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Censorship in Late Ottoman Istanbul: The Ordinary, The Extraordinary, The Visual

Palmira Brummett

ABSTRACT: The Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), was well known for the imposition of various stringent forms of censorship. In that regard he joins a long procession of autocrats dating from ancient times to the present. But censorship ranges from the ordinary to the extraordinary as it is deployed and as it is represented in narrative and visual formats. When I began research for my study of cartoon satire during Abdülhamid II's reign (*Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press*), I was motivated by the disjuncture between a historiographic vision of an era of “freedom,” apparently ushered in by the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution of 1908, and the more cynical picture of “reality” presented in Ottoman cartoons. This article continues that meditation on historiography, censorship, and the cartoon space. It asks how a paradigm focused on censorship might affect the historiographic linkage between empire and republic, suggests a typology of censorship, and employs a select group of late Ottoman cartoons to present the visualization of autocracy and the press law.

Introduction

In 1996 I submitted a paper for a special issue of *Princeton Papers* on Middle Eastern political cartoons.¹ The editor wrote me, noting that one of the (Turkish) scholars evaluating the essay did not like my calling Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) an “autocrat;” he wanted that adjective removed. What could I say...?! I said he was an autocrat whether the reader liked it or not.² The editors left

1. Palmira Brummett, “New Woman and Old Nag: Images of Women in the Ottoman Cartoon Space,” *Princeton Papers: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 6 (1997): 13–58; also published in Fatma Müge Göçek, ed., *Political Cartoons in the Middle East* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener, 1998), 13–58.

2. In fairness, the reviewer may have taken literally the first definition of “autocrat” found in sources like *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1993), 78, “a person (as a monarch) ruling with unlimited authority;” but that entry also notes that “autocrat” is taken from the Greek meaning “ruling by oneself, absolute;”

the designation in. It was a small example of attempted censorship. But that mini-struggle begs the question of the meaning of autocracy (one-man rule) and the role of censorship in certifying the position of autocrats. It points out the fact that media of many sorts are a routine target for censorship, whether that censorship is small, medium, or large. And it raises a question that confronts us all: What is the threshold of tolerance for censorship? I think we only find out the answer to that question when we are forced to do so... when a president tells his followers to punch members of the press in the eye, or charges academics with “terrorism” for signing a petition. Autocracy, then, is central to the question of censorship, and so is a public. Then there is law, and the enforcement of law. All of those elements were embodied in the cartoon space of the late Ottoman Empire. Why cartoons? Cartoons are compelling. They reveal the ways in which the standard narratives of history break down. They are an antidote to silence, and censorship. The cartoon was a cultural space where the voice of the people, or peoples, was supposed to be heard, or seen.

When the organizers at Duke University for the 2017 conference, “*Yasak/ Banned: Political Cartoons from Late Ottoman and Republican Turkey*,” contacted me, I could not help but be intrigued. They wanted me to reflect on my monograph (*Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press*, which analyzed cartoon satire at the end of Abdülhamid II’s reign) in the contexts of censorship and later developments in Turkey. I replied that I could comment on censorship and how my thinking had evolved since the book appeared in 2001, but that I was no expert on modern Turkey. That said, I find the organizers’ project, the question of censorship, fascinating: its forms and mechanisms, its particulars and universals, and its impacts on the human condition. What follows then is not an analysis of the evolution of Ottoman and Turkish press law or a research project on the periodization of autocracy. It is a brief commentary, based on my past work, on certain elements of the relationship between censorship, satire, and autocracy, with some cartoons thrown in.

The research for my book was initiated in the 1980s. I was motivated by the disjuncture between a historiographic vision of an era of “freedom” (*hürriyet*) apparently ushered in by the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution of 1908, and the more cynical picture of “reality” presented in Ottoman cartoons.³ I was working at the University of Chicago Library, accessioning Ottoman

and the number two definition is “one who has undisputed influence or power.” One could argue that no monarch rules with “unlimited authority,” and that power is seldom undisputed. But Abdülhamid was certainly a monarch, ruling as one, whose shutting down of the assembly he had authorized under duress suggests the type of autocracy I have in mind.

3. Palmira Brummett, *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press 1908–1911* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001). Most of the cartoons in this article also appeared in that volume.

gazettes, and looking at cartoons. And somehow the celebratory picture of the revolution did not seem to get at the multiple strains of thought circulating in Istanbul, or at the differences between what the literati and the *hoi polloi* wanted or thought. The cartoon space and the historiography did not match. Since the monograph was published in 2001, as the essays in this issue illustrate, much new and innovative work has been done on the intersections among historiography, censorship, visuality, and the press.⁴ We are thus in a better position now to make comparisons between the satire and autocracy of the Ottoman period and that of the republic, and to contemplate, again, what exactly is the nature of revolution.

The Second Ottoman Constitutional Revolution took place, more or less, on 23 July 1908. Under duress Sultan Abdülhamid II recalled parliament and reinstated the constitution that he had suspended in 1878.⁵ On 27 April 1909, after an aborted counter-revolution, the sultan was deposed by the National Assembly and exiled in Salonica. This nine-month period was a time of radical political restructuring. And it provided an opportunity for the enemies of the empire to advance their objectives.

Like other revolutions, the 1908 Revolution is often cast in terms of demands for freedom. But under that vague umbrella of “freedom” lie many concrete things: the ability to do (and say) certain things and the ability to avoid certain things. That is where censorship comes in. Under Abdülhamid the press was not completely suppressed.⁶ But the Press Law required government authorization for all publications: domestic (regulated by the Ministry of Public Instruction) and foreign (regulated by the Foreign Ministry). A copy of each issue of every publication had to be sent to the Press Bureau (founded in

4. For example, a panel entitled “Regulating Print in the Late Ottoman Empire: A New Look into the Question of Censorship,” at the 2017 Middle East Studies Association Meeting (MESA) in Washington, DC, comprised a range of fascinating presentations encompassing both the serious and the satirical and focusing on the press in the Arab provinces of the late empire. Papers were presented by Till Gallert, Annie Greene, Kathryn Schwartz, and Ekin Enacar.

5. Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, v. 2, *Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997 reprint of 1977 edition), 266–67; Caroline Finkel, *Osman’s Dream: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 509–15.

6. See Selim Deringil, *The Well Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 135–49, on the sultan’s image management, monitoring of the foreign press, and attempts to construct a positive image of his administration. Also see François Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II, Le sultan calife (1876–1909)* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

1862) for approval.⁷ Then the temporary suspension of censorship in July 1908 saw the publication of over 200 new gazettes in Istanbul alone. Those gazettes portrayed the streets, the parliament, cafes, theatres, the home, and other venues as places where people were now free to do the things they had previously not been able to do under Abdülhamid's reign.⁸ But, more importantly, the press portrayed people as free to say what they had been unable to say before. Even though all of the press was by no means revolutionary, the revolution supposedly brought at least a temporary end to citizens being silenced by their government. Freedom, however, is always limited; it has internal and external constraints, even during periods of political upheaval.

By August 1909, a new Press Law had curbed the press and publishers by threatening legal action for "disturbing public order."⁹ The press had apparently been too free. Nonetheless, the notion of disturbing public order, or decency, was construed variously over time, space and situation. It was a category very much subject to differential interpretation and differential

7. On the press laws and censorship, see Server İskit, *Türkiyede Matbuat Rejimleri* (Istanbul: Ülkü Matbaası, 1939), 691–729; Roderic Davison, "How the Ottoman Government Adjusted to a New Institution: The Newspaper Press," in *Turkic Culture: Continuity and Change*, ed. Sabri Akural (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 17–26; Donald Cioeta, "Ottoman Censorship in Lebanon and Syria, 1876–1908," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 2 (1979): 167–86; İpek Yosmaoğlu, "Chasing the Printed Word: Press Censorship in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1913," *Turkish Studies Association Journal* 27, no. 1 (2003): 15–49, esp. 17, 19–20, 24–25, 34–36, 42, for a tracing of the press laws; Ebru Boyar, "The Press and the Palace: The Two-Way Relationship between Abdülhamid II and the Press, 1876–1908," *Bulletin of the School of African and Asian Studies* 69, no. 3 (2006): 417–32, esp. 421–23; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 125–28, 165–66; Till Grallert, "Authoritarianism versus liberty of speech? The theory and practices of press censorship in Bilād al-Shām (1875–1914)," MESA, Washington, DC, Nov. 2017 presentation, online: DOI 10.5281/zenodo.1039570, on the vagaries of press law enforcement.

8. Parliament was reopened on 17 December 1908. See Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:278.

9. *Ibid.*, 2:286. The charge of "disturbing public order" was also invoked in late Ottoman Syria; see Grallert, "Authoritarianism versus liberty of speech?" 6–8, 15–25. Grallert explores requests for permits for publication and for republication of periodicals that had been suspended in the years 1909–13, and examines permissible and non-permissible content. Also see Yasemin Gencer, "Pushing Out Islam: Cartoons of the Reform Period in Turkey (1923–1928)," in *Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Christiane Gruber and Sune Haugbolle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 191. Erol Baykal's "The Ottoman Press 1908–1923" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2013), takes an in-depth look at press permits and censorship, and problematizes the question of enforcement of the Press Law. His monograph, *The Ottoman Press, 1908–1923*, now under review for publication, attempts to quantify censorship during this period and provides a full transcript of the Press Law in Turkish.

enforcement.¹⁰ For example, İpek Yosmaoğlu notes that a 10 November 1909 memorandum sent from “the undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior to the *Şura-yı Devlet* (State Council) suggests that state officials themselves were among the readers of a newspaper which was supposed to be treated as a time-bomb by the customs officials at the borders, namely *Serbesti* (Liberty).”¹¹ Censorship was reactive, but it was also proactive. Melis Hafez points out that in September 1909 a “circular” was sent to government bureaus all over the empire telling government officials not to talk to journalists, publish editorials, or attend demonstrations.¹² This type of censorship was ordinary; but the circular illustrates the perceived need to reinforce the government’s authority to censor its officials. It highlights the fact that the press was considered a threat both before and after the 1908 Revolution.¹³ That revolution gave the press a brief and relatively unfettered opportunity to critique both government and censor. We do not always know how the public received either the censorship or the critique of censorship in the satirical (or serious) press; but we do know that the interconnections among government, censor, public, and law were common tropes in the cartoon space.¹⁴

10. Cioeta, “Ottoman Censorship in Lebanon,” 172–73, 178, highlights the differential or arbitrary enforcement of the press laws in Lebanon as well as problems deriving from the vague language of the laws. Annie Greene, “‘The suspension of print is the hand of tyranny’: Freedom of the press in Ottoman Iraq?,” MESA, Washington, DC, Nov. 2017 presentation, for example, notes how local, provincial officials resisted dicta from officials of the Porte in this regard.

11. Yosmaoğlu, “Chasing the Printed Word,” 40–41.

12. Melis Hafez, *The Lazy, the Dandy, and the Industrious: The Culture of Productivity in Late Ottoman Society*, 144, book manuscript currently in preparation. Hafez’s interesting work uses morality texts, gazettes, and employment records to illustrate how ideas of industry and laziness were deployed and evolved in the late Ottoman Empire. Also see, Yosmaoğlu, “Chasing the Printed Word,” 35 on restrictions placed on government officials expressing their opinions in 1912.

13. Fatma Müge Göçek, *The Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 128–30, notes the Ottoman assembly’s debate over censorship and whether the newspaper press constituted a threat, “damaging to the legitimacy of the current Ottoman rule” early in Abdülhamid’s reign. Her analysis focuses on the expansion of Ottoman civil society in the nineteenth century and the tension between that civil society and government censorship.

