

“Population Politics” at the End of Empire: Migration and Sovereignty in Ottoman Eastern Rumelia, 1877–1886

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Over the course of the nineteenth century, the old multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Eurasian empires—the Ottoman, the Russian, and the Austro-Hungarian—had to contend with grave challenges to the dynastic order of things from modernizers and nationalists espousing ideas of popular sovereignty and representative government.¹ By the century’s end, imperial reforms, geopolitical rivalries, nationalism, and ideas of representative government had forced the Ottoman Empire to regard its subjects through a political lens that proved to be the precursor to national identity, one of corporate, ethno-religious identification. Ottoman reforms had the unintended consequence of prompting non-Muslims to seek equality and rights as groups and in relation to Muslims, and increasingly, by the end of the century, to Turkish Muslims. The integrity of the Ottoman Empire seemed to rest on the government’s ability to control the competing claims of ethno-religious groups, and, by demonstrating the success of reforms, to prevent Great Powers from intervening on behalf of its Ottoman Christian subjects.² In

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¹ The phrase “population politics” in the title is one Eric Weitz uses to explain a shift in international relations beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century and culminating with the peace settlements after World War I. Specifically, conflicts among the European powers over colonial expansions and imperial ambitions were increasingly addressed not simply by territorial adjustments but by agreements to move, bestow rights on, and grant special status to discrete population groups circumscribed by nationality, ethnicity, race, religion. See Eric D. Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 1313–43.

² On the linkage between Great Power rivalries and their intervention on behalf of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, see Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire 1815–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

1878, however, the empire failed when it lost its war with the Russian Empire, which had ostensibly been waged to save brutalized Christians in the Ottoman Balkans.

Russia had couched its bids to Ottoman territory, especially the Bosphorus Straits, by posing as the protector of Orthodox Christians and Slavs under Ottoman rule. Under the Peace Treaty of Berlin that ended the war, the Ottomans lost most of their European (Rumeli) territories either to fully independent nation-states such as Serbia and Romania or to nominally dependent polities like the Principality of Bulgaria and the administratively autonomous Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia. Like earlier nineteenth-century Ottoman territorial losses, those sanctioned in Berlin solidified the trend of waning imperial sovereignty in favor of either nominally Ottoman polities that were effectively dependent on a European power, or emerging nation-states. In either case, the militarily and economically stronger European powers explained their decisions to excise territory from, and limit the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire by arguing that it was lacking in (European Christian) “civilization.” In nineteenth-century European political discourse, “civilization” was the fundamental marker of sovereignty, and, in its absence, justification for colonialism.³ Meanwhile, the powers denied full civilization to the Christian polities that sprang up from the Ottoman Empire, convinced of their inability to govern with fairness and reason or ensure the rights of all their citizens.⁴

The “standard of civilization”⁵ which admitted a state into the Family of Nations was essentially reserved for societies that had the cultural and historical experiences of Christian Europe.⁶ European scholars of international law, politicians, and public figures viewed the Ottoman Empire as uncivilized, even though its sovereignty was formally recognized by the Treaty of Paris (1856); statehood alone was insufficient for its membership in the Family of Nations because the empire lacked the special European civilization that qualified a state for full sovereignty, and hence protection from external interventions in its domestic affairs.⁷ By the end of the century, European pressures for reforms or for direct intervention in the Ottoman Empire increasingly paired “civilization” with concerns for “humanity,” which it ostensibly did not exhibit.⁸ The bloody suppression of revolts among Christians in the Ottoman

³ Antony Anghie, “Finding the Peripheries: Sovereignty and Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century International Law,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 40 (1999): 1–80.

⁴ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, 48.

⁵ Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

⁶ Anghie, “Finding the Peripheries,” 27–28.

⁷ Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, 50–51.

⁸ Jack Donnelly has argued that the “standard of civilization” was being replaced in the late nineteenth century with “contemporary notions of internationally recognized human rights”; “Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization,” *International Affairs* 74 (1998): 1–24.

Balkans on the eve of the Russo-Ottoman war consolidated, particularly in Great Britain, an image of the Ottoman Empire as a place where humanity was routinely violated, and that was thus undeserving of British guarantees for sovereignty.⁹ The result was that the Ottoman Empire and its former dominions competed over who was more “civilized” in order to stake out claims to sovereignty. I will explain this larger process through a case study of Eastern Rumelia, an imperial borderland on the cusp between empire and nation.

I will argue that, in practice, claims to sovereignty did not unfold merely as diplomatic posturing in the realm of “high politics”; rather, they stemmed from local politics and measures regarding one of the most serious problems that accompanied the redrawing of imperial borders: migration. The contraction of the Ottoman Empire provoked Muslim emigration, resulting in the loss of life, land, and other properties.¹⁰ Those Muslims who returned to their homes in the aftermath of the Russo-Ottoman war had to contend with both economic dislocation and new political realities, as well as with a depressed social status. This was despite international treaty obligations, and official pledges, to protect and respect Muslims.¹¹ Facing such pressures, some decided to relocate to the Ottoman Empire proper. This postwar, peacetime Muslim emigration was the major bone of contention between Ottoman and Eastern Rumelian authorities, the latter being dominated by Bulgarian Christians.

The Ottoman government saw in Muslim emigration evidence that Eastern Rumelia was not modern and civilized enough to justly rule all of its residents regardless of their religion; consequently, the province was unfit for autonomy and full Ottoman sovereignty had to be reasserted. Eastern Rumelia’s authorities denied there was discrimination there, and suggested that Muslim emigration instead exposed Muslims as fanatical and insufficiently civilized. To demonstrate how civilized, and therefore worthy of autonomy and even independence the province was, the Eastern Rumelian administration pursued a course of modernization that nevertheless further stimulated Muslim (and briefly even Christian) emigration. The administration initiated reforms in land tenure and agriculture, specifically the replacement of the tithe with a land tax, which limited, modified, or broke the authority of Ottoman land laws and

⁹ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 111.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Nedim İpek, *Rumeli’den Anadolu’ya Türk Göçleri (1877–1890)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1999); Mahir Aydın, *Şarkı Rumeli Vilâyeti* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1992); Ali Kemal Balkanklı, *Şarkı Rumeli ve Buradaki Türklere* (Ankara: Elhan Kitabevi, 1986); Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995); and *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire* (London: Arnold, 2001).

¹¹ See the text of the Treaty of Berlin in Sir Augustus Oakes and R. B. Mowat, *The Great European Treaties of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918).

practices, and thereby undermined Ottoman sovereignty. Muslims responded by contesting this process with the local authorities by invoking prewar laws and practices, complaining to the imperial government, or leaving Eastern Rumelia altogether. The administration was unwilling to change its modernization course and did not actively try to stop Muslim emigration. Instead, it took advantage of the demographic changes that resulted from their leaving to claim that the province was basically Bulgarian Christian, and that hence Ottoman sovereignty was obsolete. Put simply, emigrating Muslims provoked the empire and its administratively autonomous province to articulate claims to sovereignty by trying to manage the migration of Eastern Rumelia's Muslims.

SETTING UP EASTERN RUMELIA

The Treaty of Berlin of July 1878 mandated the establishment of a European Commission consisting of members from the signatory powers. It would write an Organic Statute for Eastern Rumelia, while the civil branch of the Russian occupation authorities was in place to guarantee what they saw to be just rule and an orderly transition to self-government. For both the victorious Russian troops and Bulgarian nationalists, Eastern Rumelia represented a harmful compromise. The treaty revised the Treaty of San Stefano of the previous March, which had ended hostilities and demarcated a sizeable Bulgarian state stretching east from Serbia to the Black Sea, and south from the Danube to the Aegean. Great Britain thought this Bulgarian state provided Russia with undue leverage in the Ottoman Empire at the expense of the other Great Powers. The diplomatic logic of balance of power, which had regulated interstate relations since the 1815 Congress of Vienna, was also useful to new European bidders for influence in the Ottoman lands during the second half of the nineteenth century. Unified Germany was eager to host the diplomatic negotiations over the future of the Ottoman Balkans, and the Treaty of Berlin changed the Bulgarian state borders established in San Stefano: now there would be a Principality of Bulgaria under Ottoman suzerainty, and an administratively autonomous Ottoman province called Eastern Rumelia and headed by a Christian governor helped by an elected legislative assembly. Macedonia was returned to the Ottoman Empire on the condition that the Sultan institute reforms, particularly by improving the condition of its Christian population.

The structure of Eastern Rumelia revealed two features key to late-nineteenth-century geopolitical rivalries. First, the balance among the Great Powers became entwined with the balance among specific ethno-religious groups that viewed outside powers as potential protectors, most notably Bulgarian Christians, Turkish Muslims, and Greek Christians. Second, geopolitical interests were formulated in the familiar nineteenth-century language of "civilizing backward peoples" by showing them the way to rational and just governance. But this language was entwined with struggles

in the imperial metropolises between liberal and conservative political visions of the moral responsibility of empire.¹²

When Benjamin Disraeli penned *The Bulgarian Horrors* following the suppression in April 1876 of a nationalist Bulgarian uprising, he forced the question of whether Britain was prepared to uphold just and rational government.¹³ In Russia, pan-Slavic sentiments, complemented by a domestic reformist discourse of just and rational authority, invoked similar concerns about Russia's role in promoting better lives for Slavic populations under Ottoman rule.¹⁴ The suppression of the April uprising had served as the pretext for the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. The uprising was said to indicate that the Ottoman Empire's *Tanzimat* reforms had been inadequate to promoting justice and equality among Muslims and non-Muslims, and that Ottoman sovereignty had to be limited.

