalism in Europe laid the bases for national consciousness by creating “unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars.”³³ Speakers of various language groups in Europe, who had previously found it difficult to understand one another, became aware of millions of fellow readers in their communities. For Anderson, this process laid the foundation of nationally imagined incipient communities. Anderson’s model, however, puts emphasis on literacy and takes the urban middle classes as the sole basis of the Russian public sphere, undermining other channels that enabled illiterate masses and lower classes to ponder upon the concept of national unity, such as bazaar rumors and coffee-house talks.

Besides the boulevard press, for instance, the *lubok* continued to serve another quintessential product of the Russian popular culture, through which the lower classes began to imagine themselves as part of a larger community. The widespread circulation of popular reading materials and the *lubki* significantly unified the Russian public during the War of 1877-1878, and abated – if not completely erased – the preexisting dichotomy between low and high cultures. The Janissaries frequently appeared in the Russian press, portrayed as brutal soldiers,

³⁰ James von Geldern and Louise McReynolds, eds., *Entertaining tsarist Russia: Tales, Songs, Plays, Movies, Jokes, Ads, and Images from Russian Urban Life, 1779-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 117.

³¹ Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral communities : the culture of class relations in the Russian printing industry, 1867-1907* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1992), 214.

³² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (NY: Verso, 1991), 35.

³³ *Ibid*, 44.

who were “easily ensnared by female beauty and [who] particularly favored Russian women.”³⁴ The image of the Turks as people with beastly cruelty had become a common feature of the *lubki* as well. As Stephen Norris suggests, these images function “as a means of exploring not only Russian national identity, but also Russian attitudes toward the Orient.”³⁵ Despite the “highly subjective renditions of the war’s events,” the *lubki* “nevertheless remained the best means for a number of Russians to learn about the details of the conflict.”³⁶ The Russian *lubki* and the popular papers ultimately transformed the age-old symbols of allegiance – such as family, the father Tsar, and the Church – into national ones. The history of the mass circulated press in Russia is therefore entrenched in a much larger framework: “it is at once the story of political, social, cultural and economic transition.”³⁷

It would be fair to suggest that Andrei Aleksandrovich Kraevskii’s *Golos (The Voice)* in 1863 signaled the transformation of the incipient printing industry into a commercialized market of independent news agencies in Russia.³⁸ “The bastard son of the illegitimate daughter of a grandee at the court of Catherine the Great,” Andrei Aleksandrovich took his surname Kraevskii from one of his mother’s lovers.³⁹ Born into the nobility without a legitimate name, Kraevskii had to make himself a reputation through Herculean efforts. He enrolled in Moscow University’s philosophy department at the age of fifteen and took his first journalistic task three years later at the *Moskovskii vestnik*, an ultranationalist paper propagating the official ideology of Nicholas I. Soon after exhausting his family fortune he moved to St. Petersburg and became the editor of the Ministry of Education’s journal, a position that helped him make the acquaintance of prominent intellectuals of the time. By 1863, when he published the first issue *Golos*, Kraevskii had already made himself a legitimate name but also many enemies. His constant financial concern compelled him to attach great importance to profits in the newspaper business, which distanced him and his paper from his contemporaries.

³⁴ Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read...*, 233.

³⁵ Stephen M. Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812-1945* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 83.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulated Press* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3.

³⁸ Biographical information on Kraevskii is taken from the *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar’* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia upravleniia udelov, 1903), 9: 400-404 and McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime*, 32-34.

³⁹ McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime*, 32.

As the title of his paper implies, Kraevskii chose to give the readers a chance to speak up. Unlike his contemporaries, Kraevskii sought to extricate *Golos* from all ideological associations and pioneered a new journalistic genre, “one that enlarged the variety of offerings and invited readers to take an active part in producing the paper, making it ‘theirs.’”⁴⁰ In its first issue on January 1, 1863, Kraevskii announced that the primary objective of *Golos* would be to publicize news in a manner of strict factual objectivity instead of propagating personal opinions or predilections.⁴¹ Kraevskii’s emphasis on objectivity from the very onset of *Golos*’s appearance revealed his preference of making profit over provoking the people against the government. Although *Golos* did not realize Kraevskii’s aspirations of an all embracing newspaper – a result of its expensive price at twelve rubles – it became a bestseller in Russia until the War of 1877-1878, while most Russian newspapers were still ambivalent about their position between the populace and the Tsar.⁴²

The war in the Balkans and Eastern Anatolia presented the Russian press an invaluable opportunity to experiment their ability to manipulate the public opinion. Rising circulations during the unsuccessful 1876 Serbian uprising had compelled the editors to ponder possible ways to include the people in the national political agenda, which subsequently led to the emergence of a Pan-Slavist public discourse. The new journalism that first appeared out of the crisis in Serbia was soon unveiled by A.A. Suvorin’s *Novoe Vremia*, which was to dominate the market over twenty years following the Russo-Turkish War.

Until the exasperation of the Plevna stalemate in the fall of 1877, however, the editorial line of *Golos* still remained aloof to the ideological currents and attached to maintaining an ‘objective’ balance between different views on Alexander’s conduct of war. Even when Osman Pasha’s first major defense at Plevna became front-page news in Russia and elsewhere in Europe, Kraevskii spared a substantial amount of space to the ‘for and against’ columns as well as letters and articles written by foreign correspondents.⁴³ On August 2 1877, for instance, *Golos* published a letter written by a war correspondent of the *Times*, who revealed his observations on the latest developments at the front.

⁴⁰ V. Zotov quoted in McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime*, 31.

⁴¹ *Golos*, 1 January 1863, no.1.

⁴² Rantanen, *Foreign News in Imperial Russia*, 68.

⁴³ The defense of Osman Pasha at the battle of Plevna has been mythologized by both Russia and Turkey until today. See, for example: V.N. Achkasov, et.al. *Russko-Turetskaia Voina 1877-1888* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1977) and Turhan Sahin *Oncesiyle ve Sonrasiyla 93 Harbi* (Ankara: Kultur ve Turizm Bakanligi, 1988).

Sergeant Brecken Berry's letter read: "When asked to disclose the unpleasant details of a battle's intensity, I refrain from lying whatever the repercussions may be. In the Balkans, the Bulgarian peasants and soldiers are massacring the Turks and stealing from the local inhabitants since the Turks are being accused of misgoverning their Christian subjects for centuries. The Bulgarian atrocities and actions against humanity obviously provoked the Turks to retaliate by using excessive force against the civilians and captives"⁴⁴ In Berry's opinion, "there was no difference between the Christian Bulgarians and the Muslim Turks," the real irony, however, was that the Russian soldiers, "who came [to Plevna] to fight against the Turks," seem to be patrolling the Turkish villages "to defend them against the rogue Cossacks and Bulgarians."⁴⁵

Despite his subtle flattering of the Russian soldiers, Berry's rhetoric – accentuating facts and abstaining from sensation – fit well into the staunch objectivist editorial framework of *Golos*. Yet, the new journalism that was born out of the war transcended the boundaries of Kraevskii's objectivism. Although *Golos* frequently published detailed maps to visualize the frontline, the majority of Russian readers found *Golos* far too tedious and began subscribing to more picturesque papers.⁴⁶ It was only when the number of Russian casualties drastically increased following several failed attempts to storm Plevna, *Golos* realized the importance of war-correspondence. Through hiring G. Gradovskii, *Golos'* first war correspondent, Kraevskii managed to meet the public demand and new market tastes.