14. As is the case now, beyond punitive governmental actions, the press could be the target of violence coming from those who opposed its various messages. Some press offices were sacked during the 1909 counter-revolution; and the editor Hasan Fehmi and writer Ahmet Samim were assassinated in 1909 and 1910 respectively. See Brummett, *Image and Imperialism*, 9; Yosmaoğlu, “Chasing the Printed Word,” 46, on the assassinations of Fehmi and Samim and the CUP intimidation of journalists. On a more general level, various members of the public might simply find editorials unsettling, or cartoons distasteful and scandalous.

Cartoons, Periodization, and Typologies of Censorship

In any case, the sultan, as autocrat (and embodiment of government) was a primary target in both the serious and satirical press. A major focus in the press was Abdülhamid as representing tyranny and “old” style government. One day after he was deposed, for example, a cartoon appeared in the satirical gazette *Davul* (Drum). It showed a portrait of the sultan, posed before a blood-stained curtain decked with skulls; and its first caption played on the epithets *Hünkâr* (chief) and *Hunkâr* (doer of bloody deeds). Like many cartoons, however, this one could send a powerful message without benefit of caption. It was not a flattering portrait. The second caption echoed the paradox of the first and suggested an audience familiar with foreign literature. It asked what was the role of the figure posed here, “reader of the novel *The Red Mill Murders*, or its protagonist,” villain or hero (Figure 1).¹⁵ That reference was to the popular French serial, *Le Moulin Rouge* (1866), by Xavier de Montepin. The suggestion here is that the sultan was implicated, suspicious if not clearly guilty. Satire, of course, plays upon the dramatic.¹⁶ Some cartoonists expressed sympathy for the end of an era and the pathos of a deposed sultan. Other cartoonists were much more direct, depicting Abdülhamid as oppressor, executioner, and silencer of speech. He was, after all, the ultimate source of censorship, including that of the press. As other contributors to the *Yasak* Symposium and to this volume have pointed out, the image of the sultan was varied and evolving.¹⁷

The “public” was both audience for governmental acts of tyranny and embodiment of the voice of the people longing to be heard after long years of suppression. The public took various forms in the satirical press (man on

15. *Davul* 21:8, 15 Nisan 1325/28 April 1909. “Kırmızı değirmen cinayetleri” romanı kari veya kahramanlarından? The message was reinforced because *Davul* splashed the curtain in this cartoon with (blood) red ink, rather than using the black and white format of most of its cartoons. For a catalog of the Ottoman satirical press, its organs and publishers, see Turgut Çeviker, *Gelişim Sürecinde Türk Karikatürü*, 3 vols. (Istanbul: Adam Yayınları, 1986–91).

16. As Ebru Boyar, “Press and Palace,” 419, has pointed out, Hamidian censorship was not a “fixed and rigid affair.” Neither were the representations of the sultan and his role in oppressing the Ottoman people.

17. Also see Boyar, “Press and Palace,” 423–24, on the vexed relationship between Abdülhamid and the press. Arlen Wiesenthal, “Our heroic emperors: Heroism, world order, and the social history of monarchy in the late Ottoman Empire, 1900–1908,” MESA, Washington, DC, Nov. 2017 presentation, is producing an evocative study of the ways in which the public images of Abdülhamid II and his successor Mehmet Reşat were constructed and deployed. He makes the important point that Mehmet V Reşat (r. 1909–18) was not simply a placeholder between empire and republic. He served as a public symbol of Ottoman glory. Wiesenthal also suggests how genres of heroism extended into the Ottoman press of the twentieth century (e.g., in *Harb Mecmuası*).



Figure 1: Abdülhamid, the Former Hünkâr and Hunkâr: *Davul* 21:8, 15 Nisan 1325/28 April 1909.

the street, old nag, vagabond, Karagöz).¹⁸ But one such image was that of the drummer, a noisemaker who demanded attention. Thus the first page of issues of *Davul* showed the *davulcu*, drummer, gathering an audience and passing on his “wisdom” or warning (Figure 2). He was a highly recognizable messenger, mascot of the press and its efforts to stir things up. In the context of the Constitutional Revolution he was a symbol of the public’s expectations for a freer press, released from the constraints of tyranny.

But the fact is that the audience poised to hear the message of the press, and the writers and cartoonists that produced the new Ottoman gazettes, were not at all certain about exactly how free the press would (or should) be. Revolution brought change but it also brought terrible uncertainty. There was the expectation that the old, oppressive Press Law was now null and void. But in the years immediately after the revolution several new press laws would be imposed on publishers and readers.¹⁹ The satirical press portrayed the law as a potential source of both censorship and liberation. After July 1908 writers and publishers watched to see how the law might change or what role it would play. The new government(s) wanted to advocate freedom while maintaining control, a complicated task that required keeping the press more or less in check. So once the new constitutional regime was established its deputies began debating what form a press law should take.²⁰ A cartoon in the bilingual gazette *Kalem* expressed the frustration deriving from that governmental balancing act as the new regime in early 1909 tried to define the boundaries of censorship. It shows “Censorship” as a vampire (*cadi*) emerging from its coffin (Figure 3). Various Ottoman figures, presumably journalists, try to hold it down while the Press

18. Brummett, *Image and Imperialism*, 51–71; idem, “New Woman, Old Nag,” on the female voice of the public.

19. Yosmaoğlu, “Chasing the Printed Word,” 21, 26–27, argues that Abdülhamid’s control over the press was tightened gradually, aided by journalists who cooperated with the censorship system to ensure their publications’ survival. She then suggests that freedom of the press after the revolution was “virtually unchecked until the incident of March 31 (April 13) . . .” (32), a notion that the cartoon space suggests was already only partly true early in that year. Her main point, however, is that CUP rule “attempted to normalize the process of social and political control,” . . . by means of the “centralization of the control of press affairs under the Ministry of Interior and the enactment of the first body of legislation concerning the press in 1909” (34).

20. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks 1902–1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 279–88, esp. 284, 288, illustrates the ways in which the CUP consolidated its power from insisting on modifications to the Press Law under the new parliament to claiming to take on the role of “Ottoman Public Opinion,” in 1909. Also see Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 93–100. Baykal, “The Ottoman Press, 1908–1923,” mss. 94–96, provides a good tracing of the history of the press law, arguing that the July 1909 Press Law was “liberal.”



Figure 2: The Drummer and his Audience. *Davul* 13:1, 14 Kanun-ı sani 1324/27 Jan. 1909.

Law (*Matbuat Kanunu*) serves as a lever to pry the coffin lid loose.²¹ Inscribed on the tomb in French is “*Ci Git Dame Censure*” (Here lies Madam Censor).

This cartoon, of course, has a backstory, a complicated set of layers of narration and context. The struggle either to contain or reanimate censorship is clear, as is the role of the Press Law in advancing the cause of censorship. But the specific situation is less clear. The Ottoman caption addresses the statesman Hakkı Bey, ambassador to Rome. I do not know what specific position on the new Press Law Hakkı Bey had taken; perhaps he had recently made a statement on the law.²² The text surrounding the cartoon frame, as is the case more often than not, is unhelpful. Regardless of Hakkı Bey’s specific stance, however, the message that revolution had not brought an end to government censorship is clear. The “vampire” was not so readily contained.

If we foreground censorship as a primary concern, our historiographic paradigm suggesting a radical break between empire and republic no longer seems so compelling. I have argued that 1908 brought a great liberation of tongues and of pens in Istanbul. So many things that were not previously published found their way into print. But the period in which satire thrived and censorship languished was relatively short lived. If, then, the censorship of Abdülhamid was more oppressive or more effective than the censorship of the republic (or that of today), we have to show exactly how and exactly where. We have to think about what motivates censorship, and for whom. And we have to look at the mechanisms, media, and personnel of censorship to trace how they have evolved and expanded or contracted. There may well be a demonstrable ebb and flow to the application of censorship over time.

Various approaches can be applied to such a “measurement” of censorship, which can be typed into its multiple kinds, sources, administrations, targets, principles, acts of enforcement, and responses. Müge Göçek, for example, has used the promulgation of sultanic censorship laws in the nineteenth century

21. *Kalem* 24:8, 29 Kanun-ı sani 1324/11 Feb. 1909. I am using *Kalem* (published Sept. 1908–June 1911) and *Davul* (published Oct. 1908–May 1909) here, both because they comprise many compelling cartoons but also because I have them readily to hand after the production of my book. The Istanbul Greek gazette *Embros*, on 21/3/1909 published a similar resurrection of the censor cartoon; see Efthymia Canner, “La presse satirique greque d’Istanbul au lendemain de la révolution jeune-turque: le journal *Embros*,” *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, special issue on *L’humour en Orient*, ed. Irène Fenoglio and François Georgeon, 77–78 (1996): 115.

22. Or, perhaps, the cartoon served as a tribute to Hakkı Bey. İbrahim Hakkı Bey (later Pasha), 1863–1918, had been minister of education, served as ambassador to Rome, and would later lead the government as grand vizier (1910–11) after Hilmi Pasha was deposed at the end of 1909. See Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:290. Images of Hakkı Pasha as grand vizier were common in both the satirical and serious Ottoman press, for example: *Nevsal-ı Osmani*, sene 3, 1327 mali/1911–12, which included photographs of government officials.

روما سفير کبریٰ سیلانی :

A. S. E. Hakky Bey, Ambassadeur Ottoman à Rome.



جانی چیتورد

Resurrection.

Figure 3: The Resurrection of the Vampire, Censorship, Kalem 24:8, 29 Kanun-ı sani 1324/11 Feb. 1909.

to illustrate the “increasing polarization between the Ottoman state and the expanding civil society,” of the empire.²³ Censorship in this model is a measure of relative power. In a related but more focused paradigm, Donald Cioeta, for the period 1876–1908, examines the nature of the press regime which, he writes, developed in three stages. First and second were official newspapers and “privately owned but officially subsidized” newspapers, for both of which self-censorship was applied. Third was financially independent newspapers which “forced the state to decide between reliance on social consensus and enactment of press censorship laws to control the contents of the periodical press,” with the Ottoman state choosing censorship.²⁴ I would agree generally with this staging but would add that financially independent newspapers also routinely engaged in self-censorship, partially for survival. Cioeta highlights publishers’ responses to warnings and suspensions as a measure of the effectiveness of censorship, tracing the extent of government follow-up and the degree of difficulty involved in enforcing censorship rules.²⁵ That issue of enforcement is critical. A press law in and of itself does not ensure censorship; it is a lever that allows the censor to do his (or her) task, as the *Kalem* coffin cartoon demonstrates.

Another typology appears in an article on Ottoman censorship by İpek Yosmaoğlu, who treats censorship as “a ‘process’—an indicator of the current political climate and state modernization. . . .”²⁶ She looks at censorship as exercised whereas Cioeta focuses on censorship as experienced, and I have focused on censorship as critiqued in visuals. Yosmaoğlu sees a clear periodization from empire to republic, arguing that under the CUP (Committee for Union and Progress):

...censorship gradually lost its paternalistic character and was transformed into a more rational and impersonal mechanism under the centralized control of the state. The most significant manifestations of this transformation were the enactment of the Press Regulation [of 1909] and the growing authority of the Ministry of the Interior in overseeing the censorship process—an unprecedented crystallization of power in a single state bureau.²⁷

23. Göçek, *The Rise of the Bourgeoisie*, 128.

24. Cioeta, “Ottoman Censorship in Lebanon,” 167. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this reference. Cioeta begins his article with this: “Since the first printed books and newspapers, official censorship has been the norm, not the exception.” I agree and suggest that assertion leads us naturally to a distinction between ordinary and extraordinary censorship.

25. *Ibid.*, 179–80.

26. Yosmaoğlu, “Chasing the Printed Word,” 16.

27. *Ibid.*, 48.