Eastern Rumelia was born in this context of imperial rivalries and broader European considerations of liberal governance, principally as regards European colonies in Asia and Africa. In the nineteenth century's second half, British colonial officials and legal scholars viewed British possessions on the Indian subcontinent and in South Africa as “quasi-sovereign,” as “states that were said to retain some measure of authority over their internal legal affairs while holding only limited capacity to form international relations.”¹⁵ Colonies lacked the sort of European Christian civilization that was the standard for admittance into the Family of Nations (called also “the international community”). This civilizational standard enabled the colonial powers to elaborate numerous regulations that defined the varying terms and limits of local autonomy, and ultimately asserted, though not without local challenges, the primacy of imperial law and supremacy of the colonial order.¹⁶

Eastern Rumelia could be regarded as a “quasi-sovereign” state, since the sultan remained the suzerain, but the province paid an annual tribute, had only a gendarmerie, and could not conduct foreign policy. Yet such a category did not fully describe its relationship with the Ottoman Empire since the European powers did not consider the empire a civilized modern state. By the time Eastern Rumelia was founded, the empire was heavily indebted financially to Europe, and was its military inferior. The European powers considered the Ottoman Empire incapable of justly governing Christians (or Muslims) and used the tools of international diplomacy, and occasionally troops, to intervene

¹² Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, 147–54.

¹³ William E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: J. Murray, 1876).

¹⁴ See Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism, 1856–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 67–72, 242–54.

¹⁵ Lauren Benton, “From International Law to Imperial Constitutions: The Problem of Quasi-Sovereignty, 1870–1900,” *Law and History Review* 26 (2008): 595–619, here 596.

¹⁶ Benton, “From International Law to Imperial Constitutions.”

on behalf of oppressed Ottoman Christians.¹⁷ Under the Treaty of Berlin, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary took over administration of Cyprus and Bosnia, respectively, on the grounds that the empire could not ensure good government to Christians and peace among Christians and Muslims. In dealing with the emigration of Muslims, the Eastern Rumelian administration constantly had to demonstrate to both the European powers and the Ottoman Empire that it was capable of ensuring good government for Christians and Muslims and peace between them.

The Berlin signatory powers, especially Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, quarreled over the nature of Ottoman imperial authority in newly founded Eastern Rumelia. This raised broader questions about the kind of rule appropriate for those from the shrinking Ottoman world (as well as from the European empires) who claimed self-rule but were thought to lack political maturity. Lord Salisbury asserted that Eastern Rumelians should enjoy order, justice, and safety of life and property, but not the liberty of political and social agitation that might undermine the government.¹⁸ Lord Beaconsfield remarked to Sir Henry Drummond Wolff that the institutions Wolff envisioned for Eastern Rumelia “might be too liberal for the peculiar circumstances of the case.”¹⁹ The Berlin agreements had bound the powers to limiting the independence of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, but just what sort of limited self-rule was appropriate was a question that drew Britain, Russia, and Austria-Hungary into a debate about the legitimacy of national aspirations.

The Russian Colonel Shepelev argued that the colonial model of self-rule was ill-suited to the culture and historical experiences of the Bulgarian Christians.²⁰ Local needs had to be addressed, the Russians insisted, suggesting that the temporary Russian administrators had already developed a framework of governance for Eastern Rumelia.²¹ The Russians opposed Austro-Hungarian representative Benjamin Kallay’s suggestion of a bicameral assembly that would in practice represent the interests of Muslim Turkish landowners and Greek Christian merchants.²² Wolff and the French delegate to the European Commission, Baron de Ring, argued that the prewar positions of these two populations had to be restored, as a balancing element to the possible extreme tendencies in a popularly elected legislative assembly. Ring emphasized that the economic achievements and intellectual potentials of Greek

¹⁷ Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, 63–141.

¹⁸ Henry Drummond Wolff, *Rambling Recollections*, vol. II (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1908), 234.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁰ Maria G. Manolova, *Rusiia i Konstitutsionnoto Ustroistvo na Iztochna Rumeliia* (Sofia: BAN, 1976), 91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²² *Ibid.*, 114.

Christians would help develop Eastern Rumelia.²³ Eventually Count Tseretelev, the Russian representative to the commission, struck a compromise with Kallay: Tseretelev consented to formation of a Permanent Committee that would have legislative powers when the assembly was not in session, while insisting that this committee would not be appointed by the governor but instead elected by the assembly.²⁴

Russia's advocacy for representative government in Eastern Rumelia was bound up with its goal of limiting Ottoman influence in the Balkans. And while the British position entailed support for institutions associated with representative government, they linked this to guarantees that a Bulgarian majority would not dominate Turkish Muslim and Greek Christian minorities.²⁵ The same logic was applied, along with an attempt to co-opt the Orthodox ecclesiastical elite, to newly occupied Cyprus, where the British considered their role to be one of preserving a “balance between Turk and Greek” that was key to successful British rule.²⁶ Balance, in the context of Eastern Rumelia, meant that Russia's clout in the Balkans, grounded in her championship of the Bulgarian Christians, would be restrained by mechanisms of representation that assured Muslim Turks and Greek Christians the right to participate in the political process. In addition, Bulgarian, Turkish, and Greek would all be official languages and the leaders of all religious communities would be represented in the provincial assembly.

After the Greek War of Independence (1821–1830), the Great Powers had pushed for similar arrangements of shared Christian-Muslim governance, the promulgation of Organic Statutes, and greater local autonomy in Ottoman areas inhabited overwhelmingly by Greek Christians. When they intervened, it was usually on the grounds that Ottoman reforms were failing to improve the conditions of rural Christians; they used their financial and military leverage to force the Ottoman government to impose limits on Ottoman sovereignty while also upholding, in the short run, the empire's integrity so as to maintain Europe's balance of power and collective security.²⁷ Muslim emigration accompanied all of the modifications of Ottoman sovereignty during the nineteenth century. In Eastern Rumelia, though, the quick replacement of the tithe with a land tax, coupled with the democratic political process, embroiled Muslim emigration in a discourse on civilization and modernity that was crucial to claims and efforts to recover diminished sovereignty.

²³ *Ibid.*, 116–21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 124–34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 116–121; Elena Stelova, *Iztochna Rumeliia (1879/1885): Ikonomika, politika, kultura* (Sofia: Izd. OF, 1983), 13–51.

²⁶ Lord Salisbury's remark quoted in Andrekos Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878–1915: The Inconsequential Possession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 159.

²⁷ Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, esp. chs. 5 and 9.

CIRCUMSCRIBING EASTERN RUMELIA'S POPULATION: RUSSIAN
MANAGEMENT OF POST-WAR MUSLIM REPATRIATION

Muslim migration became a problem linked to questions of sovereignty from the moment Russian-Ottoman hostilities ended. The settling of Muslim and Christian refugees was central to the tenure of the civil branch of the Russian occupation authorities—the Provisional Russian Administration, or PRA. The PRA stayed until October 1879, when the first Provincial Assembly of Eastern Rumelia met in the capital, Plovdiv. The PRA's leaders, Prince Vladimir Cherkasskii (until his death in March 1878) and Count Alexander Dondukov-Korsakov, wanted to monitor who and how many Turkish Muslim refugees returned to the newly created province, with two goals in mind. First, the PRA hoped to provide Bulgarian Christians with demographic advantages that could be translated into political power and ultimately undermine the Ottoman presence in the Balkans. Cherkasskii, Dondukov-Korsakov, Count Nikolai P. Ignatyev (the former Russian ambassador at Istanbul), and Tsar Alexander II all saw Russian victory and a Bulgarian state as an extension of Russian influence in Europe through dependable Christian Slavic states.²⁸ Second, the PRA worked to weaken Ottoman power in Eastern Rumelia and the Principality of Bulgaria by targeting the Muslim landed elites. To this end, the PRA developed stricter procedures for Muslim repatriation and redistributed to impoverished Bulgarian Christian peasants the land belonging to those it viewed as despotic Turkish feudal lords. Meanwhile, Russian occupation authorities were acutely sensitive to upholding their image as just liberators and civilizers, and ostentatiously displayed their adherence to the evolving standards of international laws of occupation.²⁹

In the period after the April 1876 uprising but before the outbreak of hostilities, Cherkasskii studied Ottoman history, law, and economy, and gathered information on local conditions from educated Bulgarian Christians.³⁰ He continued collecting data during the first months of the war, when Russian military successes were still uncertain. The product of these efforts was the publication

²⁸ B. H. Sumner, "Russia and Panslavism in the Eighteen-Seventies," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 18 (1935): 25–52; and "Ignatyev at Constantinople, 1864–1874 I," *Slavonic and East European Review* 11 (1933): 341–53; and "Ignatyev at Constantinople: II," *Slavonic and East European Review* 11 (1933): 556–71; Charles Jelavich, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism: Russian Influence in the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879–1886* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), *passim*.

²⁹ For the relationship between domestic reform initiatives and Russian international engagements, especially Russian commitment to and articulation of international law, see Peter Holquist, "The Russian Empire as a 'Civilized State': International Law as Principle and Practice in Imperial Russia, 1874–1878," *NCEEER Publication*, 2004, 20–21, at: http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2004_818-06g_Holquist.pdf. I thank the author for providing me with this link.

³⁰ Many of his informants later became important politicians and public figures in the Principality of Bulgaria and in Eastern Rumelia. Goran Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko Upravlenie v Bŭlgariia prez 1877–1879* (Sofia: BKP, 1958), 65–71.

of *Материалы для изучения Болгарии* (Sources for the study of Bulgaria), which served as a blueprint for the temporary Russian administration following his death.³¹ From May through June of 1878 the administration further accumulated and created local knowledge by conducting a land survey. The survey recorded patterns of land distribution, focused on large landholdings (*çiftlik*s) and their distribution in the Russian occupied territories and among religious groups.³² The survey found that the majority of *çiftlik* owners were Muslim landlords, even though the majority of the population was Christian.