As the Russian newspapers – including *Golos* – conformed to the terms of the new Pan-Slavist journalistic discourse, Plevna became the major bone of contention between Russia and Europe, mostly because the European powers were reluctant to support the Balkan nations' cause. Kraevskii and his war correspondent Gradovskii began publishing controversial reports from June 1877 to January 1878, signaling a major transition in the editorial policies of *Golos*. A study of *Golos* provides a nice window into how the war and its events professionalized newspapers, the ways in which public opinion compelled an editorial change – therefore better profits – and how these trends led to an increasingly anti-Tsarist line. The Plevna stalemate and rising casualties, the portrait of the enemy and strong resentments against the Turkophile press in Europe – especially in England – and the exasperation of the situation in the Armenian regions of

⁴⁴ *Golos*, 2 August 1877, no.172.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The daily circulation of *Novoe Vremia* reached almost 50000 copies. Source: Rantanen, *Foreign News in Imperial Russia*, 53.

Eastern Anatolia all appeared as intertwined themes of *Golos*' new agenda during this period. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these reports is the recurring criticism against the policy decisions of the government and the municipal administrations, which signified their realization of a strong *obshchestvennost* (public opinion).

The power of public opinion in shaping the political decisions in Europe soon became a much-debated topic in *Golos*. Along with the popularization of the term *obshchestvo* – the usage of which had been banned by Catherine's Censorship Statute of 1796 – more people began to reflect on the implications of a public sphere in the Russian context.⁴⁷ The war thus became a catalyst in the process of emerging public debates through newspapers, where subscribers began to point out their common problems, and offer solutions. The Russian popular press accordingly incorporated people's complaints in their civic forums, which were mainly related to the setbacks of public services during the war.

On July 12 1877, for instance, a *Golos* affiliate was complaining about not being able to send his report via telegram, since the telegraph services had temporarily been suspended by the army headquarters due to immediate military necessities. The reporter's letter read: "Unfortunately the telegraph communication has been cut for some time now, and, as is known, the postal services do not function properly. Hence, I kindly suggest that mothers, wives and sisters should put at least a ruble in their envelopes that they send to the front. The envelopes carrying money are the ones that are most likely to be delivered."⁴⁸ Another reader complained about not finding a single Russian newspaper at the opening ceremony of the Nikolayev Hospital in Bucharest. In his letter to the editor of *Golos*, dated July 20 1877, he wrote: "What really surprised me, however, is not seeing *Golos* in the hospital, because you promised the Ministry of Education to send free issues to hospitals."⁴⁹

Similar columns, wherein people raised their voices and put pressure on municipal administrations for better public services, frequently appeared in *Golos* and gradually formed the contours of Russian public sphere. It could be argued that those who initially participated in civic forums were the literate urban masses, which had better access to newspapers. As Daniel Brower suggests, the urban masses "were in a good position in their daily lives to become critical

⁴⁷ For the usage of the word *obshchestvo* in Russia see Rantanen, *Foreign News in Imperial Russia*, 68-70.

⁴⁸ *Golos*, 12 July 1877, no.152.

⁴⁹ *Golos*, 20 July 1877, no.159.

of the conditions in their cities and to be aware of Western models of progressive urbanism.”⁵⁰ Nonetheless, public criticism was not merely limited to municipal administrations. Through reading popular propaganda materials such as the *lubok*, the lower classes merged into the Russian public sphere within a broader Pan-Slavist framework – they faced a common enemy and shared similar anti-European sentiments with the urban middle classes.

During the heated debates of June 1877 over the widespread pro-Turkish sentiments in Europe, Gradovskii wrote that the Turks very well knew that their handling of the Serbian crisis in 1876 and use of excessive force in curbing the resistance violated the common norms and rules of war. “The Turkish government,” argued Gradovskii, “still remembers the scandalous events of last year, and how the European public opinion was aggravated by reading the *Daily News* reports on the massacres of the Bulgarian Christians by the Bashibozuks and Circassians.”⁵¹ Hence the Turkish Government, “mindful of the power of European public opinion on political issues,” had been spreading all sorts of rumors and accusations against Russia in the European press. “Every day the Turkish government publishes fully-dramatized news in Europe about the Russian troops’ systematic killings of civilians in the occupied zones, and degrading treatment of women and children.”⁵² “How ludicrous these accusations are,” wrote a reader in his letter published the next day, “Regardless of these fallacious charges, it is hard to keep silent. Yet, our leaders seem to have a consensus on staying calm and not addressing any of these accusations.”⁵³ After praising the several virtues of Russian soldiers, the reader then suggested that the “humanitarian nature of Russians even when facing those who deserve execution should be publicized in Europe,” and that “the people of Russia should pay strict attention to every false accusation published in the European Press.”⁵⁴ In many respects, as these comments suggest, the Russo-Turkish War represented the first modern war in the sense that public opinion throughout Europe now mattered in how the war was prosecuted and in how Europeans—including Russian—read the news and argued with it.

Public criticism against the ‘Turkophile European Press’ grew even to a larger extent with the exclusion of the Armenian problem from European newspapers, particularly because the English government pursued pro-Turkish policies. Although the scope of Pan-Slavist

⁵⁰ Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity*, 128.

⁵¹ *Golos*, 14 June 1877, no.123.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Golos*, 15 June 1877, no.124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

propaganda in the Russian popular press was initially limited to the Balkan nationalities in the war, it gained a particularly important dimension with the inclusion of Orthodox Armenians. *Golos* began publishing regular columns on the situation at the Eastern Front, focusing on the exasperation of the living conditions in the Armenian regions of Eastern Anatolia. A series of articles appeared in August 1877, when General Tergukasov of the Russian forces in Erevan rescued “over 3000 Armenian families from the blood-thirsty Kurdish bandits and Bashibozuks.”⁵⁵ The Russian public was alarmed by “the Turkish governments’ belated dispatch of security forces to the region, whether intentionally or unwittingly.”⁵⁶ The war correspondents of *Golos* argued that “these peaceful Christian peoples of Asia Minor” were energized with Russia’s recent operations in the Balkans “since the future of an independent Armenia depended on Russia’s victory in the War.”⁵⁷ The Eastern Front at the War of 1877-1878 was closed without the realization of Armenian dreams, but saw, nevertheless, the seeds of the future Turkish-Armenian conflict.

In the Balkans, it took four major attempts in 141 days to break Osman Pasha’s defense at the Shipka Pass, which was a heavy burden on the Russian economy. As Gradovskii wrote on August 4 1877, “the soldiers were overzealous and sadly mistaken by their initial victories...The number of casualties [was] mounting, with 15000 dead in two weeks, and this number [was] expected to rise drastically.”⁵⁸ Yet, Gradovskii also added that these numbers should not be too disappointing since Russia was capable of raising an army of 500.000 if necessary to win this war. Indeed, when the Russians finally stormed Plevna in late 1877, the number of casualties reached almost 40000 soldiers.⁵⁹ The delayed Russian victory that came after several months of deadlock was followed by a brief period of euphoria during the armistice at San Stefano. In his diary, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Gazenkampf attached a copy of the first telegram sent by Nikolai Nikolayevich after the victory. The great prince was delighted to see “how the local Christians of the Balkans were deeply grateful for their salvation from the Bashibozuks and Circassians.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ *Golos*, 2 August 1877, no.172.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Golos*, 3 August 1877, no.173.

⁵⁸ *Golos*, 4 August 1877, no.174.