Her analysis highlights bureaucratic agency and also law by making a distinction between impositions of pre-publication and post-publication censorship.²⁸ For Yosmaoğlu, the singular transformation of censorship occurs as Young Turk ideology seeks to replace the “loyal subject” with the “loyal citizen,” and shift allegiance from the person of the sultan to the “system.”²⁹ How determined or successful that shift was, of course, is subject to debate. We might ask, for example, whether citizen loyalty can still be devoted to the person of the ruler, certainly a relevant question now. In any case, the analytical paradigms just delineated can be expanded beyond the time frames employed and used, in whole or in part, to assess censorship as applied from the late Ottoman Empire to the present day.

Another approach is to think in terms of periods of extraordinary censorship interspersed between periods of ordinary censorship without necessarily assuming a break between sultanic or republican models.³⁰ This approach can foreground autocracy and extend the period of analysis forward or backward in time. For example, a Human Rights Watch 2016 examination of the Turkish government’s suppression of expression notes five components of the current “crackdown” on “independent domestic media: 1) the use of the criminal justice system to prosecute and jail journalists for terrorism, insulting public officials, or crimes against the state; 2) threats and physical attacks on journalists and media organizations; 3) governmental interference with editorial independence and pressure on media organizations to fire critical journalists; 4) the government’s takeover or closure of private media companies; and 5) restrictions on distribution, fines, and closure of critical television stations.”³¹ Although the mention of “television” clearly dates this set of categories, they are otherwise roughly applicable to earlier periods, and comparable

28. See Davison, “How the Ottoman Government Adjusted,” 22, for a letter of 1866 from the Foreign Minister Ali Pasha to Safvet Pasha, Ottoman ambassador to Paris, on the efficacy of pre-publication censorship.

29. *Ibid.*, 34.

30. Brummett, *Image and Imperialism*, 318. During the Second Constitutional Revolutionary period, Ottoman satirists resisted censorship; but they did not seem to be so concerned with the struggle over ownership of “nationalism” that we see today. Rather, they “embodied the ‘nation’ as empire, in order to preserve it and to assert its integrity against the foreign powers and internal factionalism that threatened it.” Also see 320, 325–27 on external threats, and 328 on integrative and subversive tendencies.

31. Human Rights Watch, *Silencing Turkey’s Media: the Government’s Deepening Assault on Critical Journalism*, (Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 2016), back cover. This model also raises the question of what exactly is the distinction between “disturbing public order” and “terrorism,” and when one reaches the level of the other.

to the suppression of the press under Abdülhamid and the CUP.³² They could be further refined by looking at disjunctures between enforcement and law and variations in the application of censorship to different regions or segments of the population. That is, for any period of time, one might ask which types of censorship were encoded in law, which were culturally constructed whether encoded in law or not, which were enacted or enforced, either routinely or selectively, against whom, and what was public reaction in each case?

One thing that radically differentiates the censorship of today from that of the Ottoman era is the expansive media through which censorship functions in ways that can be much more immediate and much more pervasive than the more personal, or (often) short-range, censorship of Abdülhamid's time. In both cases, however, the threat of censorship can be just as effective as the exercise of censorship. The types of media employed help determine what knowledge the censors have of "violations" and also what modes of punishment agents of enforcement can realistically employ against those who violate the rules. Modern media spreads the word of freedom and resistance, it also puts the faces and words of actors against censorship right before the eyes (and the weapons) of the censors.³³

I begin with a distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary as censorship is deployed and as it is represented in narrative and visual formats. I do this because people are accustomed to censorship. And I speak here particularly of government censorship rather than community, institutional, or family censorship. There is always a subtle, or not so subtle, threat that a person may be taken to task for criticism of the government, but the expectation of punishment varies. There are always the rhetorics of security vs. external and internal threats that governments can deploy to make people keep silent. Inertia is a powerful force in history, and I would argue that most people do not react directly against ordinary censorship. Instead, we hear and see censorship best, historically, when it becomes extraordinary, when sweeping new regulations are imposed, when many people are arrested, when the government invades the domestic sphere in uncustomary ways. Censorship, after all,

32. On the CUP, Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti, see Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*; idem, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

33. Human Rights Watch, *Silencing Turkey's Media*, 12; Bilge Yesil, *Media in New Turkey: The Origins of an Authoritarian Neoliberal State* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 1–13, 17–50, 99–100, 103–07, 118–24, provides useful context for the evolution of media and the state in Turkey. She notes (120–25) the legal controls of the AKP and the "protection" of Turkish morality by the banning of certain words in domain names on the web. Dilek Kurban and Ceren Sözeri, *Caught in the Wheels of Power: The Political, Legal and Economic Constraints on Independent Media and Freedom of the Press in Turkey* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2012), 30–35, note context, laws, and the issues of political pressure, patronage, and self-censorship (49–52).

takes place in both public and private spaces. The cartoons of the late Ottoman period proposed that revolutionary “freedom” would (and sometimes should) apply to the domestic as well as the more public sphere. That proposal was sometimes serious and sometimes humorous. In either case, the satirical press suggested that the “public” was accustomed to censorship and not so accustomed to “freedom.”

