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Reflecting on Armenians in Ottoman Historiography

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Abstract

The Workshop for Armenian/Turkish Scholarship (WATS) convened its first meeting at the University of Chicago in March 2000. Since then, the historical literature on not only the Armenian Genocide, but also Ottoman Armenians more generally, has grown ever more sophisticated. This essay takes stock of the growing visibility of Armenians in Ottoman historiography over the last two decades, and other developments. In particular, it asks why historical scholarship on Armenians has yet to have a transformative effect on the frameworks used to study the Ottoman Empire's history? The essay first identifies a series of obstacles that have prevented Armenian and Ottoman studies scholarship from developing a shared set of questions. It then offers suggestions for more carefully addressing the underlying problematics of empire that can bridge this divide without inadvertently reproducing national or regional paradigms that have long left an imprint on Ottoman historiography.

Keywords: genocide; Armenian; Ottoman Empire; historiography; Turkey

In March 2000, the Workshop for Armenian/Turkish Scholarship (WATS) convened its first meeting at the University of Chicago. That the organizers' original goal – a push for historical literature on the Armenian Genocide to transcend the nationalist narratives that underwrote denialism – seems so quaint in retrospect is testament to the workshop's overwhelming success. Prior to that first meeting nearly twenty-five years ago, genocide denialism was an institutionalized feature of the North American academy. Not only did staunch denialists occupy powerful positions (such as Stanford Shaw at UCLA, Bernard Lewis and Heath Lowry at Princeton, or Halil İnalcık at Chicago, among many others), but the Republic of Turkey was itself also

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directly involved in building the field of Ottoman studies on campuses across the continent and punished those who refused to toe the official line on the genocide.¹ Serious work on the genocide rarely found a place in mainstream venues and the idea that Armenian, Turkish, or other historians might sit down to build a field together was inconceivable. Yet today, nearly twenty-five years later, denial of the Armenian Genocide in the academy is politically incorrect; denialist literature has been relegated to the edges of the profession; and collaboration between scholars of different backgrounds is now commonplace.²

While these developments are obviously welcome, we must ask: how have they impacted Ottoman studies over the last two decades? What obstacles remain to writing more inclusive histories of the Ottoman Empire? This short essay offers some answers. To do so, it will locate WATS and post-WATS scholarship in the telescoping contexts of Ottoman historiography, Middle East studies, and the discipline of history. Though not at first obvious, scholars of the Arab lands, the Balkans and coastal Anatolia, and the Kurdish- and Armenian-dominated parts of eastern Anatolia have in fact engaged with similar sets of problems over the last twenty-odd years. Discerning how they have done so is important not only for understanding why these debates developed, but also for setting new agendas without recentering the nation.

What Has Been Done?

The retreat of the nationalists from scholarly discourse on the fate of Armenians during the First World War coincided with several welcome developments that have helped to generate more critical historical scholarship. Beginning in the early 2000s, several intrepid Turkish and Kurdish scholars turned the nationalists' Rankian slavishness to state archives on its head by publishing critical monographs on the genocide based largely on

¹ The Institute of Turkish Studies (ITS), established by the Republic of Turkey in 1982, played a critical role in enforcing Turkey's official position in the American academy on both Armenian and Kurdish issues. The Turkish state infamously threatened to withdraw its support for ITS in 2006 if its then-director, the late Donald Quataert, did not step down or issue a retraction for characterizing the fate of Armenians as "genocide." ITS also facilitated the establishment of Turkish studies centers and chairs at many universities, including the Atatürk Chair at Princeton. In his capacity as director of ITS in 1985, Heath Lowry pressured many prominent scholars of Middle East, Ottoman, and Turkish studies to sign an advertisement placed in the *New York Times* that denounced Armenian accusations of genocide as lies. Because he refused to sign, the Turkish government revoked Rudi Lindner's (University of Michigan) visas and rescinded his research permissions. Lowry would later be appointed to the Atatürk Chair at Princeton in 1993.