⁵⁹ *Golos*, 15 January 1878, no.15

⁶⁰ M.A. Gazenkampf, *Moi Dnevnik 1877-78 gg.* (S.-Peterburg: Berezovskii, 1908), 349. Gazenkampf’s diary is published in 1908. It was actually a compilation of the letters he had sent to his wife in 1878.

Nevertheless, Russia did not enjoy her victory for long; the Russian press had initiated popular debates over the pro-Turkish foreign policy motives of England as early as January 1878. “The tactics of successive English governments have always been the same,” read an article in *Golos* on January 15 1878, “along the customary lines of the ‘Eastern Question,’ the English will seek to keep their lion below the Turkish crescent on the Sublime Porte’s flag.”⁶¹ A similar column suggested that the current English government, “by allowing false publications on the Russian troops’ excessive use of force, and by integrating these articles into the everyday public life of the English society,” was trying to manipulate the hearts and minds of the English people.⁶²

The winter and spring of 1878 turned out to be a period of intense newspaper battles between England, Russia and the Sublime Porte. The Russian press was acutely aware of the government’s mistake in choosing to keep silent and disregarding European public opinion. *Golos* sought to draw the Russian people into public debates on a nationwide scale, and formulate ways to prevent a possible European *fait accompli* after the Russian victory. “Russia needs to paralyze the pro-Turkish activities in England,” wrote Kraevskii, “but in doing so, Russia needs to refrain from getting into a similar polemical battle with the Turks in the English press.”⁶³ For Kraevskii, the Russian military forces had another weapon at their disposal; they needed to provide the world mass media with true information and statistics about the Russian military activities in the occupied zones. Until the settlement of an internationally recognized treaty, he suggested that “the Russian military head offices in all occupied villages and regions should publicize every single decision and regulation taken for security purposes.”⁶⁴

Despite the warnings of Kraevskii and others, the early excitement of the Russian public soon faded at the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, which nullified almost all favorable conditions of San Stefano in accordance with the European balance of power in the Balkans. Perhaps the most disappointing modification was the partitioning of the Greater Bulgaria among Montenegro, Serbia and Romania, dissolving the Russian plans for a Slavophil Balkan ally.⁶⁵ The Russian painter Vasily Vereshchagin’s *Apotheosis of War* captured the Russian people’s disillusionment

⁶¹ *Golos*, 15 January 1878, no.15.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ See articles I through XII: Treaty Between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East: Signed at Berlin, July 13, 1878. *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol.2, No.4, Supplement: Official Documents. (Oct., 1908), 401-424.

with the War, who thought that thousands of Russian soldiers had died for a futile cause.⁶⁶ Although Vereshchagin finished this particular work in 1871, witnessing the events of 1877-1878 the viewers began to see the painting as a commentary not just on the Central Asian campaign, but as the cost of Russia's expansion in general. The ramifications of diplomatic defeat, amplified through the Russian press, had an unprecedented impact on the public psyche. Until the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, the successive governments sought to cope with a diverse public sphere continuously making demands for reform. The legacies of 1878 necessitated a radical reevaluation of imperial policies regarding the question of nationalism, and new formulations on consolidating power over the world's largest multi-ethnic and multi-confessional community.

⁶⁶ Vereshchagin participated in the Turkish campaign of 1877-78, during which he lost his brother and got severely wounded. Vereshchagin's paintings was not limited to visual statement but "often stood as a powerful expression against war, tyranny and injustice." He died on a flagship on 13 August 1904, along with 700 soldiers, while painting the war against Japan. Source: Sunil Kar, *Realistic Art of Vereshchagin* (Calcutta: Nava Yug Publishers, 1981).

CHAPTER II:

Basiret and the Ottoman Public Sphere

The War of 1877-78 had a parallel effect on the Fin-de-Siecle Ottoman Empire. It brought an end to the remaining Ottoman presence in the Balkans, took away almost one third of the empire's population, weakened the Ottoman influence in Eastern Anatolia and transformed the long established ties between native Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Jews, who used to live in communities organized on the basis of religion (*millet*). Through imposing ethnicity as the dividing line of nationhood, both the Treaty of San Stefano and the succeeding Berlin Treaty of 1878 created conflicts, ramifications of which still endure. Kemal Karpat, in his *The Politicization of Islam*, suggests that the Berlin Treaty "created problems of Macedonia, which became a bone of contention among Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, and of Armenia, none of which have been solved."⁶⁷ The impact of defeat gradually soaked into the consciousness of the Muslim-Ottoman masses and caused a national trauma, inflicting a long-lasting insecurity into the public psyche. The Ottoman awareness of an imminent collapse – the first time in its history – was debated and circulated through the Ottoman press and "destroyed once and for all the Ottoman phoenix myth" (*Anka*).⁶⁸ The Ottoman popular newspapers – led by *Basiret* – reflected the abysmal results of 1878 and pioneered a revisionist discourse, which constituted the ideological basis of the future Young Turk movement.

The official ideology of the new Turkish Republic was formulated as a result of the incipient public opposition against Abdulhamid's autocracy during and after the War of 1877-78, which later became more apparent in the writings of the new Turkish intelligentsia after 1889. While the *Weltanschauung* of the Young Turk movement, in Sukru Hanioglu's phraseology, was witnessed in 1889-1902, a growing opposition in the Ottoman Press surfaced during the Russo-Turkish War, setting the grounds for an organized reaction of the next decade. Indeed, the Young Turks, who survived "the First World War and the ensuing War of Independence, and who witnessed the coming into being of the Turkish Republic, saw many of their dreams fulfilled."⁶⁹

In 1939, seven years after the publication of General Halil Sedes' voluminous *1875-1878 Osmanli Ordusu Savaslari*, what was then – and perhaps still is – the most detailed account of

⁶⁷ Karpat. *Politicization of Islam*, 149.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 153.

⁶⁹ M. Sukru Hanioglu. *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 216.

the war in Turkish, President Ismet Inonu – a former CUP member – sent a letter to the author, extending his gratitude for “this major accomplishment in modern Turkish history.”⁷⁰ Inonu asked Sedes whether he was planning to work on the transliteration of the first two volumes into the new alphabet in order for more people to read their history. In his account on Gazi Osman and the Battle of Plevna, Sedes particularly emphasized “Istanbul’s ineptness in utilizing Osman’s initial victories at Plevna,” and blamed the Sultan for their “tragic encounters and missed opportunities.”⁷¹ Since the Ottoman defeat was so devastating, the surrender so unconditional, and the humiliation it brought home so personal, it generated an ongoing interest in the War of 1877-1878.⁷² The defense of Plevna by Gazi Osman Pasha and the details of the ensuing battles have later been meticulously studied by the Turkish Armed Forces and still remain as part of the War Academy’s curriculum.⁷³

How Russia defeated the Sublime State in 1878 and managed to cross the Danube, despite the poor quality of their artillery and a weaker fleet, has been a central question in these accounts; one that reflects more on the problems of central administration rather than poor naval leadership or swift armament. In 1876, the *London Daily News* defined the Ottoman navy “numerically speaking, one of the finest in the world, containing several state-of-the-art ironclads purchased from abroad.”⁷⁴ Indeed, the Russian awareness of a Turkish supremacy in the Black Sea was what dictated a twofold prolonged land campaign – one in the Balkans, the other in Caucasus.⁷⁵ During the Russo-Turkish War, the Ottoman Empire transformed into one of the largest markets in the world for arms trade as the Turkish attempts to promote domestic arms production proved to be futile and even more expensive than buying. The Sultan’s military reforms and imports, although later became a huge burden on the treasury, nevertheless

⁷⁰ Most CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) members, Mustafa Kemal and Ismet Inonu being most renowned, participated in the formation of the Republic.