Rectifying this discrepancy was important for Cherkasskii and the PRA because it underscored Russia's status as a civilized power capable of promoting good government and thereby peace. The contrast with the Ottoman Empire in this respect also justified the Russian occupation and the decisions made in Berlin to chip away at Ottoman territory in the Balkans; Great Power interventions in the Ottoman Empire during nineteenth-century reforms were invariably explained as actions promoting good government.³³ Cherkasskii had been sympathetic to Russian Slavophiles in the 1840s, as well as to their ideological successors, the Panslavs, who after Russia's defeat in the Crimean War elaborated a political program for Slavic unity under Russian tutelage.³⁴ He came to view the Balkan Slavs as suffering oppression under the Turks and the malignant indifference of the Concert of Europe, which opposed Slavic independence from Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule.³⁵ Cherkasskii remarked that, at least on paper, many Ottoman laws, particularly those concerning provincial government, were sound because they had been copied from Europe, but he said the problem remained that the Ottoman administration did not know the laws well and therefore did not apply them, but instead “governed the country arbitrarily.”³⁶ Consequently, the Russian authorities had to end “the arbitrariness of the Turkish administration, while retaining those institutions

³¹ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 65–71. This practice of knowledge production was not new; the reform impetus in Russia prompted the dispatching of literati to the Russian provinces to gather information about local peasant life and thereby develop strategies for its modernization. On this, see Catherine B. Clay, “Russian Ethnographers in the Service of Empire, 1856–1862,” *Slavic Review* 54 (1995): 45–61.

³² *Çiftlik* means “farm,” though by the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Balkans the term was increasingly used to denote farms made up of large landholdings. On this, see Strashimir Dimitrov, “Chiflishkoto Stopanstvo prez 50–70 godini na XIX vek,” *Istoričeski Pregled* 11 (1955): 3–35. For a discussion of the changing nature of *çiftlik* in Ottoman history, especially with reference to Anatolia and the Arab heartlands of the empire, see Çağlar Keyder and Farouk Tabak, eds., *Landholding and Commercial Agriculture in the Middle East* (Albany: SUNY, 1991).

³³ Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, passim.

³⁴ Petrovich, *Emergence*, 37–38, 241–46.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁶ Quoted in Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 68. Cherkasskii approved of the administrative councils that had been established after the 1864 provincial reforms in the Ottoman Empire; the councils were made up of both Muslims and non-Muslims. On this point, see Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 81.

and laws which do not contradict the idea of just and humane rule over the population.³⁷

In the language of reformers in Russia, arbitrariness (*proizvol*) had to be replaced by rational legal authority (*zakonnost*).³⁸ And while in the 1870s the meanings of these concepts, as well as the methods required to achieve them, were contested within Russia itself,³⁹ Cherkasskii's mind was clear with respect to achieving justice on behalf of the Bulgarians: the local Ottoman administrative authorities had to be replaced with temporary Russian ones, while privileging the Christian population, to end the arbitrariness of Ottoman rule.⁴⁰ After all, when Russia had first gone to war with the Ottoman Empire on behalf of the brutalized Slavs, the action had won approval from the international community as a humanitarian and civilizing action.⁴¹

In the early stages of the war, the temporary Russian authorities distributed food, allowed Christians to cultivate lands deserted by fleeing Muslims, and even settled Christian refugees in villages Muslims had abandoned.⁴² Cherkasskii envisioned this as a temporary measure, yet as the war progressed and it became more difficult to support both troops and refugees, he allowed the Bulgarian Christian refugees to cultivate the plots of Muslim refugees.⁴³ His successor Dondukov-Korsakov had to deal with even more Christian refugees, from Ottoman Macedonia and the province of Edirne.⁴⁴ Bulgarian Christian cultivators and landholders throughout the occupied territories appropriated land vacated by Muslims, asserted their ownership of the land by beginning to cultivate, and refused to pay rent.⁴⁵ It appears that in some cases the PRA issued the cultivators documents of land ownership.⁴⁶ Around Plovdiv (later Eastern Rumelia's capital), even non-displaced villagers sought permission to rent the fields of Muslims who had fled.⁴⁷

To ease the burden of refugee settlement and to subvert challenges to the Russian authorities and their vision for an Orthodox Slavic polity, Dondukov-Korsakov worked to control the return of Muslim refugees. The Russians had

³⁷ Ibid., 81.

³⁸ W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), 162–63.

³⁹ Lincoln, *Great Reforms*, 164–73.

⁴⁰ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 68.

⁴¹ Jelena Milojković-Djurić, *The Eastern Question and the Voices of Reason: Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Balkan States, 1875–1908* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 2002), 45.

⁴² Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 130–32.

⁴³ N. G. Levintov, "Agrarnyie Otnosheniia v Bolgarii nakanune Osvobozhdeniia i Agrarnyi Peravorot 1878–1879 godov," in *Osvobozhdenie Bolgarii ot Turetskogo Iga (Sbornik Statei)* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1953), 139–222, here 186–87.

⁴⁴ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 159.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 176–77.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 136; Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), BEO, NGG d. 968 No. 102.

⁴⁷ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 136.

explicitly pledged to safeguard religious freedom, particularly that of Muslims, and to maintain order and peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims, and they denounced acts of violence committed by Bulgarian Christians.⁴⁸ The PRA provided Muslim refugees with food and transport back to their homes.⁴⁹ Yet Dondukov-Korsakov wrote that he could not be sure that Muslims went to their actual homes; he suspected the Ottoman government was demanding the settlement even of people who had not resided in the Russian occupied territories before the war.⁵⁰ In his memoirs, Henry Drummond Wolff described the efforts of Russian authorities in December 1878 to send “four or five hundred Turks from a distant village” in Eastern Rumelia to Edirne. Congratulating his personal authority, and Great Britain as the just and civilized power with respect to Russia and the Ottoman Empire, Wolff said that he “wrote to the Governor-General [Stolipin] a very strong letter which he answered in the middle of the night, saying that the people had been brought in this way by mistake of the police. They were then sent back, comfortably enough, to the village.”⁵¹ He recounted that the European Commission received letters written by Muslim Turks in Eastern Rumelia narrating abuses by Bulgarian Christians.⁵² Meanwhile, Dondukov-Korsakov regarded the complaints of Muslim refugees in Istanbul as mere theater performed to impress the British.⁵³ To deal with the pressure of providing agricultural land to Christian refugees, he established entrance procedures for Muslims, while at the same time trying to provide relief to Muslim refugees.

Dondukov-Korsakov’s measures for refugee management resulted in a General Ordinance, which mandated that all returning Muslim refugees had to prove their right of land possession in court with appropriate documentation.⁵⁴ He emphasized the need for orderly repatriation lest conflicts occur between returning Muslims and the Christian refugees who had been settled in the places the Muslims had abandoned,⁵⁵ but such conflicts occurred anyway.⁵⁶ The stronger impact of the General Ordinance was that it prevented Muslim large landholders and notables from returning.⁵⁷ Two notables, Hacı

⁴⁸ Holquist, “Russian Empire,” 23.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰ N. Ovsianyi, *Sbornik Materialov po Grazhdanskomu Upravleniiu i Okkupatsii v Bolgarii v 1877–78–79* (S.-Peterburg: Tipografiia “Tovarishestva Khudozhestvennoi Pechati,” 1903), vol. 5: 22–30, 101–5, 161–64, 173–79, 219; vol. 6: 50.

⁵¹ Wolff, *Rambling Recollections*, 217–18.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 216–17.

⁵³ Ovsianyi, *Sbornik*, vol. 6: 50.

⁵⁴ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 144–45.

⁵⁵ Ovsianyi, *Sbornik*, vol. 5: 161–64.

⁵⁶ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 135–37, presents evidence about rather violent clashes among Bulgarians over abandoned land. It is unclear if the PRA articulated a policy for addressing such conflicts, but in any case there is always a discrepancy between official policy and action by individual officers. Only further archival research can illuminate this question.

⁵⁷ Ovsianyi, *Sbornik*, vol. 5: 101–04.

Arif Ağa and Hacı Şaban Ağa, were arrested when they tried to return, then tried and sentenced to death on the grounds they had committed atrocities against Christians during the Bosnian (1875) and Bulgarian (1876) uprisings.⁵⁸ Following diplomatic negotiations they were pardoned and sent to Istanbul, but their ordeal warned other men of such stature to wait for the Russians to depart before trying to return.⁵⁹ Indeed, Muslims as a group did not begin to return in greater numbers until the Russian authorities had left. The refugee waves induced by the war, and by the Russian refugee settlement and repatriation practices, had redrawn Eastern Rumelia's rural landscape and, more broadly, reshaped the region's demography.

MUSLIM EMIGRATION FROM EASTERN RUMELIA, AND CLAIMS TO SOVEREIGNTY

Muslim Refugee Repatriation and Repeated Emigration

Muslim emigration from Eastern Rumelia was caused partly by the failures of refugee repatriation. Specifically, rural Muslims, even when they succeeded in gaining restitution for lost land, were hard pressed to lead lives as cultivators due to the profound social and economic dislocation caused by the war. Fear and insecurity, fed by abuses or intimidation by Bulgarian Christians, further undermined postwar normalization and forced many to leave once again.⁶⁰ The demographic changes wrought by war and occupation had altered the ethno-religious composition and balance of neighborhoods and villages. This balance continued to tip to the disadvantage of Muslims because of the other major factor behind emigration after the Russian departure: the replacement of the tithe with a land tax. This change, as I will discuss presently, ultimately increased the political leverage of Bulgarian Christians both locally and across the province.

The demographic changes caused by the war and the PRA bolstered Bulgarian Christian politicians' insistence on the "Bulgarian character" of Eastern Rumelia. But equally transformative demographic changes occurred after the Russians left: approximately 20 percent of the rural Turkish Muslim population had left Eastern Rumelia by 1885, the year the Principality of Bulgaria took over the province.⁶¹ This emigration incited discord between Eastern Rumelia's administration and the Ottoman government, and raised the question of which was civilized enough to ensure good government for Christians and Muslims alike. For the empire this was an old and dangerous question; Eastern

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 169–71.

⁶⁰ İpek, *Rumeli'den*, 130–36.

⁶¹ On the numbers, see Liuben Berov, "Agrarnoto Dvizhenie v Iztochna Rumeliia po vreme na Osвобождението," *Istoricheski Pregled* 12 (1956): 3–36. His numbers are bit high, and I have used reports by prefects to compile a more accurate count.