² Examples of such collaborations include Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman Naimark, eds. *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi, eds. *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016); and Ümit Kurt and Ara Sarafian, eds. *Armenians and Kurds in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Fresno, CA: The Press at California State University, Fresno, 2020).

Ottoman state documents.³ This work – including that of WATS itself – was spurred on by a growing interest, among historians across the discipline, in empire as a category for analysis. The “new imperial history” drew attention to how empires managed difference to enforce hierarchy in societies that were multilingual, multi-confessional, and geographically diverse.⁴ It also benefited from the increasing ease of access to archives in Turkey, most notably, but also in Armenia, Europe, North America, and elsewhere. Historians, many of them responding directly to the challenges authored by WATS-affiliated scholars, thus subjected the previously unquestioned authority of Ottoman state archives to even greater scrutiny by turning to sources produced in Armenian and Armeno-Turkish to describe the contingencies of imperial rule. The trend of considering Ottoman archival material and primary sources produced by Armenians has gradually extended to other facets of Ottoman history. As a result, Armenians increasingly appear as active participants in Ottoman imperial politics and society rather than as passive subjects on the receiving end of state policy or, worse, as enemies of the Ottoman state.

Joined by those studying other parts of the empire, including its other marginalized communities, successive cohorts of scholars have developed a rich source base in numerous languages encompassing a wide variety of ego documents, newspapers, letters, and material culture in addition to more traditional archival sources. The “provincial” turn in Ottoman historiography in the late-1990s and early-2000s ushered in new understandings of how imperial power was contested and constituted at the local and regional levels. Studies on eighteenth-century Diyarbekir and Mosul were instrumental in challenging deeply rooted notions of Ottoman decentralization and decline in the early-modern period, rooting the analysis of state power in issues of land tenure

³ Examples would include Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, Translated by Paul Bessemer (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question, 1876-1918* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2010); Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence Against the Armenians (1789-2009)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Göçek's work, though not archivally based, relies overwhelmingly on the memoirs of Ottoman state officials. Deringil meanwhile uses Ottoman archival sources to study the Hamidian massacres. Ottomanist scholars have long bemoaned the fetishization of state archives. For an early statement of the problem, see Halil Berktaş and Suraiya Faroqhi, eds. *New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1992).

⁴ The “new imperial history” refers largely to the body of scholarship that has developed in the Russian/Soviet fields over the last several decades. Two journals, *Ab Imperio* (founded in 1999) and *Kritika: Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History* (in 2000), act as homes for the subfield. On the influence of the new imperial history in Ottoman historiography, see Alan Mikhail and Christine Philliou, “The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54.4 (October 2012): 721-45.

and political economy.⁵ Scholars working on late-Ottoman Transjordan, Palestine, Yemen, North Africa, and the Balkans have confronted nationalist narratives that either ignored or presented oversimplified narratives about the recent Ottoman past. In doing so they have uncovered the vast bevy of local intermediaries through which the modernizing Ottoman state exercised power, revealed dense networks of regional trade and mobility, and have urged a more empirically driven and historically specific understanding of Ottoman imperialism.⁶ Partly inspired by this literature, recent years have witnessed the publication of several monographs and articles on the empire's primarily Armenian and Kurdish provinces. These works build on an already established literature in Armenian studies, and have benefited greatly from the efforts of organizations such as Houshamadyan, Project SAVE, and others dedicated to preserving and making accessible Armenian primary sources. These scholarly works have begun to uncover the social, political, and economic heterogeneity that characterized this region at the end of empire; we can no longer assume, for example, that the experiences of someone in Van can substitute for those of a resident in Antep or Diyarbekir or Mush and vice versa. Other scholars working in this vein have strived to contextualize late imperial violence, at least in part, by reframing the prevailing forms and processes of governance that existed over the course of the long nineteenth century.⁷ Thanks to these efforts, and the expanded source base undergirding them, we now have a historiography better attuned to the experiences of the diverse cast of characters who lived Ottoman lives – not only those marked by confessional, linguistic, gendered, or ethnic differences, but also those hailing from different social strata, professions, or from parts of the

⁵ See Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State* (Boston: Brill, 2004) and Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540-1834* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶ Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995); Dina Rizk Khoury, "The Ottoman Centre versus the Provincial Power-holders: An Analysis of the Historiography," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume Three: The Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 133-56; Ussama Samir Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000); Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Isa Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism* (London: Routledge, 2011). More recent examples include Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016); Nora Elizabeth Barakat, *Bedouin Bureaucrats: Mobility and Property in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2023).