I used the quotation from the “Letter of President Ismet Inonu to General Halil Sedes,” dated 02.17.1939: Yenikoy (San Stefano), Istanbul.

⁷¹ Halil Sedes, *1875-1878 Osmanli Ordusu Savaslari* (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1935), 21.

⁷² The war is better known as *93 Harbi* in Turkish, referring to the year 1293 in the previously used lunar calendar.

⁷³ T.C. Genelkurmay Baskanligi. *1877-1878 Osmanli-Rus Savasi Zaman Dizini*. Ankara: Genelkurmay Basim Evi, 2004.

⁷⁴ London Daily News, quoted in Jonathan Grant, “The Sword of the Sultan: Ottoman Arms Imports, 1854-1914,” in *The Journal of Military History* 66 (2002): 9-36.

⁷⁵ Bruce Menning, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 52.

strengthened the Ottoman navy and land forces.⁷⁶ Likewise Lieutenant F.V. Greene of the U.S. Army Corps, having observed the war in the Balkans from the Russian side, reached similar conclusions.

In his detailed account on the Russian Campaigns of 1877–1878, Lieutenant Greene compares the European forces of the two empires and suggests that “even though the Ottomans had only something more than half of [the artillery] possessed by the Russians, and that their regular cavalry was lamentably deficient in numbers, they were far superior in the quality of their armament.”⁷⁷ The Ottoman artillery, wrote Greene, was all “composed of Krupp’s steel breech-loaders of 8 and 9 centimeters caliber, which in quality of metal, in range, accuracy, and lightness were much superior to the bronze pieces of the Russians.”⁷⁸ As the Duke of Argyll later noted in his renowned *The Eastern Question*, however, some of the best generals in the service of the Porte, together with the regular army, “was not only kept at bay for many months, but were at last completely defeated by the little bands of indomitable Montenegro.”⁷⁹ Duke Campbell concluded that, on the whole, the results of the War had actually shown “no deterioration in the fighting qualities of the Turkish soldier,” but proved that “there had been in Turkey, no reform of the administrative system on what the success of campaigns depended.”⁸⁰

In 1890, more than a decade after the Ottoman defeat, Osman Pasha justified Duke Argyll’s conclusions about the administrative problems in his memoirs: “Following the heated battles of the summer (1877) we began to experience a serious shortage in our food supplies, which necessitated an immediate retreat to a better place for refortification. Yet, Istanbul’s repudiation of our demands, the scarcity of medicine to heal our wounded and the overwhelming energy of our enemy, finally led to our defeat and imprisonment.”⁸¹ Osman Pasha included in his account the details of his captivity and the “honorable and special treatment he received from

⁷⁶ When the war broke out in 1877, the Ottoman economy was already in a bad shape. Although the establishment of the Ottoman Bank in 1856 had temporarily eased the financial crisis, the migration of four million displaced Muslims shortly after the Crimean War and the secession of important urban centers from the Empire triggered an increased inflation until 1877. For a detailed account on the budget deficit see: Donald Quataert, “The Economic Climate of the ‘Young Turk Revolution,’” in *The Journal of Modern History* 51 (1979): 1147-1161.

⁷⁷ F. V. Greene, *Sketches of army life in Russia* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 141.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ George Douglas Campbell. *The Eastern Question From the Treaty of Paris 1856 to the Treaty of Berlin 1878, and to the Second Afghan War* (London: Strahan & Company, 1879), V2:39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, V2:41.

⁸¹ “Gazi Musarunileyh tarafindan bizzat kaleme alinmis Tercume-i Hal (6.3.1890),” in Halil Sedes, *1875-1878 Osmanli Ordusu Savaslari*, 36.

His Excellency Emperor Alexander and Grand Duke Nicholas.”⁸² Perhaps the most striking aspect of this manuscript is Alexander’s note to the General, which read: “Please do not be demoralized by your current situation. Captivity is a natural possibility in every battle. You have courageously employed every possible means at your disposal. Alas, your government could not utilize your leadership. Do not forget, you are being held here as my guest of honor for a temporary basis not as a captive.”⁸³

As Wolfgang Schivelbusch suggests, if defeat is understood as a national trauma of wrongdoing and debauchery from which the nation, having cleansed itself, emerges younger and stronger than before, the question still remains: “What of the poisons that prompted the crisis in the first place?”⁸⁴ In many respects, the Young Turks wasted little time, having recovered from the initial shock, in finding the causes of defeat. Their post-trauma diagnosis pointed out not only Sultan Abdulamid’s ineptness in administering the war but also the *Tanzimat* reforms as the major grounds for leading the empire to a dead-end. Much as one may desire to simplify ideologies and their foundations, however, there was no singular “Young Turk” response to the defeat. This was a movement born into the *Tanzimat* period, generated its power from Abdulhamid’s military and education reforms, and, ultimately, overthrown its precursors, replacing them with the blueprints of how the new Turkish state should function.⁸⁵ In other words, the Constitutions of 1876 and 1908 were both “direct results of the agitation of the Young Turks, who were united in opposition to the *Tanzimat*.”⁸⁶ But the fact still remains; none of these accomplishments could be achieved “without the preparatory reforms carried out through the years by the dedicated Men of the *Tanzimat*, whom the Young Turks criticized so vigorously.”⁸⁷

In this regard, the popularization of a pan-Turkist-pan-Islamist public discourse through newspapers and periodicals before 1908 was made possible by Mahmud II’s (1785-1839) promotion of the printing industry as part of his centralized reforms initiating the *Tanzimat*

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, 30.

⁸⁵ The body of secondary sources on the history of the Young Turks has grown to a large extent with the publications of Sukru Hanioglu, Kemal Karpat, and Hasan Kayali. Two classical accounts used in this paper are from Serif Mardin and Feroz Ahmad. The complete list of sources is included in the bibliography.

⁸⁶ Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 132.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 133.

period. More than a century after the introduction of the first printing workshop by Ibrahim Muteferrika in 1719, Mahmud's establishment of an official Ottoman gazette in 1831– *Takvim-i Vakayi'i (Calendar of Events)* –constituted an important landmark in the history of the Ottoman press. Similar to Peter's *Sankt Peterburgskie Vedemosti* (1703) in Russia, production of knowledge through newspapers started with a state sponsored reform in the Ottoman Empire.

