2 The Ottoman Home Front

World War I as a total war affected enormously the Ottoman civilians. Just as in other combatant countries, the Ottoman home front, too, was vital to continuing the war. Women in soldiers' families suffered particularly, although all segments of the Ottoman society encountered adverse conditions. The war negatively influenced the Ottoman economy, changed further the demography of the empire, and led to the rise of nationalism and ethnic conflict. These developments influenced both the course of the war and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

Economic Impact of World War I

The Ottoman economy had been hit by Tripolitanian War and Balkan Wars, but with World War I the foreign trade stopped. After the government canceled the capitulations system and pursued a high-tariff policy in 1914, the cost of imported items increased and their import was limited. Ottoman foreign trade used to depend on sea transport. Following the Allied blockade of transport in the Mediterranean Sea, the only means available to the Ottoman war effort and trade was land transport. Continuing a long war in such conditions was nearly impossible due to the insufficient railway lines, poor roads, and limited telegraph system.[1]

People in Istanbul suffered food scarcities most rapidly because they relied on flour imported from Romania, Russia, and Marseille. Interestingly, in 1914, bringing wheat from Anatolia to Istanbul was 75 percent more costly than importing it from New York. The empire had enough food supplies for a six-month war. However, since the war continued for years and the trade roads were blocked, people exhausted their food supply. Feeding a huge army made things worse. In time, not only the shortage of food but also its distribution among different social groups created great problems.[2]

Solving the food problem of Istanbul was therefore a priority of the war governments. Unionist elite Kara Kemal tried several methods, ranging from opening soup kitchens to food distribution, but all measures

generally proved to be insufficient. After the first year of the war, food shortages were also felt in the provinces. All parts of Anatolia suffered from hunger but certain regions were in a worse situation. Apart from the Arab regions, such as northern Syria and Lebanon, which were hit by severe food shortages, the most extreme hunger and food scarcities occurred in eastern Anatolia.[3]

Wartime economic recession was another cause of shortages. Difficulty in finding credits and many imported semifinished and intermediate goods hit industrial production. Furthermore, conscription diminished the industrial and agricultural workforce. As a result, just as in other combatant countries, a larger number of Ottoman women started working. However, they mostly worked in textile and food processing, which required quite a low level of expertise. They also had low mobility in the labor market due to their family obligations, which restricted their employment options. Therefore, the labor shortages in industry continued until the end of the war. The overall decline in industrial production was most probably between 30 and 50 percent. Agriculture, too, suffered due to lack of mechanization and labor shortages. From 1913 to 1918 the production decrease was about 40 percent in wheat and more than 50 percent in exportable products, such as tobacco, raisins, hazelnuts, olive oil, raw silk, and cotton.[4]

To raise production levels, the government introduced an Agricultural Obligation Bylaw (Mükellefiyet-i Ziraiye Kanun-ı Muvakkatı) on 18 September 1916, which became law on 2 April 1917. This law forced civilians, especially peasants above the age of fourteen and some associations and enterprises, to sow additional fields. Peasant women became the primary victims of this law, which soon turned into a forced labor regime. Despite these efforts, agricultural production did not improve significantly until 1922.[5]

Furthermore, aware of small profit margins, forced requisitions, or lack of marketing opportunities, the great part of small and middle producers passively resisted the needs of war mobilization. Peasants did not sow their fields, industrialists slowed down production, and merchants preferred to hoard goods. The disappearance of basic goods from the market made life more difficult for civilians.[6]

Nationalization of the Ottoman economy was another wartime development. Following the idea of the "national economy" (*Milli İktisat*), the Ottoman state abolished the capitulations, raised customs duties, and introduced new laws in favor of Turkish entrepreneurs. The Language Law (Dil Kanunu), enacted on 24 March 1916, made Turkish the only language of commerce. The Law for Encouraging Industry (Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu) was revised on 27 March 1915 to increase the number

of Turkish employees and laborers in factories, to provide certain privileges to national investors, and to support national companies. Furthermore, national banks – such as the National Credit Bank (İtibar-ı Milli Bankası), founded during the war in 1917, and the Agricultural Bank (Ziraat Bankası) – provided credits to rich Muslim Turkish merchants and peasants.[7]