⁷ These works include Richard E. Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire: Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020); David Guțman, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011); Nilay Özok-Gündoğan, *The Kurdish Nobility in the Ottoman Empire: Loyalty, Autonomy and Privilege* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); Zozan Pehlivan, *The Political Ecology of Violence: Peasants and Pastoralists in the Last Ottoman Century* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

empire where previously the print material often used by scholars had been scant. In contrast with the pre-WATS literature, the lived experiences of Ottoman Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Kurds, Assyrians, and others exist not as orthogonal to the empire's history but as constitutive of it.

What Are the Lingering Problems?

Yet we must ask: how much have these studies of the eastern provinces and the increasingly visible Armenian historical actors transformed Ottoman historiography? The welcome developments noted above notwithstanding, the answer so far is very little. While historians now nod to the fact that Armenians not only existed in the empire but also suffered genocide, neither Armenian experiences nor the materials they have left us are employed to challenge long-standing features of the historiography. The fact that the works we might use to teach undergraduate courses on Ottoman history struggle to grapple with genocide or even to locate non-Muslims more generally reflects the place of privilege Sunni Turks and the central state continue to enjoy in historiographical discourse.⁸ Turkish-speaking Sunnis remain, for the most part, the default or normative "Ottoman." In other words, despite doing the hard work that allows us to think more critically about an integrated imperial body politic we have yet to develop an inclusive historiography. The reasons that explain why this is so ultimately signal a movement away from one of the early catalysts for WATS: writing imperial history.

Empires are heterogeneous political formations where regimes of difference are maintained through violence and coercion (but also rewards and incentives), sovereignty is layered and shared, and the benefits of hierarchical relations ultimately flow to the top. The category of empire is therefore a useful concept for understanding not only the violence that periodically pulsed through imperial society, but also the variable and contingent nature of it. For the Ottoman case, historians such as Christine Philliou and Ussama Makdisi have paid attention to different facets of imperial governance to locate non-Muslims in the systems of violence that organized imperial society.⁹ Yet those Turkish historians who broke the wall of silence on the Armenian

⁸ For examples, consider Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Carter Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Douglas A. Howard, *A History of the Ottoman Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Reşat Kasaba, ed. *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume Four: Turkey in the Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Renée Worringer, *A Short History of the Ottoman Empire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), among others. Though not a work of synthesis, Şükrü Hanioglu's 2010 monograph *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press) is arguably the worst mainstream example of employing the Sunni Turk as normative Ottoman approach to history writing. By contrast, Marc Baer's recent survey, *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesars, and Caliphs* (2021), expertly centers gender and non-Muslim subjectivity to recast the empire's history.

⁹ Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*.

Genocide were understandably more concerned with establishing the culpability of the central state and its leadership, many of whom later found themselves at the helm of the new Turkish republic in the early 1920s.¹⁰ Research on the genocide necessarily underscored the agency of the state. The political importance of such a step notwithstanding, it had the unintentional effect of legitimizing the overly positivist historical literature produced by Armenian scholars, largely from diaspora communities in either the North Atlantic or the Middle East, whose analysis reduced imperial political contention and violence to that of a simple perpetrator/victim or oppressor/oppressed binary.¹¹