The development of a modern printing industry in the Empire indeed became a – if not *the* – primary objective within the *Tanzimat* agenda. Shortly after the proclamation of *Tanzimat (Hatt-i Serif of Gulhane)* in 1839, Abdulmecit I (1823-1861) issued an imperial edict to this end. In order to “help diversify the cultural life and regulate publications,” declared the Sultan, “anyone could print books in the official printing house *Tabihane-i Amire*.”⁸⁸ Agah Efendi's *Tercuman-i Ahval*, which came out in 1860, was the first private owned Turkish newspaper in the Ottoman Empire, although there had already been several periodicals published by foreigners in urban markets, such as Cairo, Smyrna and Salonika.⁸⁹ *Tanzimat's* spirit of modernization ultimately encouraged a positivist editorial line in the periodicals, most of which carried the word *Funun* (Science) in their titles.⁹⁰ The editors' confinement to positivism prevented the emergence of a widespread boulevard press or *lubok* culture in the Ottoman Empire, and limited the scope of the printed press to an urban middle class. Nevertheless, several women and children magazines as well as comic books entered the market in this period, further expanding the consumer profile and transforming the newspaper industry into a more profitable market.⁹¹

The gradual expansion of the printing industry until 1876 provided a fertile environment for the newly emerging political opposition groups to publish their demands for a constitution. The establishment of *Jeunes Ottomans (Yeni Osmanlılar Cemiyeti)* by Namik Kemal and Ziya Pasha in 1867 gave a new momentum to the growing criticism against the *Tanzimat* reformers in

⁸⁸ The edict was published in *Takvim-i Vekayi* on 2 January 1840, no189. The dates and publication details of all the references to this periodical are from Server Iskit, *Turkiye'de Matbuat Rejimleri: Tahlil ve Tarihçe* (Istanbul: Matbuat Umum Mudurlugu, Ulku Matbaasi, 1939).

⁸⁹ Alexandre Blacque's *Le Courrier de Smyrne* and William Churchill's *Ceride-i Havadis* were popular newspapers by this time. In fact Churchill's paper was also published in Turkish, yet is not regarded as a Turkish paper due to its ownership and editors. For a detailed account on private newspapers published by Europeans in the Ottoman Empire see: Orhan Kologlu, *Miyop Corcil Olayi* (Ankara: Yorum Yayimlari, 1986) and O. Mehmet Alkan, *Olculebilir Verilerle Tanzimat Sonrasi Osmanli Modernlesmesi* (Ph.D. diss., Istanbul Universitesi, 1996), 380-390.

⁹⁰ For a complete list of journals and their content please see: Hasan Duman, *Baslangicindan Harf Devrimine Kadar Osmanli-Turk Sureli Yayinlar ve Gazeteler Bibliyografyasi ve Toplu Katalogu, 1828-1928* (Ankara: Enformasyon ve Dokumantasyon Hizmetleri Vakfi, 2000).

⁹¹ Ibid.

the Ottoman press, and, in turn, entailed more legal restrictions on political journalism.⁹² The first comprehensive censorship regulation came with the *Matbuat Nizamnamesi* of 1864, which was later institutionalized by Abdulhamid II (*Matbuat İdaresi*) to check the opposition until his dethronement in 1909.⁹³ Abdulhamid's rigid control over political columnists became quite severe – to the extent that even the official gazette *Takvim-i Vekayii* was temporarily closed down – and was not limited to the domestic market. Abdulhamid hired language specialists to monitor foreign newspapers published in Europe.⁹⁴ The existence of a monitoring agency demonstrates Abdulhamid's recognition of public opinion and justifies “the legitimacy crisis” that the Empire was facing in Europe.⁹⁵ In this sense, the *Golos* correspondent Gradovskii was accurate in his argument; the Porte was “mindful of the power of European public opinion on political issues.”⁹⁶

A comprehensive set of new restrictions was passed in 1877 “to prevent insubordination provoked by newspapers with political content,” empowering *Idare-i Orfiye* to stricken the control over publications.⁹⁷ Although several members of the *Jeunes Ottomans* were eventually tried and exiled, the Ottoman intellectuals finally got the Sultan's attention and discovered the power of public opinion in the Sublime Porte. *Basiret* became the “by product of the rise of the struggling, small entrepreneurs who appeared after the *Tanzimat*...representing their desire to conceptualize Westernism or modernism in the form of new ideas.”⁹⁸

There are striking similarities between the editorial policies of *Golos* and *Basiret*. Just like its Russian contemporary, *Basiret* was initially founded as “a purely entrepreneurial venture,” in 1869 and sought to remain “devoid of any firm ideological commitment” until the

⁹² The name of this group literally translates as ‘The New Ottomans,’ which is considered to be the first political opposition movement in modern Turkish history. The translation into French was *Jeunes (Young) Ottomans*. Since Ottomanism did not carry any nationalist connotations in the fin-de-Siecle Europe, the movement began to be termed as *Jeunes Turcs* in Europe. In conventional historiography, the distinction between the New Ottomans (*Yeni Osmanlilar*) and Young Turks (*Genc Turkler*) signifies a periodization between the *Tanzimat* and post-*Tanzimat* reformists. Nevertheless, both terms are still used interchangeably in a number of historical publications. This ambiguity stems from the difficulty in translating the ideological transformation of Ottomanism in the 19th century nationalist context.

⁹³ For the evolution of Ottoman censorship regulations see Alkan, *Olculebilir Verilerle Tanzimat Sonrasi Osmanli Modernlesmesi*, 388-394.

⁹⁴ See Cevdet Kudret, *Abdulhamid Devrinde Sansur* (Istanbul: Milliyet, 1977), 60-82.

⁹⁵ Fort the concept of “legitimacy crisis” in the late Ottoman State See: Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999).

⁹⁶ *Golos*, 14 June 1877, no.123.

⁹⁷ Kudret, *Abdulhamid Devrinde Sansur*.

⁹⁸ Karpat, *Politicization of Islam*, 120.

Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.⁹⁹ Another similarity is to be found between the objectives of their editors; Basiretci Ali Efendi, like Kraevskii, perceived his profession from a strictly modernist window and tried to incorporate the “voice of the people” in his paper.¹⁰⁰ Shortly after its foundation, *Basiret’s* circulation reached an unprecedented level in the history of the Ottoman printed press, ascending to 40000 copies.¹⁰¹ The growing popularity of *Basiret* among the most renowned intellectuals of the Porte, however, compelled Basiretci Ali – perhaps reluctantly – to deviate from objectivism to a new Pan-Turkist-Pan-Islamist discourse. By 1870, *Basiret* had gradually become an instrument of mass propaganda in the hands of the Ottoman bureaucrats, “who looked upon public opinion as the best means to counterbalance the despotism of the Sultan.”¹⁰²

Perhaps the most important milestone in *Basiret’s* development was the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. *Basiret’s* editorial line had taken a pro-German stance in the war, signaling the emergence of an Ottoman-German rapprochement, which was to change the course of imperial policies on the wake of the First World War.¹⁰³ In the immediate aftermath of the German unification in 1871, upon Chancellor Bismarck’s invitation, Ali Efendi traveled to Germany and received funding to equip *Basiret* with the state-of-the-art printing apparatus. Between 1870 and 1876, *Basiret* allotted a substantial coverage to the situation at the Turkic-Muslim regions of the Russian Empire, problems of Tanzimat reforms at home, as well as Pan-Germanism abroad, and published popular articles on nationalism, contributing to the politicization of Islam in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁰⁴ By 1876, *Basiret* “inadvertently perhaps, after – and in spite of – years of collusion with the government and the constitutionalists,” indeed came to represent the true “voice of the people.”¹⁰⁵

When war with Russia became inevitable in 1876, *Basiret* sought to counterbalance the Pan-Slavist propaganda by creating a Muslim Union in the empire. Despite the continuous friction between the government and *Basiret’s* editorial board, the idea of a Pan-Islamic

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Biographical information on Basiretci Ali Efendi is from his personal memoirs written in exile after 1878: Ali Efendi, *Istanbul’da Elli Yillik Onemli Olaylar* (Istanbul, 1976).

¹⁰¹ Biographical information on *Basiret* is from İlhan Yerlikaya, *XIX. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Siyasi Hayatında Basiret Gazetesi* (Van: 100. Yıl Üniversitesi, 1994).