Rumelia was the product of Russian intervention supposedly intended to remedy Ottoman misrule.⁶² For Eastern Rumelia this question was as new as the province was, and demonstrating that it was capable of governing both Muslims and Christians was an important step toward ultimately claiming independence from the empire. Meanwhile, the Ottoman government used Eastern Rumelia’s failings to undermine provincial autonomy. Turkish Muslims sent petitions to both Plovdiv and Istanbul, which drew the two administrations into a heated exchange about who could secure Muslims a better life of order, prosperity, and justice.⁶³

For the Ottoman Empire, the problem of Muslim refugees involved more than just the issue of asserting sovereignty. The arrival of Muslim refugees from what became the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was but one aspect of a larger process of Muslim refugee settlement in the empire, which had been ongoing since the end of the Crimean War (1853–1856).⁶⁴ A refugee commission had been established in 1860 to absorb arriving Muslims, but due to a constant shortage of money it was abolished in 1865 and its duties dispersed among different sectors of the internal and foreign ministries, as well as the gendarmerie.⁶⁵

A decade after the war, Muslims from the Russian Empire continued to trickle into the Ottoman Empire, forcing the government there to set up another refugee commission as a separate administrative body, which existed until 1875.⁶⁶ Another war with Russia (1877–1878) practically severed the Balkans from the Ottoman Empire, prompting waves of Muslims to seek shelter and a new life in the Ottoman territories proper,⁶⁷ and in 1879 still another commission was created in Istanbul to deal with them. It operated until 1880. Providing food, shelter, clothing, housing, and arable land for the steady influx of impoverished, frightened, and dejected Muslims was financially and logistically burdensome.⁶⁸

Research on the settlement in the Ottoman Empire of Muslim refugees from Russia has revealed social tensions that arose between them and hosting Ottoman families, villages, neighborhoods, and towns.⁶⁹ Even

⁶² In *Against Massacre*, Rodogno shows well how humanitarian intervention in effect diminished Ottoman sovereignty.

⁶³ Villages from a district would usually group and write one petition. See, for instance, BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11, s. 4, s. 25–3, s. 41.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, David Cameron Cuthell Jr., *The Muhacirin Komisyonu: An Agent in the Transformation of Ottoman Anatolia, 1860–1866*, PhD diss., Columbia University, 2005; also McCarthy, *Death and Exile*.

⁶⁵ Cuthell, *Muhacirin Komisyonu*, 107.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁶⁷ See the records of the commission: BOA, BEO AYN. d. 1553.

⁶⁸ İpek, *Rumeli'den*, passim.

⁶⁹ See Oktay Özel, “Migration and Power Politics: The Settlement of Georgian Immigrants In Turkey (1878–1908),” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46 (2010): 477–96.

without these, adjusting to a new environment would have been hard enough for refugees from the Balkans, and the Ottoman government cautioned them that they would have a hard time adapting to the climate.⁷⁰ When Muslims of Eastern Rumelia, having barely settled in, began to emigrate again, the Ottoman authorities pressured for resolution of Muslim grievances so as to stop their leaving.

Muslim emigration from the European territories of the empire also reminded Sultan Abdulhamid II that he was losing sovereignty over Rumili—an old part of the empire, “the most precious of European lands.”⁷¹ Though it angered Bulgarian nationalists and hurt the pride of the Russian army and diplomats, the Treaty of Berlin, while supposedly saving the face of the Ottoman Empire, was from the Ottoman viewpoint both an insult and an injury. The ready reception in Europe of William Gladstone’s *Bulgarian Horrors* solidified the image of the Ottoman Turks as uncivilized and despotic.

European diplomats in Berlin viewed the empire through this “civilization lens” as they insisted that the Ottoman signatories commit to reform in Macedonia so as to uplift Christians. They did not, however, “trust” the Ottomans to do the same in Bosnia-Herzegovina or the Russian occupied territories of the future Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. In his *Rambling Recollections*, Wolff explained the British position by paraphrasing Lord Salisbury’s statement, “That men should have public order, safety of life and property, pure justice, security against excessive taxation—these were things of vital importance. We could not save Turkey by compromising in the least degree the rights of populations to have these....”⁷² Meanwhile, the Ottoman government employed the same logic to hold the Bulgarian-dominated Eastern Rumelian administration accountable for the grievances of Muslims in the province. That the administration did not stop Muslim emigration prompted the Ottoman government to paint the province as insufficiently civilized. Accordingly, to Istanbul’s concern with Turkish Muslim refugees from Eastern Rumelia we must add Sultan Abdulhamid II’s preoccupation with his empire’s image, or what Selim Deringil has termed “Ottoman image management.”⁷³

In answer to Ottoman accusations that he was not ensuring orderly and just Muslim resettlement, Eastern Rumelia’s Governor Aleko Bogoridi insisted, “The government has taken in every case the precautionary measures listed in the vizieral note to protect the life, property,

⁷⁰ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 4/3, s. 69.

⁷¹ The words belong to the statesmen and intellectual Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, quoted in Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris 2011), 136.

⁷² Wolff, *Rambling Recollections*, 234.

⁷³ Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 135–41.

and land of the Muslim people and even to secure their freedom from anxiety.”⁷⁴ In the fall of 1879, Eastern Rumelia’s legislative assembly had voted to distribute 40,000 lira for the settling of refugees; the government gave financial help to what it considered to be the poorest returning Muslim refugees, and tried to settle the debts that Bulgarian Christian villagers owed them.⁷⁵ But Bogoridi was in a tight spot since he had to prove that Muslim-Christian relations were normalizing. As late as 1880, British Ambassador to Istanbul Sir Henry A. Layard wrote that Muslims from Eastern Rumelia and the Principality of Bulgaria had sent petitions to British consuls about abuses by Bulgarian Christians.⁷⁶ Todor Ikonov, the Bulgarian Christian Prefect of Sliven, was aware of such reports to the consul in the Black Sea city of Burgas, but dismissed them as expressions of British antagonism to Bulgarian rule.⁷⁷ In his memoirs he condemned the violence committed by the Ottoman soldiers as well as the abuses of the Bulgarian gendarmerie in Eastern Rumelia, and also highlighted the poverty of both Muslims and Christians in the countryside.⁷⁸

Turkish Muslims and the imperial government in Istanbul resented how the PRA had handled refugee settlement. Under pressure from the European Commission, Bogoridi appointed special commissions in each prefecture to handle the reinstatement of Turkish Muslim refugees. Only the records of the Plovdiv commission survive. Historian Goran Todorov has calculated that of a total of 1,946 decisions, 738 specifically concerned returning land to Turkish Muslims and dealt with the terms of leasing their landholdings; 127 dealt with the physical reinstatement of claimants and the recognition of their right of possession. Based on research on the contemporary press, Todorov argues that the special commissions in the other prefectures of the province acted in very similar ways.⁷⁹ Despite the Plovdiv commission’s decisions, a great many Bulgarian Christian villagers rebelled against its orders and physically resisted administrative officials charged with carrying them out.⁸⁰ Sometimes large landholders resorted to Eastern Rumelia’s courts either to reclaim property or to collect rent for lands that had been cultivated in their absence. This is what Hacı Nuri Ağa from Plovdiv did, for example, though after three years of administrative delays and conflicting interpretations of documents he seems to have given

⁷⁴ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 4/3, s. 97. “Vizieral” means sent from the Office of the Ottoman grand vizier.

⁷⁵ BOA, Y. A. HUS 163/26 s. 2; Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 129, 163, 176.

⁷⁶ Sinan Kunalalp, ed., *The Queen’s Ambassador to the Sultan: Memoirs of Sir Henry A. Layard’s Constantinople Embassy 1877–1880* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2009), 658–59.

⁷⁷ Todor Ikonov, *Memoari*, Toncho Zhechev, ed. (Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel, 1973), 177, 225–31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 225–31.

⁷⁹ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 169–76.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

up.⁸¹ In another case, one Ahmed Ağa spent several years trying to reclaim his land by gathering documentation from Ottoman registers and marshaling it in court, only to conclude with exasperation: “All the doors of justice are closed for us (*Artık bütün adalet kapıları bizim için oraca kapandı*).”⁸²

Ahmed Ağa’s failed use of documentation exposes one of the main difficulties for Eastern Rumelian Muslims: they had to navigate the competing claims to sovereignty of the empire and its “quasi-sovereign” borderland. While the Eastern Rumelian authorities relied on imperial law and practice, they interpreted Ottoman documentation according to local needs. They were able to do so partly because of discrepancies in imperial documents, and partly because so many had been lost during the war. In constructing his case, Ahmed Ağa procured various documents from the imperial bureaucracy in Istanbul, prompting the participation of several administrative bodies like the Office of Records, the Imperial Treasury, the Tax Department, the Forest Department, the Ministry of Finance, and the Council of State. His misfortune, not unique to his case,⁸³ was that these bodies did not fully agree on what constituted his property and thus from which property he was entitled to collect rent.

Such inconsistencies posed a problem for the Eastern Rumelian administration as well. For instance, in 1882 Bogoridi requested copies of lost title deeds (*tapu senedi*) and asked the office of the Ottoman prime minister to initiate a process of verification of existing ones.⁸⁴ The imperial Office of Records had modified the format of the documents,⁸⁵ possibly to curb the tricks of postwar opportunists who acquired land for themselves by posing as the appointed agents (*vekil*) of refugees seeking to reclaim land.⁸⁶ This modification provoked confusion in the province, and anger from Bogoridi that such a change was made without his knowledge.⁸⁷ Istanbul’s action, including its neglect to inform Bogoridi, was a display of both imperial sovereignty and the recognition of just how entangled imperial and provincial claims to sovereignty were. Bogoridi’s expectation that he would be involved in the imperial

⁸¹ Or at least the archival trail shows us that much; BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 9/1, s. 37, 68, 70 and A. MTZ. RŞ 131/5, s. 125. A similar situation of conflicting evidentiary interpretation can be seen in the case of Fatima Hanım, in BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 3/2 s. 144.