This binary has proven resilient among many in the Armenian Studies community despite efforts to the contrary. The shameful silence of Ottoman and Middle East studies scholars – including several historians who have advanced their careers by studying dead Armenians – while Azerbaijan (with Turkish and Israeli support) ethnically cleansed the thousands-year-old Armenian community of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh has only reinforced their position. That silence felt especially loud as Turkish politicians publicly cheered on the Azerbaijani offensive (which was accompanied by graphic images and videos of Azeri war crimes on social media), nationalists in Istanbul besieged the Armenian Patriarchate, and Turks and Azeris in Europe took to the streets together to hunt down Armenians, thereby instantiating the timeless perpetrator/victim binary in real time. The resilience of this binary thus continues to interpose obstacles to adequately theorizing Ottoman imperial society, locating a diverse Armenian community within it, or critiquing the provenance of primary source material in any language. It has also facilitated the misappropriation of theoretical or conceptual approaches that we might otherwise employ to realize these goals.

The response from some sectors of the Armenian studies community to the war in Artsakh is a case in point. Since at least the 1980s, denial of Armenian nativeness to Anatolia and the Caucasus has been a hallmark of Azerbaijani nationalism.¹² Most scholars, content enough to point to the overwhelming documentary evidence to the contrary, ignore such baseless arguments. Since 2020, some scholars have responded to Azerbaijani propaganda by attempting to situate Armenian experiences within frameworks of indigeneity

¹⁰ In his earlier work, Akçam linked a reckoning with the Armenian Genocide to human rights and democracy inside Turkey. The title to his first major book on the issue in Turkish, *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu: İttihat ve Terakki'den Kurtuluş Savaşı'na* (Ankara, 1999), makes the connection explicit. For anglophone audiences, his monograph, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London, 2005), 43-44, argues that historians should emphasize the perpetrator's perspective to arrive at more sophisticated understandings of the genocidal process.

¹¹ While our commentary here is directed at diaspora Armenian scholars – whose English- or French-language work best had the chance of engaging with Ottomanist historical literature – similar criticisms may be leveled at those in the (both pre- and post-independence) Armenian academy.

¹² On the “paper wars” between Armenian and Azerbaijani historians in the late Soviet period, see Stephan Astourian, “In Search of Their Forefathers: National Identity and the Historiography and Politics of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ethnogeneses,” in *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, eds. Razmik Panossian and Donald Schwartz (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Russia and East European Studies, 1994), 41-94.

and post-colonialism and to link Armenian dispossession in the region with settler-colonialism as practiced by Americans and Europeans. Keith Watenpaugh, for example, has compared the Native American and Armenian genocides from a human rights studies perspective arguing that “the ideology and practices of modern humanitarianism are a shared element of indigenous genocide and can serve as a vital analytical tool of comparative study.” He also finds these two indigenous genocides comparable because of their “common experiences of genocide denial and cultural erasure.”¹³ In this comparison Watenpaugh treats the Ottoman Empire as a settler-colonial state and insists on the importance of treating the Ottoman Empire as such from a human rights perspective.¹⁴ As innovative as these comparative frameworks are, they risk reproducing the same pitfalls by superimposing the genocide on almost half a millennium of Ottoman history. They also risk missing the specifically *Ottoman* strategies of managing a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, and geographically diverse empire that, particularly in the period preceding the late-nineteenth century, differed drastically from European colonial practices. Such approaches reproduce many of the very problems that WATS moved to resolve more than two decades ago.

What Is to Be Done?

We thus return once more to the primary issue: how do we harness the positive developments of the last fifteen to twenty years to place pressure on the central debates in Ottoman historiography? How do we develop a historical literature in which scholars of Ottoman religion (typically assumed to be Islam), for example, have to grapple with the subjectivities of the empire’s non-Muslims (and Armenians in particular)? And how do we do so without simply putting old wine in new bottles? The first and most obvious need is practical: more serious work on Armenians in the pre-Hamidian period will serve as a bulwark against uncritical abstraction that paints a reductive history of Ottoman imperial governance and Ottoman Armenian subjectivity. It will be incumbent upon those who write that history to attempt answers at several interrelated questions: firstly, what are Ottoman Armenian archives? How do we use Armenian sources in ways that are neither superficial nor otherwise problematic? In other words, how do we contextualize Armenian archives? And how can we bring Ottoman and Armenian archives in conversation with one another?