¹⁰² Karpat, *Politicization of Islam*, 120.

¹⁰³ For the German influence on the late Ottoman State see: İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Alman Nufuzu* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1983).

¹⁰⁴ See Yerlikaya, *XIX. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Siyasi Hayatında Basiret Gazetesi*.

¹⁰⁵ Karpat, *Politicization of Islam*, 121.

solidarity seemed favorable for both sides. Hence, at the onset of the war there had been in the Ottoman Empire a relative freedom of press since most newspapers contributed to the national cause by propagating the Russian image as marauding Christian fanatics. Until the fall of Plevna, *Basiret* confined its coverage to the behavior of the troops reflected through a sensational journalistic style and to the atrocities committed by the Russians in the Muslim villages.

Osman Pasha's appointment to the command of the Ottoman troops in the Balkans caused a great surge of public enthusiasm, which was followed by a massive demonstration at the Sirkeci train station to send off the general to the front.¹⁰⁶ The initial optimism and general public mood, however, gradually deteriorated with the defeat of the Ottoman forces after a 141-day-long battle. When Abdulhamid rejected Gazi Osman's request for retreat from Plevna, steering the Ottoman armies into a catastrophe, *Basiret* became more critical of the administration, especially after January 1878. Similar to the wartime foci of *Golos*, *Basiret's* criticism entangled controversial themes, such as the Eastern Question and a growing resentment against England, a general state of ambiguity in between the two peace Treaties – San Stefano and Berlin – as well as the government's inaptness in dealing with the European balance politics.

Central to the editors' critical discourse was their intent to promote nationalism, bordering on the lines of the Russian press. Despite its flamboyant anti-Slavist rhetoric, *Basiret* particularly emphasized the "national character" of the Russian victory in order to demonstrate the fruits of "this modern ideology," which incorporated an element of dissent from absolutism and rigid-Westernization, and, more importantly, which belonged to the Russian people. "It now becomes obvious that Russia is driven not only by the Emperor's will, but also a national resolve (*irade-i milliye*), which lies on a Pan-Slavist ideal," wrote *Basiret* on January 13 1878. Prophesizing on the ramifications of nationalism, the article followed, "since the Emperor lacks the authority to control the Pan-Slavist committees, Russia will not be satisfied by only achieving an autonomous Bulgaria."¹⁰⁷ A similar excerpt clearly displays *Basiret's* awareness of the nationalist nature of the imminent threat before *Dersaadet* (Istanbul). "According the Russian Press there can be no armistice to deter Russia from her cause, behind which the entire Russian nation stands. The Russians may not explicitly state their ultimate goal of replacing the crescent of Hagia Sophia with the cross, but they insist on seeing the Ottoman Christians having

¹⁰⁶ *Basiret*, 7 July 1877, no.2125.

¹⁰⁷ *Basiret*, 13 January 1878, no.2330.

achieved the same rights and being subjected to the same laws as the Muslims.” *Basiret* perceived this “seemingly legitimate prerequisite” as a pretext to gain time for dispatching further troops on Istanbul.”¹⁰⁸

The essence of *Basiret*'s nationalist propaganda could be seen in the authors' diverging perceptions of Europe. Although the journalists always remained critical of the central role England and France played in conventional Ottoman diplomacy, they too hoped to see a second Crimean alliance against the Russians in the spring of 1878. “If Russia wages another offensive in Eastern Europe, the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire will solely depend on the good will and influence of England and France,” wrote *Basiret* on January 8, “for what really bothers the Russian State is our robust alliance with the European powers.”¹⁰⁹ In a similar vein, *Basiret* argued on January 10 that “the fighting capacity of the Russian soldier at the Eastern Front [had been] exhausted,” and, based on the recent telegram they received from Vienna, it was likely that “the conflict of interests between the English and Russians in Eastern Anatolia would result in an armistice quite soon.”¹¹⁰ The incipient hopes for a European intervention, which would solve the crisis through “dignified means”, continued until early February. On January 19, when the Ottoman State accepted the Russian proposal to meet in Edirne (Adrianople) and discuss the terms of a sustainable peace until the official armistice, *Basiret* suggested that “England and Austria would certainly raise their reservations on the Russian pre-requisites in any possible settlement,” which could, in turn, block a possible Russian advance to Istanbul.¹¹¹ Evidently, *Basiret* thought that the English policies pertaining to the Eastern Question, which had hitherto been in favor of the Ottomans, would remain unchanged.

Neither the Disraeli government's nor Franz Joseph's response to the crisis in the Balkans, however, ran parallel to their prospects. It became quite clear that “both England and Austria would seek to curb Pan-Slavism by exploiting the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans,” instead of pursuing the post-Crimean mode of balance politics.¹¹² As the Ottoman arbiter in Edirne – Server Pasha – suggested, the Ottoman State had radically deviated from its former coalitions, and “no longer trusted the English government or the so-called alliance between the

¹⁰⁸ *Basiret*, 12 January 1878, no.2329.

¹⁰⁹ *Basiret*, 8 January 1878, no.2325.

¹¹⁰ *Basiret*, 10 January 1878, no.2327.

¹¹¹ *Basiret*, 19 January 1878, no.2336.

¹¹² *Basiret*, 16 February 1878, no.2364.

two states, more than they did the Russians.”¹¹³ Despite the ongoing peace talks in Edirne, the continuation of Russian offenses in Eastern Anatolia and Bulgarian atrocities became a major bone of contention. What was more disappointing, however, had been “to witness the English turn their backs against this infringement... for there is a difference between inability to prevent a crisis and implicitly supporting it by not protesting.”¹¹⁴

The resentment against the English and Austrian governments soon took a different turn on 3 March 1878. When the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano were publicized, *Basiret*'s criticism targeted particularly the Ottoman administration. In March 1878, *Basiret* published a series of articles regarding the Porte's ineptness in monitoring the succession of properties and exchange of peoples within the lost territories. “While there [was] no doubt that the Ottoman State's plans [had] all ended up in disaster,” one particular aspect of defeat attracted more public attention.¹¹⁵ The idea was to defend the *land* when the Ottoman pashas had drawn the battle lines in Rumili and the Balkans, but “once the land had been lost, the *people* that [they] left behind” became a more tragic part of their defeat.¹¹⁶ *Basiret* journalists labored to dramatize the plight of refugees (*muhajir*) in their publications and, inadvertently perhaps, found the term *vatan* (homeland) extremely useful in utilizing the destitute of the displaced, hence giving the paper an unprecedented popularity witnessed to that time. “The *muhajirs*' longing for their *vatan* cannot be compensated by any gift that we here possess,” wrote one journalist on February 17.¹¹⁷ A profound natural instinct that was publicly expressed, as Karpat suggest, “thus became part of the intellectual and emotional patrimony of the new political culture.”¹¹⁸

The urgent need to ameliorate the living conditions of the refugees in the capital was noted in the Russian observers' accounts as well. M.A. Gazenkampf, who was present at the San Stefano negotiations, wrote: “Finally we arrived at Hagia Sophia. The famous cathedral is covered with some sort of beastly painting and below in the choir areas we found thousands of sleeping people of all sexes and in all ages. This is all forms of Muslim society, fleeing from our troops.”¹¹⁹ Witnessing the Porte's inability to cope with the rogue Cossacks, who “marauded the fleeing Muslim women and children,” and with the “housing of thousands of refugees flooding

¹¹³ *Basiret*, 4 February 1878, no.2352.