What exactly constituted extraordinary censorship was not necessarily addressed in the Ottoman cartoons I studied, which tended toward a more simple juxtaposition of “freedom” (*hürriyet*) and “tyranny” (*istibdad*) without promoting open revolt. Charles Press in his classic, *The Political Cartoon*, has argued for what he calls the “cherished community.”³⁴ If a cartoon can depict a vision of what people consider their cherished community, especially if that community is under threat, its rhetoric can be especially effective. Then people may be provoked to act. Similarly, if a government can show the public that its cherished community is threatened, then it is much easier for that government to behave in a tyrannical fashion, and effectively to deploy various forms of censorship to ward off “evil,” and to provide “security,” so called. In the Ottoman case the government (both before and after Abdülhamid) used the two threats of foreign intervention and moral depravity to legitimize censorship.³⁵ Those defenses of the censor’s art relied on several notions: an ignorant public had to be protected from that which it did not understand; modern influences, often foreign, had compromised the moral fabric of the empire making certain elements of society weak and suspect; and, perhaps most threatening of all, political forces within and without (e.g., Russia, Austria, Britain, and France) were poised to undermine Ottoman sovereignty and dismantle the empire, thus putting the cherished community in danger and requiring unquestioning loyalty and obedience to the sultan, Porte, or *meclis* (parliament) from the citizenry.³⁶ As the papers from the *Yasak* Symposium demonstrate, xenophobia,

34. Charles Press, *The Political Cartoon* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), 1–70.

35. See Palmira Brummett, “Dogs, Women, Cholera, and Other Menaces in the Streets: Cartoon Satire in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908–1911,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 4 (1995): 433–60; idem, *Image and Imperialism*, 247–53, on women’s “place” and the “balance of chastity”; and Grallert, “Authoritarianism versus liberty of speech?” 6, 8, 20. The threat from foreign nations came in the form of military action, economic intervention, and the circulation of forbidden print within the empire. Boyar, “Press and Palace,” 423, notes the attention paid during the Hamidian regime to restricted print materials produced inside and outside the empire: “Over a five-year period, from 1306–11/1890–1895, the government seized 1,264 detrimental books and documents which filled 32 sacks.” A report from 1902 noted the destruction of 165 sacks of “detrimental material.”

36. The Balkan Wars and World War I would bring a ramping up of the critique of Ottoman enemies as a primary source of various types of suffering.

protection of “national” or cultural honor, and defense of the territory of the homeland against foreign aggression have been used systematically as rationales for government censorship. So too was protection of the autocrat from insults. If the ruler was the symbol of “national” integrity, and loyalty was required to protect the empire from its enemies, then the ruler should not be insulted in the press.

Censorship was one element of a broader universe of oppression identified in the late Ottoman cartoon space which targeted autocracy as the major source of oppression. Autocracy was first of all that of the sultan and his regime, but also that exercised by other rulers, and finally that exercised by the parliamentary regime. Oppression, in the cartoon space, meant violence against subjects (or citizens). Thus *Kalem* depicted the deposed Abdülhamid as tyranny personified, a bloody sword at his feet, gazing out the window towards a hangman’s noose (Figure 4).³⁷

Other autocrats received similar treatment or worse. Thus *Kalem* showed the shah of Iran and the czar of Russia not only as autocrats but as bloody brutes who slaughtered their own people with impunity. One cartoon satirized Muhammad Ali Shah who sent his soldiers against the Iranian *meclis* and shut it down, thus sending a message that there was no room for freedom or parliamentary rule in Iran. In this frame, which was printed in color to enhance its drama, the shah slices up the assembly like a block of tobacco (Figure 5).³⁸

So too, Nicolas II (r. 1894–1917) of Russia was depicted with his boots crushing the figures of his oppressed people, blood dripping from his fingers. He gazes down at a small figure holding a sign that says: “National assembly, progress, peace,” all factors sought by the Young Turks, and all anathema in the cartoon space to a “real” autocrat (Figure 6).³⁹ Progress, for many of the publishers and journalists of the Ottoman revolutionary period, meant freedom from oppression, including freedom of the press from censorship.

37. *Kalem* 34:8, 16 Nisan 1325/29 April 1909.

38. *Kalem* 41:1, 11 Haziran 1325/24 June 1909. The caption in verse reads, “A gun fired, the smoke of the nation ascended to the heavens,” while the French caption has the shah cutting a bit more tobacco for his nargile. Also see Hasan Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 145. This and other cartoons of Muhammad Ali Shah were meant to highlight the civilizational superiority of the constitutional Ottomans and to evoke sympathy for the Iranian people.

39. *Kalem* 8:1, 9 Teşrin-i evvel 1324/22 Oct. 1908. This cartoon plays on the word *naçar* (helpless) and *na-çar* (not a czar), thus, another “impotent potentate poseur.” The small figure is probably Ferdinand of Bulgaria who was satirized routinely as a sort of fake European king.



Figure 4: Abdülhamid, tyranny personified (*istibdad müşakhas*). *Kalem* 34:8, 16 Nisan 1325/29 April 1909.



Figure 5: Muhammad Ali Shah (r. Jan. 1907–July 1909), the shah's tobacco. *Kalem* 41:1, 11
Haziran 1325/24 June 1909.



Figure 6: Nicolas II. Another czar not a czar. *Kalem* 8:1, 9 Teshrin-i ewel 1324/22 Oct. 1908.

There is something timeless about these cartoons, taking on the ruler who fails in his obligation to deliver justice and freedom.⁴⁰ I did a brief, unscientific, visual survey on the web using the key words “censorship,” “image,” and “Turkey” and found that many of the same symbols deployed in the Ottoman press are also deployed in contemporary critiques of the head of state and his government.⁴¹ I did not find the bloodied hands of the autocrat. Rather I found images of a gagged press, a broken pen, closed down newspapers, prison bars, and people and press breaking the chains of tyranny.⁴² The Ottoman satirical press also included imagery of the censor wielding a scissors (no longer apt for modern censorship techniques), and of funerals and burial for the gazettes that were closed down.⁴³ But, as noted earlier, a primary concern was the uncomfortable relationship between the press, the press law (which symbolized the ruler’s power to silence), and the censor. *Kalem* expressed that discomfort in a cartoon from February of 1909, again targeting the hammering out of new press laws. It shows the pen of the “press of tomorrow” still gripped by the hand of the Press Law emerging from the lock box of the censor (Figure 7).⁴⁴

Ideally the revolution had freed the pens of journalists all over the empire. But, in reality, censorship was difficult to eliminate and easy to legitimize. Censorship was a tool of government that had been deployed, at least nominally, to ensure or secure order. Article 113 of the 1876 Constitution had given the sultan the power to “suspend all the guarantees of the Constitution whenever he considered it necessary, and to banish anyone whom he felt dangerous

40. That theme of kingly justice and injustice is of course a standard of Middle Eastern and other literatures whether one reads the *Shahname*, Nasreddin Hoca, the *Arabian Nights*, the *Ramayana*, or Machiavelli’s *The Prince*.