The aim of scholars using Armenian sources, and sometimes also Ottoman archival material written by Armenians, has been to highlight Armenian voices and agency in the Ottoman Empire. Yet, despite such attempts, recent scholarship relying on Armenian sources continues to highlight the hegemony of the state and the oppression Armenians faced within that system. It thus reimposes the center-periphery paradigm that the field of Ottoman studies has ardently

¹³ Keith David Watenpaugh, “Kill the Armenian/Indian; Save the Turk/Man: Carceral Humanitarianism, the Transfer of Children and a Comparative History of Indigenous Genocide,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 29 (2022): 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

struggled against in the last couple of decades.¹⁵ Such approaches also reinforce a homogenized understanding of Armenians, a perspective that made the Armenian genocide possible.

What has been missing is an examination of how political, social, and economic processes were mediated through the multi-ethnic and multi-religious milieu that Armenians lived in, especially in the provinces. Most narratives of the eastern provinces are focused exclusively on Kurds or Armenians. Despite having lived side by side for hundreds of years, we know very little about the interactions of Kurds and Armenians beyond the bloody conflicts of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In fact, we have learned little about *how* Armenians interacted with anyone beyond state institutions. This problem is particularly pronounced as it relates to studying Armenians in their historic homeland. Here, we can thankfully rely on reports and petitions authored by Armenians themselves to sketch out parameters of political contention. Understanding the cultural fields through which communities interacted with one another, however, is a far more daunting task, as the historiography has not yet advanced to the point where we can properly analyze the evidence buried in our sources. Urban Armenians, particularly the upwardly mobile who lived in the western regions of the Ottoman Empire, have been studied alongside other groups of people. This comparative method has shown how different ethno-religious groups were impacted by the same socio-cultural and political-historical processes, and how they participated in those processes, simultaneously revealing their imperial and ethno-religious subjectivities.¹⁶ These studies, as welcome as they are, still remain rare, and they largely focus on the CUP era. Furthermore, the comparative method continues to treat each ethno-religious group in isolation rather than emphasizing their interactions, which is central when attempting to understand the functioning of the empire at the local and socio-economic level. This is partly a problem of Ottoman studies in general. As Makdisi writes “various episodes of Ottoman and post-Ottoman, Arab and Armenian, Zionist and Kemalist, imperial and local histories. . . have almost always been narrated separately, segregated by fields of scholarship that have developed their own specialized audiences, literatures, and burning questions.”¹⁷

So, in one sense there is a need for deep engagement with other subfields of Ottoman historiography. Organizing more thematic panels and conferences that bring together scholars working on various regions and ethnicities is one way to address this problem, especially if they yield edited volumes and special journal issues that feature specialists working on Ottoman Kurds,

¹⁵ The most recent example of this is Talin Suciyan, *Outcasting Armenians: Tanzimat of the Provinces* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2023).

¹⁶ Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), 2014; Murat Yildiz, “‘What is a Beautiful Boy?’ Late Ottoman ‘Sportsman’ Photographs and New Notions of Male Corporeal Beauty,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 8 (2015): 192-214.

¹⁷ Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 17.

Armenians, and Assyrians. As a critical mass of scholarship on these topics begins to emerge, works of synthesis, which make explicit the connections that exist between individual studies and put the subfields into conversation with other lines of inquiry in Ottoman studies and beyond, will be especially important to broadening the scholarly audiences for these developments.

There is a need for more work on Armenian archives, not just part of the Armenian Patriarchate's archive housed in the Nubar Library in Paris, but also the various archives in Armenia, family and oral history collections spread across the world, and that of the Jerusalem Patriarchate.¹⁸ The number of scholars who are able to work on handwritten Armenian sources are still too few in number in the western academe, even as there has been a growing number of students and scholars of the Ottoman Empire working on such sources. Use of written sources provides greater insight into the diverse experiences of rural and provincial Armenians than can be gleaned from (often overused) print documents. Armenian archives express subjectivities that are not addressed in Ottoman state archives. Armenians who wrote to the state clearly did not represent themselves in the way that they did when writing to Armenian institutions and authors.¹⁹ Yet both Ottoman and Armenian archives can reveal the many iterations of Ottoman Armenian subjectivity, shed light on interactions between the Ottoman state and its subjects (both Armenian and non-Armenian), and help us to reconstruct how state power was mediated through, and constituted by, Armenian subjects and institutions such as the church.