⁸² BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 3/2 s. 64. Ahmed Ağa’s case can be traced in BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 3/2, s. 64, 70–79, 116–21, 131, 132, 140–42, 156, 157; BOA, BEO NGG d. 969, No. 466, 477, 504, 508, and 539.

⁸³ See Kamile Hanım’s case, in BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 6/3, s. 18, 19, 46, 58, 76, 77, and 78.

⁸⁴ BOA, BEO NGG d. 967 No. 180.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ BOA. MTZ. RŞ 9/5, s. 6, 7, BEO NGG d. 969 #658, A. MTZ. RŞ 9/1, s. 73; Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 144.

⁸⁷ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 131/5, s. 42, 76. The Vergi Emaneti in Ahmed Beğ’s case feared that refugee requests for title deeds and the legalization of land sales might spur the spread of false documents.

decision curiously betrays both Eastern Rumelia’s dependence on the Ottoman Empire and its desire to be treated as equal.

Many ordinary villagers carried a burden of contradictory evidentiary interpretation similar to that of Hacı Nuri Ağa, or perhaps worse, some lacked any documents at all.⁸⁸ This was a double problem, for not only had the “paper” disappeared, but gone also was the Ottoman social web that had both validated documents and recognized ownership relations in the absence of written evidence. Thus Mehmed Effendi, a refugee landholder from Plovdiv, concluded that while there had been justice before the war, now, when it came to Muslims (*ahali-i İslamiye*), courts did not practice justice and ignored the provisions of the Berlin Treaty for equality.⁸⁹ The desperation of refugees reflected a painful political process: Ottoman documentation was being re-contextualized, and it was this process of reinterpretation within a new political paradigm that refugees characterized as unjust. The problem with the official documents was that while they had been authoritative within the socio-political context that produced them, now the ultimate authority of Ottoman documents in Eastern Rumelia was being determined not in Istanbul but in Plovdiv.

Failing to restore their prewar social status by deploying imperial documentation, people like Ahmed Beğ denounced the prevalence of injustice, and they tended to leave Eastern Rumelia altogether.⁹⁰ Others, especially smallholders and cultivators, while they decried injustice, kept appealing to both Plovdiv and Istanbul for fairness and protection. This involved them in the complex competition over who was better equipped to govern Muslims. For this reason, when agriculturally productive Turkish Muslims did resort to emigration, provincial and imperial authorities clashed over the cause. Both administrations viewed such Turkish Muslims as a malleable “flock” that could be swayed, and whether this would be for the good or for the bad depended upon the actions of the two centers of political authority—Istanbul and Plovdiv.

Land Tax Implementation and Muslim Emigration

In fall 1883 the Turkish Muslim elders (*heyet-i ihtiyariye*) of the village of ‘Arab (Plovdiv prefecture) sent a petition to Aleko Bogoridi regarding two issues that concerned them. The first was that they opposed the introduction of the new method of taxation whereby, after the constitution of a new cadaster, the Ottoman in-kind tax—the tithe—was replaced with a land tax. The elders believed that this had already prompted Turkish Muslim emigration: at the time of the petition’s preparation nineteen Muslim families had left the village and nine more were preparing to go. Emigration was also costly for

⁸⁸ BOA, BEO NGG d. 968 No. 102.

⁸⁹ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 1/37 s. 1.

⁹⁰ Todorov, *Vremennoto Rusko*, 169–71.

the village, since the “Bulgars” (Bulgarian Orthodox Christians) of ‘Arab had bought the land and houses of the emigrants and successfully bargained to pay a collective, lower price on all the property.⁹¹ In other words, Turkish Muslim villagers were trapped in a lose-lose situation, since if they stayed they had to pay the land tax, but if they left Eastern Rumelia they had to sell their property cheaply.

The second concern of the elders was that as Muslims left, “Bulgars” who had purchased their houses and land were moving into the Muslim neighborhood.⁹² The growing number of Bulgarian Christians there meant “the oppression of the needs of the Muslims (*ahali-i islamiye*).”⁹³ The elders hastened to point out that they were worried not because “the Muslims feel aversion to the Bulgars,” but rather because the elders cared “for the protection of the affairs of the confessional communities (*umur-u mezhebiye*) and protection against the aspirations of communal transgressors (*udat milliyeleri*).”⁹⁴ Such transgression was manifest in the practice of “Bulgar young men” gathering around the village well and, without shame or fear, gazing at Muslim women. The demographic changes in the village had diminished the elders’ authority to such a degree that they were hard pressed to protect “women’s canonical stranger status.”⁹⁵ They pleaded with Governor Bogoridi to enforce religiously separated neighborhoods so there would be, as before the war, a Muslim village quarter within which, they implied, no one would challenge their authority or the gender relations that buttressed it.⁹⁶

This petition reached both the provincial and the imperial capitals and provoked further heated exchanges over the causes of emigration. Bogoridi pointed out that he could not enforce residential segregation since that would run against the conception of legal equality enshrined in the provincial charter, the Organic Statute. But he was in any case altogether unconvinced by the claim that Bulgarian Christian settlement prompted Turkish Muslims emigration.⁹⁷ He had dispatched the Mevlevi Sheykh Ali Efendi and the notable İsmail Hakkı to investigate why Muslims were departing. He emphasized that they were also leaving the purely Muslim district of Kircaali, and concluded that they were simply incorrigible.⁹⁸

As for general complaints against the land tax, Vice Governor Gavril Krūstevich iterated a similar logic. He argued that Turkish Muslims from Stara Zagora, a prefecture hard hit by the war, saw the caravans of Muslim

⁹¹ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 4/3, s. 78.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 4/3 s. 97.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

emigrants from the Principality of Bulgaria and thought: “‘Why is there emigration? There must be reasons.’ They ask the emigrants and they tell them: ‘Staying is impossible, we have to flee.’ Ours [Eastern Rumelia’s Turkish Muslims] are influenced to follow. And the simple people, as you know, take their cue from those who are more influential, smarter, and wealthier. If these people say that it is necessary to emigrate, the simple people do not listen to anyone else. So this is what goes on with the Turkish population.”⁹⁹

While we have seen that Turkish Muslim emigration from Eastern Rumelia had long-term causes, it peaked in 1882–1883.¹⁰⁰ During this same period, to the alarm of Bulgarian Christian politicians, even Bulgarian Christian peasants began to relocate to the Principality of Bulgaria. Both movements were connected to the implementation of the land tax, which numerous petitions bemoaned. The 1882–1883 emigration is significant for two reasons: it was tied to Eastern Rumelia’s modernization efforts, that is, to the implementation of the land tax; and it reveals the consolidation of a majority-minority logic of government. Eastern Rumelians understood this logic in ethno-religious terms, which in turn encouraged Bulgarian Christian hegemony.

Starting with the promulgation of the law for the constitution of a new cadaster in the winter of 1881, Plovdiv and Istanbul received numerous petitions from groups of Turkish Muslims, at times entire villages, demanding tax breaks or help with working animals, tools, seed, and even food, and displaying general consternation about the land tax.¹⁰¹ Particularly from mid-1882 onward, as the new cadaster was being constituted and the land tax determined, petitioners invariably connected implementation of the new tax to the emigration of Turkish Muslims.¹⁰² Petitioners perceived in the new form of tax—which relied on projected revenue from land based on its size, type, and estimated productivity, as opposed to revenue excised from produce—a policy that would deny them access to land and rob them of their social status as agricultural producers. The grim conclusion of a petition by the Muslim community at Stara Zagora was that the provincial government’s taxation policies were designed to ruin Muslims while favoring others, hinting at Bulgarian Christians.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *Dnevniitsi ot Petata Redovna Sessiia na Oblastnoto Sübranie (10-ii Oktomvri—10-ii Dekemvri 1883 g.): Stenografski Protokoli* (Sofia: Ianko S. Kovachev, 1892), 144.

¹⁰⁰ See *Doklad na Starozagorski Prefekt za Süstoianieto na Okrüga* (Stara Zagora: Pechatnitsa “Znanie,” 1884), 7–8, and 12–15; *Doklad na Haskovskii Prefekt za Süstoianieto na Okrüga* (Plovdiv: Khristo G. Danov, 1884), 8; *Doklad na Slivenskii Prefekt za süstoianieto na Okrüga* (Sliven: Pechatnitsa na vestnik “Bülgarsko Zname,” 1884), 5.

¹⁰¹ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11 s. 4; BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11, s. 26; BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11, s. 25-1, 25-2; BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11 s. 25-3.

¹⁰² BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11, s. 26; BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11, s. 25-1, 25-2; BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11 s. 25-3.

¹⁰³ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11 s. 25-3.

One may wonder why the Eastern Rumelian administration persisted in promoting a new form of taxation that provoked so much controversy. One answer is that the Organic Statute mandated the establishment of a new cadaster and the introduction of a land tax. Another is that a new provincial cadaster meant the ascension of a “new” knowledge about land and ownership. That is, imperial interpretations of land claims and taxation issues would now be subordinated to provincial decisions—monopoly over land knowledge became an assertion of autonomy.

This did not go unnoticed by Turkish Muslim villagers. A petition by sixteen villages from the Yambol prefecture maintained that cadastral commissions simply displayed power; no agricultural plots were actually measured, and judgments on their size and type were made on the village mayor’s authority, which frequently resulted in plots being registered as smaller than the villagers knew them to be.¹⁰⁴ Corrupt or ill-meaning officials probably did harm villagers in this transition process, but gaps in measurement occurred also because officials worked with the Ottoman measure for land, *uvrat*. Though it had not been standardized, officials who were determined to create standard land knowledge treated the *uvrat* as a fixed value.¹⁰⁵

In December 1883, Director of Finance Ivan Ev. Geshov concluded in his report to Bogoridi that the cadastral commissions having determined the land tax in such “irregular ways” had resulted in considerable variation in tax burdens across the province’s six prefectures.¹⁰⁶ These “irregular ways” stemmed from deployment of the tithe as the basis for establishing the preliminary cadaster and the land tax.¹⁰⁷ The land tax was based on an estimation of the tithe for the ten years up to 1878.¹⁰⁸ The tithe, however, had been calculated in different regions for different cumulative periods. Some members of the provincial assembly observed that the land tax was a heavy burden to place on a postwar population.¹⁰⁹ Yet, Bulgarian Christian politicians viewed Eastern Rumelia as backward agriculturally and otherwise, and this had prompted

¹⁰⁴ BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11, s. 4.