41. For President Erdoğan as a sultan with turban (and comparisons to Abdülhamid) see the symposium catalog, *Yasak/Banned: Political Cartoons from Late Ottoman and Republican Turkey*, Duke University Library Collections, Erdağ Göknaç, Didem Havlioğlu, and Sean Swanick, curators (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 9–11. Also see Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

42. The pen as a symbol of the people’s voice has not yet disappeared. One representative image, a photograph from *Sputnik International*, Amnesty, accessed 17 Oct. 2017, shows a group of male demonstrators carrying a Turkish flag and holding up a captionless sign with two fists, one gripping a pen, that have broken the chain that bound them. A similar photo was published in the Huffington Post, n.d., see https://www.google.com/search?q=censorship+turkey+images&num=100&rlz=1C1RNOE_enUS592US665&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBtuGj_svYAhWDRN8KHXRQB2MQ7AkIQa&biw=1920&bih=908, accessed 9 Jan. 2018. The images here are generally undated, reflecting the lack of specificity of the web.

43. Also see Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature*, 136–75; Shiva Balaghi, “Political Culture in the Iranian Revolution of 1906 and the Cartoons of *Kashkul*,” in *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*, 59–81, for visual and narrative satire in Iran during the same period.

44. *Kalem* 25:4, 5 Şubat 1324/18 Feb. 1909.

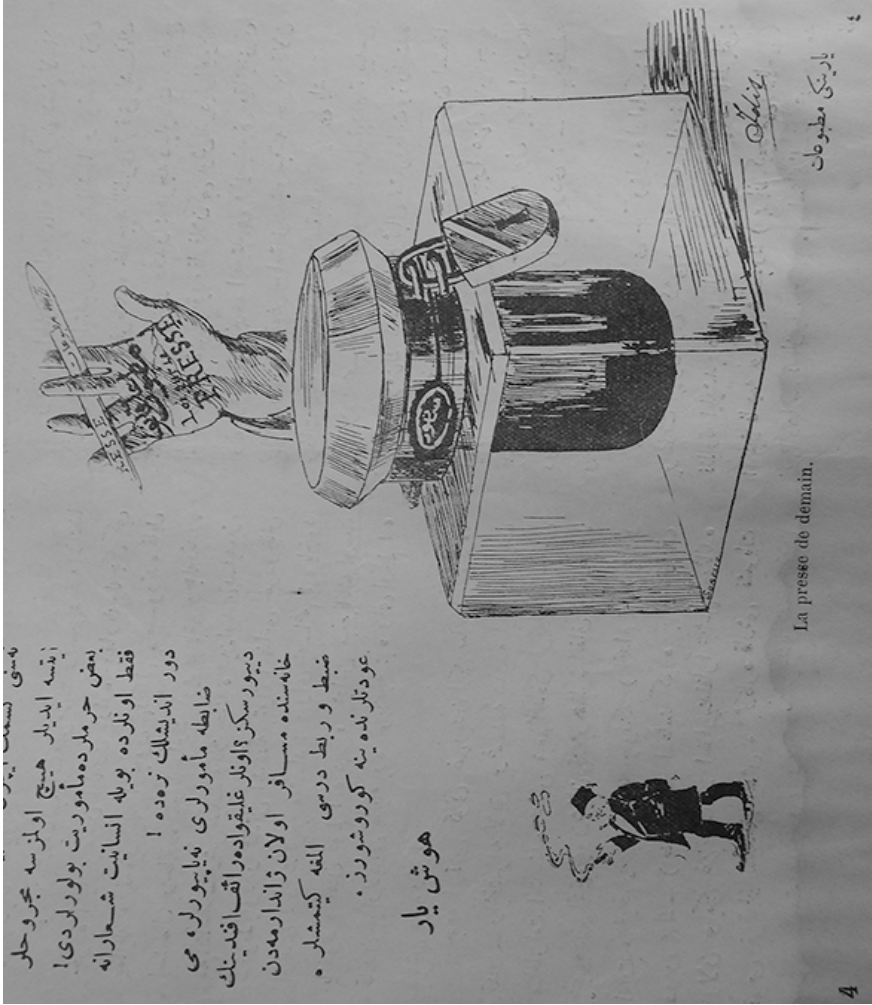


Figure 7: The Press of Tomorrow. Kalem 25:4, 5 Şubat 1324/18 Feb. 1909.

to himself and the state.”⁴⁵ After Abdülhamid was deposed, the new regimes that ruled the empire until World War I struggled with determining what constituted “danger” to the state and what level of relief for the press was practical or even desirable.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Ottoman gazettes of the revolutionary period tended to satirize autocrats as oppressors more systematically than they satirized censorship, but the link between the two is inevitable. The satirical press routinely portrayed the kings and the era of autocracy as obsolete, fading into the past. And the assumption was that with the removal of autocracy would come an era of more “freedom” including the freedom to speak, to demonstrate, and to print. The first issue of the journal *Alem* (World), in February 1909, showed Ottoman gazettes pasted into a paper lion, the “protector of freedom,” who was attacking a volume labelled “new publishing regulations.”⁴⁷ This cartoon suggested that there was still much work to be done. It reinforced the notion that the new constitutional regime could not be counted upon to guarantee freedom of the press. Freedom from the abuses of a past era was a hope rather than a reality.