But we should not approach Armenian archives with the assumption that they will necessarily undermine dominant research paradigms that have emerged out of engagement with Ottoman state sources in Ottoman Turkish. After all, Ottoman-era Armenian archives are themselves Ottoman archives produced in the taxonomies, categories, structures, and language of power of the Ottoman Empire. The archives themselves reproduce the separations of ethno-religious groups in accordance with the Ottoman state's categorization of its subjects. Therefore, in line with postcolonial approaches to studying empire, which attends to the episteme of empire, it is necessary to pay attention to how differences were made and how the state and various strata of the empire's society utilized and navigated those differences across space and time.²⁰

¹⁸ There are numerous Ottoman Armenian archives in Yerevan, the most significant being collections at the Charents Literature and Art Museum, the records of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin as well as unpublished memoirs and personal archives of several prominent Ottoman Armenian figures currently housed at the Matenadaran.

¹⁹ For more on how subjectivities find different expression in Armenian versus Ottoman state archives, see Dzovinar Derderian, "Ermenice Bir Arzuhalde Ben Anlatısı," *Toplumsal Tarih Akademi* 1 (2022): 107-11.

²⁰ For a discussion of the frameworks and organization of archives that shape approaches to the Ottoman archive as it relates to Armenians, and of Armenian archives concerning the Ottoman Empire, as well as propositions for a more critical approach to Armenian archives, see chapter 1 in Dzovinar Derderian, "Nation-Making and the Language of Colonialism: Voices from Ottoman Van in Armenian Print Media and Handwritten Petitions, 1820s to 1870s" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2019).

Theorizing Armenian archives is a necessary step for establishing the epistemological positions necessary not only to cast new light on the empire and its history, but to avoid reproducing the problematic approaches that have long plagued Ottoman historiography. Vigilant awareness of the pernicious ways the categorization and terminologies of the Ottoman state pervade documents – even those produced by Armenians or other subject communities – will allow historians to open new lines of inquiry that rescue the modes of interaction not recorded by officials from the condescension of posterity. The logic of empire resolves political and social contradictions; positioning ourselves to understand how it does so will in turn help us to arrive at more sophisticated theorizations of the state while also preempting approaches that retroactively impose the national paradigm on subjects of empire. It is no longer enough to recognize the genocide of Armenians as such or to acknowledge the agency of Armenian historical actors. The challenge now is to show how locating Armenians in Ottoman society compels us to rethink the assumptions underlying the central debates of Ottoman history.

To keep the momentum going, however, it is imperative that we acknowledge the many structural and institutional obstacles that remain. Work in this field, given the requirements of developing a solid theoretical base, learning requisite research languages, and extensive research travel is logistically difficult, time-consuming, and, for some, politically risky. The past two decades have witnessed a marked decline in funding for humanities research in the United States, declining job prospects, and serious threats to tenure and other forms of job security, aided in part by a growing popular and political skepticism about the value of humanities and social sciences research. In Turkey, the past decade has been marred by an all-out attack on academic freedom, resulting in the firing, imprisonment, and/or exile of academics, many of whom are working on the very questions we outline above. The constant threat of further Azerbaijani aggression and related political instability in Armenia, meanwhile, casts uncertainty on the long-term prospects for historical research in that country. All of these concerns together, coupled with the imperative that graduate students present, produce, and publish almost from the outset, are obstacles to widening the scholarly community working on questions related to Ottoman Armenians. We hope the positive advances in the field, spurred on by the contributions of WATS-affiliated scholars, can, moving forward, encourage the allocation of much-needed resources to ensure that they can continue well into the future.

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