¹⁰⁵ See *Doklad na Starozagorskiĭ Prefekt za Sŭstoianieto na Okrŭga* (Stara Zagora: Pechatnitsa “Znanie,” 1884), 15. On discrepancies among units and methods for land measurements in the Ottoman Empire, see also Anton Minkov, “Mernata edinitsa za povŭrkhnost ‘dionium’ v administrativno-finansovata praktika na Osmanskata Impreĭia (XV–XXv.),” *Istoricheski Pregled* 48 (1991): 47–53.

¹⁰⁶ Ivan Ev. Geshov, “Iztochno-Rumeliiski finansi,” in *Dumi i Dela: Finansovi i Ekonomicheski Studii* (Sofia: Iv. G. Govedarov i C-ĭe, 1899), 186–87.

¹⁰⁷ “Oblasten Zakon za sŭstavlenie na kadastr,” in *Oblasten sbornik ot zakoni v Iztochna Rumeliia*, vol. 2 (Plovdiv: n.p., 1881), 263–324.

¹⁰⁸ See Vera S. Katsarkova, “Opiti za reformirane na danŭchnata sistema v Bŭlgaria v pŭrvite godini sled Osvobozhdenieto,” *Trudove na Visshĭia Ikonomicheski Institut “Karl Marks,”* vol. 1 (1979): 165–203.

¹⁰⁹ See the opinions of Hakanov and Milkovski in *Dnevniĭti ot Petata Redovna Sessiia na Oblastnoto Sŭbranie (10-ii Oktomvri—10-ii Dekemvri 1883 g.): Stenografski Protokoli* (Sofia: Ianko S. Kovachev, 1892), 145, 148–49.

them to support introduction of the “more advanced” land tax. They shared a consensus that the tithe was old-fashioned, a “primitive system condemned by the entire educated (*obrazovan*) world” to which it was “impossible to return.”¹¹⁰ The tithe indexed both backwardness and Ottoman sovereignty. They were willing to recalculate the land tax, as was done in 1884, but not to repeal it. Even under this measure, though, grievors were stigmatized as “negligent taxpayers,” insufficiently “mature” to appreciate this mechanism of being included in the modern state.¹¹¹

Failure to meet taxation requirements, or fear of doing so, as early as 1882 prompted both Muslim and Christian landholders in the Plovdiv prefecture to take out loans by mortgaging their land.¹¹² Bulgarian Christians were in a conspicuously difficult situation because they had been buying up and “storing” the land of emigrating Muslims as if undeterred by the ominous land tax.¹¹³ Toward the end of 1883, one Bulgarian Christian delegate to the provincial assembly argued that Bulgarians were susceptible to emigration and concluded, “This emigration . . . will devastate our beautiful province and will bring about enormous evil.”¹¹⁴ He suggested that poverty and the land tax were the causes of emigration but demanded a thorough explanation from Vice Governor Gavril Krüstevich as to whether the government had taken concerted action to keep people from leaving. Within this discussion of Bulgarian Christian emigration, until the fall of 1883, rumors of how many had emigrated varied from two thousand to five thousand. But no one, not even Krüstevich, seemed keen to determine the exact numbers, though he insisted the rumored counts were exaggerations. Assembly members, however, were worried by the fact that rural Bulgarian Christians were emigrating at all.

This fateful discussion had an impact. When the assembly reconvened in 1884 for its regular October–December session, the provincial Director of Finance Ivan Geshov spoke at length about the unfortunate prefecture of Stara Zagora, from which yet another complaint against the cadaster had arrived, filed by thirty-six villages. Geshov advocated redistributing the land tax among the prefectures, thereby giving relief to Stara Zagora, which had

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 146, 150.

¹¹¹ *Dnevniitsi ot Shestata Redovna Sessiia na Oblastnoto Sübranie, 22-ii Oktomvri—22-ii Dekemvri 1884 g.*: *Stenograficheski Protokoli* (Sofia: Ianko S. Kovachev, 1892), 319, 438. On taxation as way of articulating the modern subject, see Yanni Kotsonis, “‘No Place to Go’: Taxation and State Transformation in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia,” *Journal of Modern History* 76 (2004): 531–77; and “‘Face to Face’: The State, the Individual, and the Citizen in Russian Taxation, 1863–1917,” *Slavic Review* 63 (2004): 221–46. I thank Peter Holquist for drawing my attention to these articles.

¹¹² Plovdivski Oblasten Dürzhaven Arkhiv (PODA), F-40k, O-1.

¹¹³ *Doklad na Starozagorskii Prefekt za Süstoiianieto na Okrüga* (Stara Zagora: Pechatnitsa “Znanie,” 1884), 49; see the Brezovo court records, PODA, F-40k, O-1; Katsarkova, “Opiti za reformirane,” 192; Atanas T. Iliev, *Spomeni na Atanasa T. Iliev* (Sofia: P. Glushkov, 1926), 220–47. *Dnevniitsi ot Petata Redovna Sessiia*, 142, 144.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

suffered heavily from both the war and the tax.¹¹⁵ Assembly Member G. Gruev was even harsher in his appraisal, asserting that the shift from the tithe to the land tax had been flawed from the start because it demanded more money than most individuals' total income.¹¹⁶ Another member, Boiadzhiev, invoked patriotism to demand the redistribution of the provincial land tax.¹¹⁷ At the very end of November the assembly passed a bill for the redistribution of all taxes collected for immovable property.¹¹⁸ In this way, the cumulative land tax demanded from each prefecture was modified so as to lessen the burden of impoverished prefectures such as Stara Zagora. After the 1884 session, the provincial Permanent Committee—which administered legislative and budgetary issues when the assembly was out of session—promulgated a normative act that forgave 300,000 kurush of unpaid land taxes for the fiscal years 1882–83 and 1883–84.¹¹⁹

Turkish Muslims, too, could benefit from these measures, but they came into effect after the peak of Muslim emigration from mid-1882 through 1883. We must ask why only “Bulgarian emigration” moved the assembly members. The same discussion of the emigration of Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox Christians produced a very different consensus regarding the emigration of Turkish Muslims: they were a flock that could not be swayed through reason. It was unfortunate that the provincial government had failed to exercise influence over emigrants through “good and honest Muslims,” one assembly member opined.¹²⁰ But, “the government could succeed only through persuasion, especially as regards the Muslim population, because this population, whatever good one does for it, still thinks that it cannot bear the conditions in our province.”¹²¹ This was perceived as unreasonable behavior in contrast to that of more thoughtful Bulgarian Christians, who before embarking sent envoys to investigate the conditions in the Principality of Bulgaria. Their reports that “not everything there is honey and butter” persuaded people to stay put.¹²²

But Muslim emigration seemed also to exemplify the normal course of modern nations. Assembly Member Bobchev concluded that it was “the fatal course of time which pushes this population to emigrate from these lands.”¹²³ Eastern Rumelia was the “fatherland” of Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox Christians,¹²⁴ so, it was reasoned, it was only natural that Turkish-speaking Muslims would prefer to be in their Muslim Ottoman Empire.

¹¹⁵ *Dnevniitsi ot Shestata Redovna Sessiia*, 439–41.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 541.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 442.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 535.

¹¹⁹ Katsarkova, “Opiti za reformirane,” 194, and 194n.

¹²⁰ *Dnevniitsi ot Petata Redovna Sessiia*, 140.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 144.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* The term “fatherland” was used by Assembly Member Milkovski.

Muslim Turks distrusted the Eastern Rumelian administration. Their appeal to the imperial government to intervene and somehow remove the burdensome land tax is as telling of their disillusionment with Plovdiv as it is of how much they still viewed Istanbul as the ultimate authority that could change the course of events in Eastern Rumelia.¹²⁵ Muslims who left may have been prompted also by a realization that in Eastern Rumelia they had limited capacity to sustain and find protection under Ottoman sovereignty.

Sultan Abdülhamid II had approved the law for the constitution of a new cadaster and the implementation of the land tax, though the Istanbul bureaucracy never stopped censuring the provincial administration for the shift from tithe to the tax.¹²⁶ That change was written into the Organic Statute, but the problem, the imperial government insisted, was that the Eastern Rumelian administration lacked a sound agricultural policy and the experience needed to govern all of its subjects with justice.¹²⁷ Specifically, the criticism went, the provincial administration was not competent enough to rejuvenate the agricultural credit-cooperatives, that landmark of Ottoman modernization and reform in the Balkans during the nineteenth century.¹²⁸ Thus Istanbul painted Plovdiv as immature and insufficiently modern, and hence unfit for autonomy. And yet the Ottoman government also vetoed an attempt by the Eastern Rumelian administration to obtain a loan to rebuild agriculture. It feared the money would be used instead to construct a railway line between Yambol and Burgas, a route that would have released Eastern Rumelian goods from Ottoman customs levies.¹²⁹ The Ottoman government also stalled any attempt to reduce the annual tribute Plovdiv was obliged to pay to Istanbul.¹³⁰ Istanbul was equally worried about the financial strain that refugee settlement placed on the imperial treasury, as well as its social costs, though it did provide land to settle Muslims fleeing from the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia.¹³¹ Aleko Bogoridi and Gavril Krüstevich used this practice to argue that Istanbul was coaxing Turkish Muslims to leave.

Even though in these diplomatic exchanges Turkish Muslims appear as an amorphous group, and their exact numbers are rarely given, relative population numbers were of huge importance inside the province as Bulgarian Christians and Turkish Muslims competed for political and social capital. This concern is what the ‘Arab petition suggests. In that particular case the Ottoman

¹²⁵ For the appeal, see BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 2/11, s. 27.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 172.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, s. 40.