Nonetheless, such hopes loomed large in the cartoon space. Shortly after the constitution had been forced on Abdülhamid, a cartoon published in *Kalem* on 3 September 1908, celebrated revolutionary possibilities by consigning the old autocrats to the museum (Figure 8).⁴⁸

The museum, of course, is a cultural space, like the press, where the past is carefully manipulated. Here Rıza Tevfik Bey (1869–1949), a renowned writer and thinker, is giving a lesson in the museum to a group of attentive young scholars. The museum cases hold the bones of dinosaurs and the figures of autocratic rulers. He tells the young men:

What you see before you are the most terrible of the beasts of the archaic age. They ate a hundred times more than the present-day elephant eats. They were insatiable. It’s very lucky that today all that is left of them is their fossilized remains.⁴⁹

Tevfik holds a copy of what looks like “Darwin” in his hand, a symbol of hope and of ideological evolution. The museum in the cartoon space thus

45. Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:175. That constitution, once reinstated after its suspension was amended multiple times; but Article 113 remained a target in the satirical press of 1908–10. Modern article 301 9 prevents people from criticizing or humiliating the republic; see Kurban and Sözeri, *Caught in the Wheels of Power*, 39–40.

46. See Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:282–86.

47. *Alem* 1:4, 29 Kanun-ı sani 1324/11 Feb. 1909.

48. *Kalem* 1:5, 21 Ağustos 1324/3 Sept. 1908.

49. Brummett, *Image and Imperialism*, Fig. 5.2, 118.

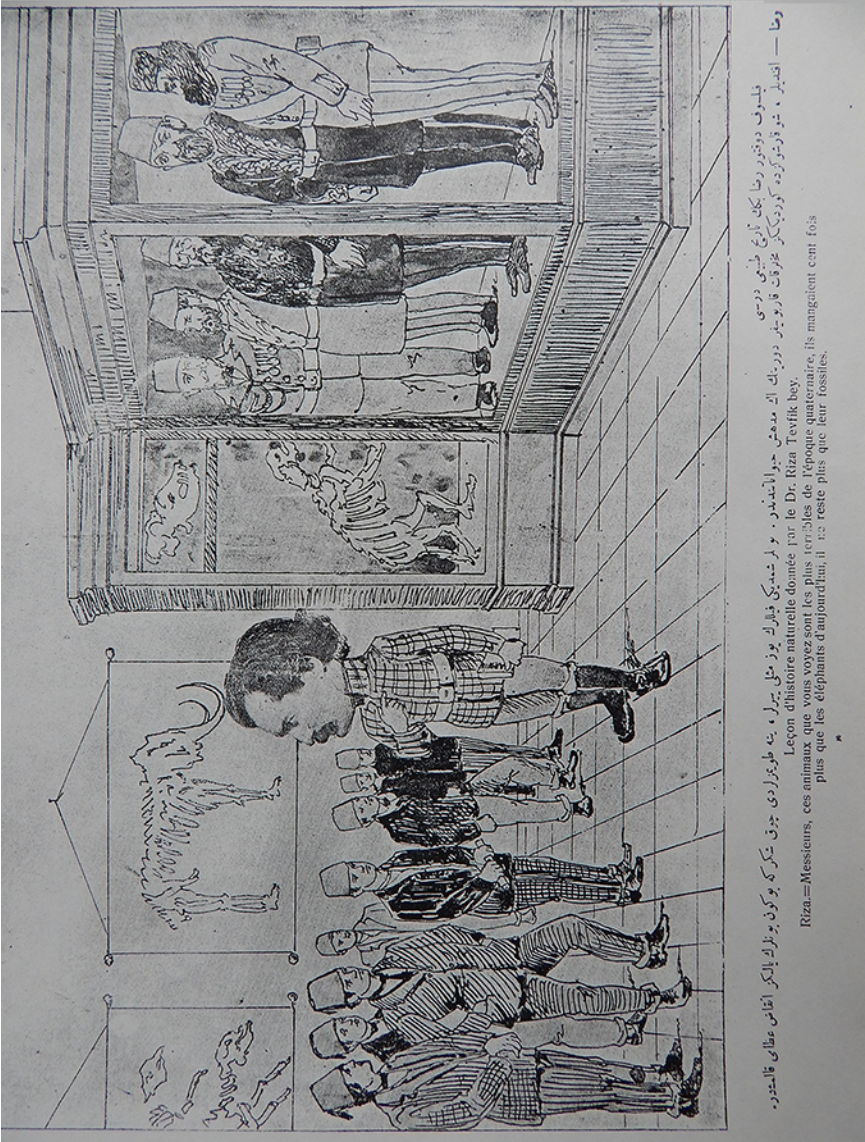


Figure 8: In the Museum: voracious beasts, Kalem 1:5, 21 Augustos 1324/3 Sept. 1908.

becomes the frame for both a fearsome past and a hopefully enlightened future. But the icons of absolute government did not go quietly. They were indeed insatiable, not so much because they consumed their own people, although that was a theme, but because they silenced the voices that were critical or told a tale contrary to the one they wanted to hear. And the struggle goes on. Today the cartoonists are alive and well; and the dinosaurs are not yet dead.

Periodization, of course, matters. The late empire period, the early republic, and the republic in its current manifestation are radically different eras, no matter what specific genre one examines. Various segments of the contemporary press have taken different approaches to issues of autocracy and freedom as was the case in the late Ottoman Empire. And enforcement of censorship is highly variable across time and sovereign space, just as it was in the time of Abdülhamid. In the present era, however, the modes of media and the extent of access have changed dramatically as have monitoring capabilities and the nature of civil society. The potential for segments of the public to react visibly and immediately to censorship has been magnified. Nonetheless, there are certain characteristics of censorship that remain remarkably constant, despite radical variations in media and social or political situation. For one thing, censorship endures as the impulse to silence (and the act of silencing) through intimidation, repression, and legal sanctions. While laws may change, and mechanisms of surveillance and resistance become more sophisticated, censorship demonstrates the will to protect and expand power. Autocracy, in its divergent forms, relies on censorship to survive and to legitimize itself. In the cartoon space, the autocrat takes multiple forms: he is the abuser of his people, the voice (loud or quiet) that silences, and the mirror of autocratic comrades or competitors. Censorship is his weapon, an insistent force in history that may be ordinary or extraordinary but is never very far away.

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