¹¹⁴ *Basiret*, 25 February 1878, no.2373.

¹¹⁵ *Basiret*, 24 March 1878, no.2400.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* (Emphasis is mine)

¹¹⁷ *Basiret*, 17 February 1878, no.2365

¹¹⁸ Karpat, *Politicization of Islam*, 122.

¹¹⁹ Gazenkampf, *Moi Dnevnik*, 528.

the city [Istanbul] everyday,” *Basiret* expanded its scope to publishing the people’s demands for a better settlement plan under the auspices of the international community.¹²⁰ The message was quite obvious: “It is true that we have been defeated, but the political aspirations of certain pashas in Istanbul are making the current situation worse... the people would like to know whether or not there will be a succeeding peace treaty in Europe.”¹²¹

Basiret’s political campaign gained an international dimension with its persistence on the need for “an objective congress to replace the existing treaty, which is unable to retain stability in the East.”¹²² The suggestion was that the Treaty of San Stefano not only “exacerbated the Eastern Question (*Sark Meselesi*) in Europe” but also created inadequate circumstances “for both the belligerent parties and the Balkan *millet*s.”¹²³ The main question was whether or not England would, once again, back the Porte in Berlin.

The Duke of Argyll later recalled in his account that the Eastern Question had indeed “stirred more deeply the feelings of this country [England] than any other question” of the time. “Five-and-twenty years ago, when that question engrossed public attention,” wrote George Douglas Campbell, “there was comparatively little difference in opinion,” about the legitimacy of the Ottoman claims in Crimea.¹²⁴ This consensus stemmed partly because Russia “was then so clearly in the wrong that little or nothing could be said in her defense.” In 1876, however, the Eastern Question, which was raised by native insurrections in the Balkans, “excited and justified by the gross misgovernment of the Porte,” boiled itself into this – “how the abuses and vices of the Turkish administration were to be dealt with” by the same powers that supported her in Crimea.¹²⁵

The new Ottoman intellectuals soon realized that the English public opinion as well as the Disraeli government’s imperial interests in the region were much different than 1856. Accordingly *Basiret* allotted a substantial amount of space for spotlights from the English press, reflecting on the possible scenarios that would emerge after the Congress of Berlin. For the first time, the post-war Ottoman government was confronted with a newly emerging political entity in the form of a newspaper whose perception of modernity, progress, and religion differed greatly

¹²⁰ *Basiret*, 16 March 1878, no.2392

¹²¹ *Basiret*, 24 March 1878, no.2400.

¹²² *Basiret*, 14 March 1878, no.2390.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ George Douglas Campbell. *The Eastern Question From the Treaty of Paris 1856 to the Treaty of Berlin 1878, and to the Second Afghan War* (London: Strahan & Company, 1879), VI:viii

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

than that of Abdulhamid. Nonetheless, as Karpát suggests, “the goal of the early reforms initiated by the Ottoman government was to preserve the state; through them, perhaps unintentionally, the power of the elitist military bureaucratic order was maintained and augmented.”¹²⁶

The emergence of a constitutional government in the Ottoman Empire had led to a comprehensive reorganization of the Ottoman military bureaucracy, who utilized the Ottoman national press in propagating their political agenda. Ironically, Islam became an influential banner at this time and was increasingly used against the Hamidian bureaucracy and statism. The expansion of an Ottoman newspaper-consuming mass after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was made possible through *Basiret* and its successors’ attempts to transform the religious communities into national political entities. Promoting the usage of newspapers provided a steady flow of ideas, and a bottom up national demand for rejuvenation. The post-war change in the structure of the Ottoman intelligentsia and politicization of the urban middle classes were all embodied in the failed coup attempt in 1878 engineered by Ali Suavi, who was an intellectual and a *Basiret* affiliate.¹²⁷

Ali Suavi had always been a leading critic of Abdulhamid’s anti-constitutionalism and supported the idea of a new political order since the early 1860s. Despite his earlier acquaintance with the Young Ottomans – such as Namik Kemal and Fazil Pasha – Suavi later disavowed the political integrity of the Young Ottoman thought due to his intransigent hostility towards the Hamidian regime. A month before the Congress of Berlin, in May 1878, Suavi announced from his column in *Basiret* that “people should assemble the next day to hear an important message and find a quick solution to the country’s problems.”¹²⁸ Together with a group of newly arrived refugees from the Balkans, Suavi stormed the Ciragan Palace and attempted to reinstate Murad V to the throne, whose constitutionalism ran parallel to Suavi’s beliefs. The ill-fated coup d’état ended up with Suavi’s death and the immediate closure of *Basiret* by Abdulhamid. Karpát suggests that it was the three major tenets in Suavi’s thinking – democratic progressivism, populism and employment of mass mobilization – that led to “the

¹²⁶ Karpát, *Politicization of Islam*, 126.

¹²⁷ Biographical information on Ali Suavi is from Karpát, *Politicization of Islam*, 124-130.

¹²⁸ *Basiret*, 19 May 1878, quoted in Karpát, *Politicization of Islam*, 129.

revolutionary act that put an end to the newspaper *Basiret* as well as to Suavi's own life and to the radical, populist phase of Ottoman Islamism that had flourished from 1875 to 1878.”¹²⁹

The Ali Suavi incident and closure of *Basiret* characterized the first bottom-up attempt in which people sought to enforce their will to the Ottoman Sultan. The immediate ramifications of this episode haunted the Hamidian regime until his dethronement. Although the majority – including the Ottoman intelligentsia – initially condemned this event, they eventually began to question the reasons behind Suavi's opposition as well as Abdulhamid's leadership and diplomatic bargaining abilities in the Congress of Berlin. Similar to the Russia society, there had been a profound change in people's perceptions of *raison d'état* after the War of 1877-1878. Through reading the daily news or attending coffee-house debates and Friday prayers, all segments of the Ottoman urban society – from shopkeepers and servants to middle class bureaucrats – became familiar with national concepts; such as, the love of the fatherland, wars and defeats as well as public rights.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Karpat, *Politicization of Islam*, 129.

¹³⁰ For an interesting account on the central role of coffee-houses and the state control over public rumors in the 19th century Ottoman society see: Cengiz Kirli, “Kahvehaneler ve Hafiyeler: 19. Yüzyıl Ortalarında Osmanlı'da Sosyal Kontrol” in Halil İnalcık and Mehmed Seyitdanlıoğlu, eds., *Tanzimat: Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu* (Ankara: Phoenix, 2006), 425-443.

EPILOGUE: The Breakfast War

Despite their dichotomized tasks and purposes in the war, in many regards, *Basiret* and *Golos* evolved through similar journalistic experiences. Through reading *Basiret's* columns on the Russian and English presses, the Ottoman intelligentsia learned about different public spheres of different international contexts, and ultimately perceived their own image from a different, larger window. The attempted coup led by Ali Suavi indicates the embodiment of this new awakening. Likewise *Golos* provided the Russian public with a different view of the enemy, the outer world, and themselves. Both papers sought to mirror how the other perceived the war's events or the sort of diplomatic moves it could possibly make.