The trade of food from Anatolia, done using the limited railway facilities provided by the government, became the most profitable business. A small number of the Anatolian Muslim farmers and merchants who were affiliated with the CUP acquired remarkable wealth. Because of the coal shortage and the army's priority to use railways, the number of wagons for trade sharply decreased. Those who hired a wagon were acquaintances of the Unionist circles. Therefore, this trade mostly created war profiteers.[8]

This trend aggravated the hunger and shortages. The state's attempts to prevent profiteering with the foundation of the Prevention of Profiteering Commission (Men-i İhtikar Komisyonu) ended with new corruption cases. The war profiteers spent their money for extravagant entertainment while people considered the profiteers' new automobiles, European furniture, telephones, and gambling in horse races as an insult.[9] The humoristic journal *Karagöz* (Black eye; also the name of a Turkish shadow play) on 31 March 1919 revealed this hatred among the people:

> They completely picked and stole
> They named it national trade
> They trimmed the country as if trimming paper
> Go on and make merchants from a thousand more vagabonds.[10]

The shortage of goods due to low production and war profiteering also caused inflation. The state's attempts to finance the war through printing money aggravated the situation. The inflation in the cost of certain products was incredible in Istanbul: one oke (1.282 kg) of sugar increased from 3 to 250 piasters, milk from 2 to 45 piasters, butter from 20 to 400 piasters, soap from 7 to 140 piasters, petroleum from 1.5 to 160 piasters, and firewood from 45 to 540 piasters (Table 1).[11]

Although the government attempted to fix certain primary consumption goods, due to the black marketeering, there was a significant difference between the prices determined officially by the government and those on the free market. Whereas the official price of bread in 1918 was 2.5 piasters, its price in the free market was 34 piasters. Again, whereas the official price of mutton was 50 piasters, it was sold for 125 piasters.[12]

Table 1. *Prices of Basic Consumption Goods in Istanbul, 1914–18, in Piasters*

Items	July 1914	January 1917	September 1917	January 1918	September 1918
Sugar	3.00	62.00	150.00	140.00	250.00
Coffee	12.00	160.00	450.00	1000.00	600.00
Rice	3.00	35.00	90.00	95.00	90.00
Macaroni	3.00	42.00	90.00	110.00	95.00
Potatoes	1.00	8.00	20.00	36.00	27.00
Beans	4.00	19.00	55.00	65.00	65.00
Onions	0.50	6.00	11.00	16.00	16.00
Olive Oil	8.00	45.00	140.00	200.00	180.00
Salt	1.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	5.50
Milk	2.00	9.00	19.00	40.00	45.00
Cheese	12.00	55.00	130.00	250.00	280.00
Mutton	7.00	28.00	65.00	130.00	120.00
Butter	20.00	100.00	210.00	260.00	400.00
Eggs	0.50	1.50	2.50	7.25	4.25
Soap	7.00	32.00	75.00	140.00	140.00
Petroleum	1.50	50.00	110.00	125.00	160.00
Charcoal	0.50	2.75	5.50	10.00	13.00
Wood	45.00	150.00	320.00	380.00	540.00

Source: Ahmed Emin, *Turkey in the World War*, pp. 147–8.

The purchasing power of the Ottoman people plummeted as a result of the black marketeering and inflation, more than observed in most European countries. Real wages dropped by about 33 percent in the period between 1914 and 1920. The situation was worse by 1918 due to a loss of real wages by about 72 percent from 1914 onwards.[13]

These wartime economic problems undermined people's trust in the state. The purchasing power of the civil servants dropped from 60 to 80 percent during the war due to inflation. They resorted to bribery and corruption more than ever to make ends meet. Living in debt, many civil servants wanted to leave their positions to become involved in trade or work in other jobs. Those who accepted bribes or illegally seized wartime taxes and the pensions of soldiers' families were the worst enemies of destitute women.[14]