¹²⁸ See Roderick Davison’s chapter on Midhat Paşa, in Roderick H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

¹²⁹ Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918* (Boulder: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1983), 92.

¹³⁰ See Ivan Ev. Geshov, “Iztochno-Rumeliiski finansi,” in *Spomeni i Studii* (Sofia: P. Glushkov, 1928), 179–91.

¹³¹ Aydın, *Şarkı Rumeli*, 30–31.

government paid scant attention to the issue, arguing that, “as for the issue of the mixed dwelling of Bulgars and Muslims ... since olden times (*min ’ül-kadim*) the aforementioned mostly lived in mixed villages and therefore this is not a cause for emigration”; the real cause, the government believed, was the failure of provincial authorities to secure order and protection for Muslims.¹³² Yet, at both the local and provincial levels of government, the weakness that the ‘Arab elders felt was inseparable from the majority-minority continuum that fed on population migrations and gave the political edge to Bulgarian Christians; through the democratic political process, they successfully exploited Muslim emigration to make themselves the political and an ethnic majority.

MUSLIM EMIGRATION AND BULGARIAN CHRISTIAN POLITICAL HEGEMONY

In setting up Eastern Rumelia, the Great Powers intended to preserve the heterogeneous character of local society so as to balance their respective roles in the Ottoman lands, and this became entwined with maintaining a balance among the main ethno-religious groups in the province: Bulgarian Christians, Turkish Muslims, and Greek Christians. No single group was supposed to dominate; that is, Bulgarian Christians, and their ostensible protector Russia, could not be allowed to establish national hegemony. The equality among the three groups would hold not only before the law, but also in politics, where it would be guaranteed by power sharing. The Organic Statute mandated that the religious leaders of all communities be part of the provincial assembly to ensure balanced representation.¹³³ The European Commission created the Organic Statute with the familiar attitude toward Ottoman subjects, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, as being insufficiently mature to meet liberal political standards. Bulgarian Christians were reminded that they had to abide by liberal principles—treating Muslims equally and justly—as a qualification for circumscribed self-rule. This was the same standard that Great Britain and France used to determine the fitness of their various colonial subjects for self-rule.¹³⁴

The Organic Statute also introduced to Eastern Rumelia representative government and the framework of a democratic political process, and a result was that political mobilization, coupled with Muslim emigration, undermined the ethno-religious balance desired by the European powers. This power-sharing scheme was also challenged by other political developments.

¹³² BOA, A. MTZ. RŞ 4/3, s. 80.

¹³³ See the abridged text in Evgeni Iochev, *Zakonodatelstvoto v tsarstvo Bŭlgariia (1879–1944 g.): konstitutsiia, zakoni, motivi, dokladi, ukazi, naredbi, naredbi-zakoni* (Sofia: Fondatsiia “Otvoreno Obshtestvo,” 1999).

¹³⁴ See Weitz, “Vienna to the Paris System,” 1339–40.

After the Bosnian and Bulgarian uprisings, the Russo-Ottoman war, and the concomitant loss of Balkan territories, Sultan Abdülhamid II was wary of the Ottoman reform conception of imperial citizenship (Ottomanism), which rested on equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, and that very conception underlay Eastern Rumelia’s political structure. Abdülhamid II’s version of Ottomanism privileged Islam as the focus of loyalty to the state and solidarity among his subjects.¹³⁵

The Ottoman loss of the Balkans, where Christians predominated in many places, was only one factor that led Abdülhamid to reshape Ottomanism. His appeal to Islam as a tool of social cohesion was primarily intended to weaken proto-nationalist mobilization among Muslim Ottomans.¹³⁶ He fashioned an image for himself as the “sultan caliph”—the leader of the Islamic community.¹³⁷ This image had international dimensions, since in territories that were no longer under direct Ottoman control—Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Eastern Rumelia, and Cyprus—Abdülhamid II affirmed his spiritual role and his bid to protect Muslims.¹³⁸ In the context of Eastern Rumelia, this played out in the Ottoman government trying to convince Muslims to stay put so that the sultan could be an advocate for their rights and affirm his position as the imperial sovereign.

Emigration was a serious political concern for both Bulgarian Christians and Turkish Muslims who remained in Eastern Rumelia. Their relative populations, as majority and minority, determined the outcome of elections for the provincial assembly and influenced administrative appointments locally. As the ‘Arab elders feared, fewer Muslims meant a weakened capability to influence events. The Bulgarian Eastern Rumelian politician Mikhail Madzharov characterized the first elections for the province’s legislative assembly, in October 1879, as a struggle among “the Turks, the Greeks, and the Bulgarians.”¹³⁹ He wrote matter-of-factly in his history of Eastern Rumelia that the designation of electoral regions was intended to give electoral advantage to Bulgarians so as to prove to the Berlin signatory powers that Eastern Rumelia was Bulgarian.¹⁴⁰ Having the “right” candidate for the assembly or an administrative position took on great importance because he was supposed to represent and protect the integrity of a specific ethno-religious group throughout the province. Bulgarian Christians won the elections, though the election results were contested, which Madzharov attributed mostly to

¹³⁵ Francois Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II: le sultan calife (1876–1909)* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003), 194–95.

¹³⁶ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 142.

¹³⁷ Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II*, 194–95.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹³⁹ Mikhail, Iv. Madzharov, *Iztochna Rumeliia (Istoricheski Pregled)* (Sofia: Pechtnitsa S. M. Staikov, 1925), 192–93.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 191–92.

“Greek intrigues.”¹⁴¹ That there was an evident Bulgarian majority called for nothing less than complete political autonomy: “[A]ll those¹⁴² who loved freedom and self-rule for the country joined the Bulgarians, because only they advocated those principles. The Turks and the Greeks preferred the restoration of the old regime because only under it could they enjoy primacy (*pürvenstvo*).”¹⁴³

Once they were dominant in the assembly, the Bulgarian Christian delegates also pushed through a method for electing the Permanent Committee that secured their majority on it in perpetuity. This committee was elected at the beginning of each October–December assembly session, and once the assembly was out of session the committee could create normative acts—equivalent in power to laws—and alter the provincial budget.¹⁴⁴ The concentration of such unprecedented powers in the hands of Bulgarian Christians frightened Turkish Muslims and Greek Christians, as Bulgarian contemporaries testify.¹⁴⁵

Madzharov was not alone in linking an ethno-religious population majority to political representation and autonomy—the very minorities that he feared saw that this principle could also be useful to them. Turkish Muslims in the district of Burgas calculated their number to be forty-five thousand, which made them a majority there and therefore, they claimed, entitled them to choose the district’s head from among themselves. Instead, a Bulgarian Christian was appointed, and Muslims protested when the same thing happened in the districts of Ahivali, Aydos, and Karınabad in the Burgas prefecture, even though, in them all, “Muslims” and “Greeks (Rum)” together outnumbered the “Bulgars.”¹⁴⁶

Frustrated with the outcome of assembly elections and the ascendance of Bulgarian Christians, Turkish Muslims tried to create a territorial majority by forming a common political front with Greek Christians. Nothing unlawful had occurred in Burgas, since the district head was not an elected position, but rather was appointed by city councils, with the approval of the provincial governor. That Turkish Muslims sought a coalition with Greek Christians lays bare how ethnicity and religion had become politicized—representation and political clout could be achieved by maximizing the advantages of a specific population, circumscribed by ethnic and religious markers.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 197–98.

¹⁴² Here “those” refers to (in addition to Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox Christians) Catholic Bulgarians, Jews, and Armenians.

¹⁴³ Madzharov, *Iztochna Rumeliia*, 194.

¹⁴⁴ Ivan Ev. Geshov, “Iztochna Rumeliia i izborüt na pürviia postoianen komitet,” in *Spomeni i Studii*, 125–39.

¹⁴⁵ See Mikhail Iv. Madzharov, *Spomeni*, Veselin Andreev, ed. (Sofia: Bülgarski Pisatel, 1968); as well as his *Iztochna Rumeliia*.

¹⁴⁶ BOA, Ş.D. RŞ 1999/5, s. 13.

Representative government by definition encourages the formation of political majorities and minorities, but in Eastern Rumelia these categories could never be divorced from ethnicity and religion. And since Bulgarian-Christians were the largest population in the province, they could not become a political minority.

Eastern Rumelia’s administration encouraged ethno-religious identification and even polarization. Simultaneously with the creation of a new cadaster, a bill was drafted that would reorganize the province’s administrative divisions. The Ottoman government objected that this change threatened to weaken Muslims socially and politically by reordering the administrative hierarchy of villages and districts, and the Ottoman Council of State exercised its sovereign right, enshrined in the Organic Statute, by striking down the bill. Governor Bogoridi claimed that the new law was simply fulfilling the provision of the Organic Statute that mandated a prefecture have no fewer than four and no more than six districts.¹⁴⁷ He argued that the Ottoman government objected only because the bill relied on the census conducted after establishment of the province, which found a clear Bulgarian Christian majority.