When changing English motives, for instance, made it difficult to foretell the possible outcomes of the approaching Congress in Berlin, newspapers became the only way to feel the pulse of their adversary. "St. Petersburg newspapers had quite justly suggested that a sustainable peace would solely rely on the consent of the English," noted an article in *Basiret*, for instance, and argued that, "in turn, the London newspapers highlighted the withdrawal of their fleet from the Straits as a good omen of their sincere desire to maintain peace."¹³¹ Another wrote: "While the Russian people were highly critical of England, and expressed their resentments against the diminishing role of the Treaty of San Stefano, the popular Russian newspaper *Golos* suggested that the entire Russian nation is disturbed by the idea of a new settlement in Berlin."¹³² The most striking aspect of this last excerpt is perhaps the way it reveals how newspapers emerged as a civil mode of communication between nations.

The internationalization of newspaper journalism throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century entailed a growing interest in war correspondence. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 therefore became the primary focus of non-belligerent powers and their printing industries. The number of foreigners accompanying the troops from both sides reached an unprecedented level. Although third party newspapers had already been put to test in the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, the institutionalization of war correspondence became a product of the 1877-1878 war. As Maureen P. O'Connor

¹³¹ *Basiret*, 14 March 1878, no.2390.

¹³² *Basiret*, 15 March 1878, no.2391.

suggests, “the conflict occurred at a doubly intriguing historical juncture.”¹³³ It was the first war to break out with a prepositioned apparatus for third parties to observe carefully, and the last war in Europe until the 20th century. The headquarters of both Russians and the Ottomans accommodated several observers from different countries, proportionate with their national interests in the region.¹³⁴ Consequently, the seemingly trivial town of Plevna became front page news in the morning papers from Japan to England. In Rupert Furneaux’s words, it became ‘The Breakfast War.’¹³⁵

Although the global ramifications of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 were profoundly felt in the West at the time, contemporary interest in this particular topic is limited to Near Eastern and Russian scholarships. Except for a number of sporadic publications, the legacies of 1877-1878 are usually excluded from the fin-de-Siecle European historical context. This is partly because neither of the belligerent powers is considered a bona fide European nation. Such isolationism, however, undermines the impact of 1878 on the European public sphere. Through the European public response to the atrocities propagated by foreign journalists, the Russo-Turkish War became a prime case study in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions, which constitute the first two codified statements on the norms and rules of warfare. Likewise, the long debated problem of competing identities in both Russian and Turkish cases has led to a view of the War of 1877-1878 with purely domestic ramifications. On the contrary, however, the ramifications of 1878 still entangle the contemporary stalemates in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Southern Caucasus, the Balkans and Eastern Anatolia, necessitating a better understanding of the transformation of imperial ideologies on nationalism.

There is certainly much to be learned from the world as seen through the lenses of the defeated, as John Dower suggests – “not only about misery, disorientation, cynicism, and resentment, but also about hope, resilience and visions.”¹³⁶ Witnessing the catastrophic ramifications of 1878, the Ottoman intellectuals held the administrative structure responsible for steering the nation into a misadventure long before the beginning of hostilities. In their public

¹³³ Maureen O’Connor, “The Vision of Soldiers: Britain, France, Germany and the United States Observe the Russo-Turkish War” in *War in History* 4 (1997): 264-95.

¹³⁴ In general, foreign observers were composed of both journalists and military attaches. In addition to several war correspondents, England, for instance, appointed 17 military liasons to the Asian and European fronts, observing from both sides.

¹³⁵ Rupert Furneaux, *The Breakfast War* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1958).

¹³⁶ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 24.

forums the Fin-de-Siecle Ottoman elite acutely defined the problems of the empire and pondered possible scenarios of salvation. Similar to their Russian counterparts, the newspapers of the Porte reexamined previous models of Westernization and sought to identify what went wrong in the *Tanzimat* (Reorganization) period. On the one hand, the public opinion gradually turned against the blind Westernization policies of the successive administrations. Just like Alexander II, on the other hand, Abdulhamid tried to stifle the emerging nationalist discourse while simultaneously attempting to co-opt it for deterring further secessions.

Despite their commonalities, however, the two empires had different perceptions of modernity. Unlike the Petrine modernization in Russia, there had always been “an element of contempt about Europeanization even among the *Tanzimat* reformists.”¹³⁷ Successive attempts to Romanize the legal system (*sharia*) paved the way for the codification of a comprehensive *acquis communautaire* in 1876 (*Kanun-i Esasi*), opening the short lived First Constitution Period, which was later abolished by Abdulhamid II on the pretext of defeat against Russians in 1878.¹³⁸ Despite the general recognition of the urgent need for modernization, however, the Ottoman intelligentsia did not follow the European model without demur. The dichotomy between traditionalists and Westerners in the Ottoman society therefore remained less clear than that of the Russian intellectuals.

Unlike the continuous friction between the Western-oriented ruling elite and the Slavophile intellectuals in Russia, the *Tanzimat* reformers and the Ottoman intelligentsia shared similar resentments towards the contemporary Western trends, which gradually soaked into the Ottoman social life. Hence, the stereotypical *dramatis personae* of the fin-de-Siecle Ottoman literature, such as Behruz Bey – the Turkish Oblomov in Rezaizade Mahmud Ekrem’s *Araba Sevdasi* – appeared more frequently than, for instance, Tolstoy’s Levin in *Anna Karenina*, who embodied similar public resentments against those conforming to an ostentatious European lifestyle.¹³⁹

Likewise, an examination of the Young Turk *Weltanschauung* provides a completely different picture than the declared aims of the Committee of Union and Progress (*Ittihat ve*

¹³⁷ Ortayli, *Imparatorlugun En Uzun Yuzyili*, 17.

¹³⁸ Ahmed Midhat Pasha – *Tanzimat* provincial administrator, Grand Vezir and one of the authors of 1876 Constitution – was convinced that the proclamation of the Constitution during the Constantinople Conference would guarantee the continuation of reforms in the Ottoman State and ease the tensions between European powers. A detailed biographical information on Midhat Pasha could be found in Stanford Shaw’s *Reform, Revolution and Republic*.

¹³⁹ See Serif Mardin, *Jon Turklerin Siyasi Fikirleri 1895-1908* (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayinlari, 1983).

Terakki Cemiyeti) in Europe – namely the dethronement of Abdulhamid II and the proclamation of the constitution.¹⁴⁰ These banners were only instruments to mask their real agenda – a strong government, anti-imperialism, and the replacement of *ulema* with an intellectual elite. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 therefore set the grounds for the future Young Turk movement through alarming the Ottoman public with the weakening of their *devlet-i muazzama* (great power) and the illusion of *devlet-i ebed müdded* (eternal state). Proliferation of popular printing and the press in the second half of the 19th century in turn produced an intellectual awakening after the war and was paralleled by the emergence of Turkish nationalism in the writings of Ziya Gökalp, Fuat Koprulu and Yusuf Akcura, who engineered the basis of the new Republican ideology.

In brief, the emergence of a critically debating public sphere suggests that the Ottoman Empire experienced modernity in the sense that most Europeans understood it. Similarly, a new social order was taking shape in Russia during the War of 1877-1878, and the line between state and society in Russia was drawn parallel to that of European nations. In fact, the structural transformation of early finance and trade capitalism in both Russian and Ottoman Empires followed an asymmetrical line – one that still remained agrarian instead of mercantilist – compared to the development of European capitalism. The relationship between state authorities and private individuals, however, was shaped in similar ways that existed in Europe. Hence, the materialization of a common public spirit during the war, the dissemination of the people's voice through newspaper columns and the division of public and private realms in urban areas all signaled the coming of larger waves of resistance against state authorities in Russia and the Sublime State.

¹⁴⁰ See: Hanioglu. *The Young Turks in Opposition*.

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