The Ottoman government needed to take on debt or tax the populace to finance the war. While war profiteers did not pay taxes, peasants suffered from additional or multiplied taxes and army requisitions. Furthermore, about 260 million of the 400 million lira cost of World War I was covered by German and Austrian foreign aid. During the National Struggle, the percentage of taxes taken from ordinary people

in financing the war increased much more. Only 13 million of its 147 million lira cost was financed by Russian aid. This meant an additional economic sacrifice for Anatolian peasants, most of whom were poor women without breadwinners.[15]

Consequences of Wartime Casualties

World War I was part of a decade of continuous warfare for many Ottoman soldiers. Although the Ottoman Empire entered the war on 2 November 1914, they had already fought in the Tripolitanian War of 1911–12, the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, and the Albanian and Yemen rebellions. During World War I they battled in the Dardanelles, eastern Anatolia, the Caucasus, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Galicia, Macedonia and Romania. They were in combat against about 1.5 million British soldiers and several hundred thousand soldiers of the other rival states.[16]

The primary human source of the Ottoman army was Anatolian Muslim peasants, who were also the backbone of Ottoman agriculture. The War Ministry, suspicious of the Greeks and Armenians, charged most of them with manual labor and sent them to the labor battalions, where the death rate was also quite high. Wealthy non-Muslim men paid 30 Ottoman gold liras and Muslim men paid 50 Ottoman gold liras to be exempt from military service. Ottoman Greeks became Greek citizens while Ottoman Jews, who had no connection with a nation-state of their own, adopted US citizenship to evade conscription. Due to such exemptions, as Erik J. Zürcher writes, conscription could not be used as an instrument of Ottoman nation building.[17] Conscriptions and losses of the Ottoman army mostly hit the Muslim population and poor non-Muslims unable to pay exemption money.

The percentage of Ottoman military casualties was very high. The Ottoman Empire conscripted more than 2,873,000 men, including the gendarme and navy forces.[18] The number of Ottoman soldiers who died due to war-related causes or who were missing in action was 771,844. Among them 243,598 died in combat or of battle wounds; 61,487 went missing in action; 466,759 died of diseases; and 763,753 soldiers were wounded. There were about 200,000 war prisoners, the greater part of whom Britain held captive and did not release until 1920–21. The number of deserters was also very high, as reported by German generals in the Ottoman army. General Otto Liman von Sanders, who served as adviser and military commander to the Ottoman army, wrote in 1917 that about 300,000 soldiers had deserted the army. In 1918 General Hans von Seeckt reported this

number as 450,000. When the war ended, there had been at least 500,000 deserters.[19]

Ottoman civilians also lost their lives due to enemy attack, migration, deportation, epidemics, destitution, hunger, and cold. The prewar population of the Ottoman Empire was about 20 million to 23 million.[20] Of these people, 17 million lived within today's borders of Turkey, more than 3 million in Syria and Palestine, including today's Lebanon and Jordan, and about 2.5 million in Iraq. By the end of the war, more civilians had died than soldiers due to armed conflict, disease, and malnutrition. About four out of five Ottoman-citizen deaths were of civilians. Making things worse, the Ottoman government deported a significant percentage of Armenians in eastern Anatolia, many of whom were massacred on the road or died at their destinations. Muslim people who migrated due to the Russian occupation of the eastern provinces also died in massive numbers. The newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkar* (Portrayal of opinions) reported on 11 May 1919 that, during their escape from the Russian army in 1916, out of the 1,604,031 Muslim refugees, 701,166 people, or 43.7 percent, had died on the road from hunger, disease, or massacres. Between 1912 and 1922 at least 1 million people of eastern Anatolia passed away.[21] The refugees received very little help from either the government or the Red Crescent Society (Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti), and, in most of the provinces where they arrived, the inhabitants did not help them either.[22]

In February 1919 the Erzurum governor reported that, among the 448,607 refugees who had departed from Erzurum, only 173,304 people had returned, 108,098 people would probably return, and 207,105 people were lost.[23] After February 1919 Turkish refugees who had been settled around Kayseri in the houses of deported Armenians left these residences when the Armenian families returned. During this second immigration, about 300,000 died of disease. In 1919 *Tasvir-i Efkar* reported that, out of the 63,614 refugees who had left Aydın province, only 42,374 of them were confirmed alive, while the situation of the others was unknown.[24]