The provincial population census from 1880 counted 815,946 inhabitants, of whom 573,560 were marked as Bulgarian and 174,700 as Turks; the rest were 42,654 Greeks, 19,549 Roma, 4,177 Jews, and 1,306 Armenians.¹⁴⁸ The Ottoman government demanded the province use population figures collected before the war, which would have disregarded Muslim emigration and affirmed imperial bureaucratic knowledge regarding Eastern Rumelia’s population.¹⁴⁹ But it was just that war-related Muslim emigration that the bill’s supporters sought to take advantage of, particularly for designating electoral regions. This was very important in 1881, when half of the assembly’s members were up for reelection. The official newspaper *Maritsa* published an appeal from assembly members that urged Bulgarians, particularly those in the religiously mixed electoral regions, not to divide themselves between different candidates lest minorities benefit.¹⁵⁰

Yet ethno-religious group unity was more precarious than Madzharov would have it or the Burgas Muslim petitioners from above acknowledged. Turkish Muslim notables distrusted those from their ranks who were appointed to higher administrative positions. They saw in them seeds of communal disloyalty and, accordingly, appealed to the Ottoman government to “protect” the community. For example, in the late fall of 1879, notables (*vücu*) from six prefectures petitioned the Ottoman government for imperial intercession

¹⁴⁷ BOA, Ş.D. RŞ 1999/26, s. 7; Bogoridi’s claim is on s. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Statelova, *Iztochna Rumeliia*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ BOA, ŞD 1999/26, s. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Madzharov, *Iztochna Rumeliia*, 236–37; *Maritsa* no. 279, 24 Apr. 1881.

to remove the notable Hacı İsmail Ağa from the Court of Appeals in Plovdiv.¹⁵¹ The “Muslim community detested” him, they insisted, for he was not only “ignorant” but also “did not bother to disturb his peace” while “Muslims were being ruined.” He had done nothing to help Hacı Arif Ağa and Hacı Şaban Ağa when the PRA had sentenced them to death.¹⁵² It appears Hacı İsmail Ağa’s offense was his acceptance of the autonomy of Eastern Rumelia by choosing to be a civil servant. This may also have provoked the jealousy of these notables, who may have wished that one of them had been appointed to his position. Their appeal to the Ottoman government to intervene, and their expectation that it would recognize the true “Muslim interests,” show how, as Turkish Muslims strove to define and protect their interests in Eastern Rumelia, they challenged Plovdiv’s claims to autonomy. No less importantly, Hacı İsmail Ağa’s appointment to the Court of Appeals exemplifies how the new political configurations proffered new opportunities for social mobility.

Though Bulgarian Christians were attaining a politically hegemonic position, their unity was precarious as well, and this is why they did not actively try to stop Muslim emigration. In 1881, the year of the new cadaster and the administrative division, a group of liberals from the Principality of Bulgaria emigrated to Eastern Rumelia to protest the suspension of the Bulgarian constitution and heavy-handed Russian influence.¹⁵³ They joined the Liberal Party of Eastern Rumelia and proclaimed one of their main goals to be independent rule for Eastern Rumelia, free from interference by any of the Great Powers, including Russia and the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵⁴ Though this radical stance was initially directed toward the Principality as a rebuke to Prince Battenberg and the Russian government, the Liberal Party increasingly advanced the idea that Eastern Rumelia should have not just administrative autonomy but also political, national autonomy.¹⁵⁵ Unlike the National Party in the province, the Liberal Party would only support a union with the Principality of Bulgaria if the constitution were restored.¹⁵⁶

The intensified Turkish Muslim and Bulgarian Orthodox Christian emigrations, linked as they were to the implementation of the land tax, gave urgency to the issue of “national unity” among Bulgarians, and catapulted the question of unification with the Principality of Bulgaria to the center of politics. In fact, talk about, and hopes and preparations for an eventual union had never stopped in either the principality or the province.¹⁵⁷ A secret

¹⁵¹ BOA, Ş.D. RŞ 1995/5, s. 12-4.

¹⁵² Ibid., s. 2, 11, 12-4.

¹⁵³ Iono Mitev, *Süedinenieto 1885* (Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1985), 140–43.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 90–91.

¹⁵⁶ Mitev, *Süedinenieto*, 140–43. See also, *Narodnii Glas* no. 386, 16 Apr. 1883.

¹⁵⁷ Mitev, *Süedinenieto*, 114–22.

revolutionary committee had been founded in 1880 with funds from the Principality of Bulgaria, meant to maintain popular mobilization in Eastern Rumelia.¹⁵⁸ At the beginning of 1884, though, a window of opportunity for the “national unity” cause was opened when Aleko Bogoridi’s mandate ended. Both Russian diplomats and the National Party sabotaged his reappointment, and so the Ottoman government appointed as his successor Gavril Krüstevich. Allying himself with the National Party, Krüstevich reappointed National Party administrative officials whom Bogoridi had dismissed and called for assembly elections.¹⁵⁹ Though Krüstevich himself was not a unionist, the National Party took the government reins from the Liberal Party by presenting itself as the bearer of “national unification.”¹⁶⁰

The Unionists’ “national unification” actually entailed keeping rural Bulgarian Christians inside Eastern Rumelia, thereby justifying its existence as a “Bulgarian province.” When the government of Dragan Tsankov came to power in the Principality of Bulgaria, it was not keen on unification either, and focused instead on friendly relations with the other states in the Balkans.¹⁶¹ When the Unionists came to power in Eastern Rumelia, secret revolutionary committees consistently undermined the legitimacy of their government by calling it pseudo-unionist, and advocating insubordinate acts like non-payment of taxes.¹⁶² Thus the desperate measures taken in 1884 to stop rural Bulgarian Christians from immigrating to the Principality of Bulgaria were meant not only to help “our sick country,” as one assembly member characterized Eastern Rumelia in an 1883 discussion on emigration,¹⁶³ but also to maintain a Bulgarian Christian majority. Having come to power using the rhetoric of unification, the Unionists in fact continued the politics of majority-minority balance that had characterized Eastern Rumelia. Rural Turkish Muslim emigration, which Bulgarian Christian politicians did so little to prevent, alleviated concerns about a countryside depopulated of Bulgarian Christians, who were supposed to demonstrate the province’s Bulgarian character simply by their presence.

Though the Unionists came to power on a platform of national unity, that theme was soon turned against them. Nationalist-revolutionary groups appropriated the national unity cause and led a coup in early September of 1885, which in effect ended Eastern Rumelia’s existence. Some politicians there were unpleasantly surprised by the coup and saw it as an act of aggression

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 151–53.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.; Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 91.

¹⁶¹ Mitev, *Süedinenieto*, 122–23.

¹⁶² Iliev, *Spomeni*, 258–61. The prefect of Stara Zagora Atanas Iliev related an incident in the district of Chirpan, where in the summer of 1885 guns were stolen from the municipality. He was also horrified that the newspaper *Borba* (“struggle,” “fight”) advocated disobedience.

¹⁶³ *Dnevniitsi ot Petata Redovna Sessiia*, 150.

rather than national union. Particularly so those who lost administrative positions as a result; some even fled to Istanbul as political exiles.¹⁶⁴ The prefect of Stara Zagora, Atanas Iliev, presented the new rule imposed by the Principality of Bulgaria as less civilized, less just, and less competent than Eastern Rumelia's had been.¹⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

In its short existence from 1879 until it was annexed by the Principality of Bulgaria in 1885, Eastern Rumelia functioned as a "quasi sovereign" imperial borderland that embodied an international experiment in pluralistic, representative governance, forged begrudgingly from competing imperial agendas, frustrated nationalist aspirations, and local struggles for power. Eastern Rumelia's and the Ottoman Empire's competing claims to sovereignty emerged from their efforts to manage and explain the causes of Muslim emigration. Muslim emigration was due to failures of postwar repatriation and the shift from the tithe to the land tax. Their departure enabled the transfer of Turkish Muslim properties to Bulgarian Christians, and allowed Bulgarian Christian politicians to exploit the democratic political process by conflating their ethnic majority with a political majority. Turkish Muslims who remained understood that their loss of land and diminishing numbers marginalized them, and they responded by trying to preserve or create a majority at the local level and urging direct Ottoman involvement in the province.

Redrawing the borders of Eastern Rumelia or overtly changing its political status would have upset the balance among the Great Powers. In this context, managing population migration became the only means by which Eastern Rumelia's administration, Turkish Muslims, and the Ottoman government could try to negotiate the existing global arrangements. In this way, the "population politics" that unfolded in Eastern Rumelia differed from the premeditated and organized population transfers that occurred after World War I, in the process of building nations on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. The linkage between Muslim emigration and sovereignty that I have examined here shaped the relations between the Ottoman Empire and its successor states in the Balkans, and subsequently between Turkey and the Balkan states. The "corporatist" model of subjecthood that Eastern Rumelia developed in its short existence fused the traditional religious categorization of Ottoman subjects with an ethnic one, under the umbrella of representative government. The tension between group belonging and individual politicization that first emerged in Eastern Rumelia was carried over to the Principality of Bulgaria, and after 1908 the Kingdom of Bulgaria. This tension became a major

¹⁶⁴ See Madzharov, *Spomeni*, 336–39; Iliev, *Spomeni*, 299–303.

¹⁶⁵ Iliev, *Spomeni*, 299–300.

dilemma for the Ottoman successor states, and was represented as well in the many minority regulations imposed throughout interwar Europe.

Abstract: This article explores the migrations of Turkish Muslims after the 1878 Peace Treaty of Berlin, which severed much of the Balkans from the Ottoman Empire as fully independent nation-states or as nominally dependent polities in the borderlands of the empire. I focus on one such polity—the administratively autonomous Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia—which, in wrestling to reconcile liberal principles of equality and political representation understood in ethno-religious terms, prompted emigration of Turkish Muslims while enabling Bulgarian Christian hegemony. Scholars have studied Muslim emigration from the Balkans as the Ottoman Empire gradually lost hold of the region, emphasizing deleterious effects of nationalism and aggressive state-building in the region. Here I look at migration at empire’s end, and more specifically at the management of migration as constitutive of sovereignty. The Ottoman government asserted its suzerainty by claiming to protect the rights of Eastern Rumelia’s Muslims. The Bulgarian dominated administration of Eastern Rumelia claimed not only administrative but also political autonomy by trying to contain the grievances of Turkish Muslims as a domestic issue abused by ill-meaning outsiders, all the while insisting that the province protected the rights of all subjects. Ultimately, a “corporatist” model of subjecthood obtained in Eastern Rumelia, which fused the traditional religious categorization of Ottoman subjects with an ethnic one under the umbrella of representative government. The tension between group belonging and individual politicization that began unfolding in Eastern Rumelia became a major dilemma of the post-Ottoman world and other post-imperial societies after World War I.