The migration continued during the armistice period, especially in western Anatolia after the Greek troops started occupying this region. In South Marmara, refugee waves continued until the population exchanges ended in the first years of the Republic of Turkey. These population movements caused severe crime, rebellions, and violence in this region for quite a long time.[25]

Migrants often fled to Istanbul and provinces in Anatolia. In 1921 the number of refugees from Izmir was estimated at three hundred thousand. The same year, the refugees who had already arrived in Istanbul from the

Balkans and Izmir were counted at sixty-five thousand. The number was seventy thousand in 1922. In the same period, four hundred thousand Muslim Turkish refugees had come to Istanbul from other parts of Anatolia.[26]

Losing their financial supporters due to conscriptions and getting poorer due to wartime migration, many Ottoman women, especially in the cities, earned their living through prostitution, begging, or theft. Their situation was so bad that the Allied powers used it as a weapon of counter-propaganda. They discouraged Ottoman soldiers and urged them to desert the army with proclamations emphasizing the hunger, death, or moral degeneration of their women and children both in Istanbul and in the countryside.[27]

Ottoman Women and War Propaganda

During World War I the Ottoman state extensively used Islamism, Ottomanism, and Turkish nationalism for war mobilization. Especially after the Balkan Wars, the CUP embraced the nationalist ideal of Turanism (*Turancılık*). This ideology was at the center of the war propaganda during the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war. Enver Pasha adopted Pan-Turkism as a state strategy because of its wartime advantages as an expansionist policy.[28] Pan-Turkism also had Islamic elements that mobilized Muslim Turkish masses against Russian and other Christian "enemy" forces. Consequently, in his declaration of Holy War, the Shaykh al-Islam demanded assistance of all Muslims for the Ottoman Empire's war effort against "infidels." He especially targeted Muslims living in Crimea, Kazan, Turkestan, Bukhara, Khiva, India, China, Afghanistan, Persia, and Africa. Ottoman war governments also supported nationalism during the war to create a new Turkish bourgeoisie and a national economy, both of which could help the economic independence of the Ottoman Empire. However, as Hasan Kayalı writes, a supranational ideology of Islamism outweighed an ethnic Turkish nationalism during the period.[29]

Although many Turkish intellectuals and members of the CUP supported the nationalist war propaganda and declaration of Holy War, larger masses of poor people, who mostly lived in the countryside and bore most of the economic and social burden of the war, had a different perspective.[30] Due to severe wartime poverty and hunger, war propaganda had nearly no influence on lower-income Ottoman women. On the other hand, elite women, as wives and daughters of the high bureaucracy, welcomed it. They became members of nationalist organizations, such as the Turkish Hearth (Türk Ocağı) and the National Defense Society (Müdafaa-i Milliye

Cemiyeti), and acquired new positions in public life. They also founded women's organizations to support the war effort. They helped the army, war widows, and orphans through the Red Crescent Ladies' Center (Hilal-i Ahmer Hanımlar Heyet-i Merkeziyesi), the Ladies' Society to Assist Soldiers' Families (Asker Ailelerine Yardımcı Hanımlar Cemiyeti), and the National Defense Ottoman Ladies' Committee (Müdafaa-i Milliye Osmanlı Hanımlar Heyeti). Furthermore, they contributed to the Ottoman Empire's internal borrowing to finance the war and supported the development of the national economy.[31]

These middle-class and elite women benefited to some extent from the policies of the Unionist governments. Under the name of the "national family" (*Milli Aile*), they received certain new positions, and, through the Decree on Family Law (Hukuk-i Aile Kararnamesi), more legal support for the monogamy they longed for.[32] Nevertheless, the vast majority of ordinary women had a very different agenda. They did not obey the mobilization attempts of the government without conflict. Although they were not politically committed antiwar pacifists, they mostly opposed government policies and practices that adversely affected their lives.