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CHASING THE PRINTED WORD: PRESS CENSORSHIP IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1876–1913

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The literature on press censorship in the Ottoman Empire has generally associated this practice most strongly with the reign of Abdülhamid II. Depicted as a time of collective paranoia, and certainly not lacking in anecdotes that support its reputation, this period has served as the default context for censorship for the limited number of works on the subject. It is relatively recently that we have come to look at the life and times of arguably the most notorious of all Ottoman sultans from a different perspective, and despite an encouraging interest in print culture in the Ottoman Empire exemplified by the works of Palmira Brummett and Elisabeth Frierson, the history of the Ottoman press and its battle with state authority remains largely untold.¹ This article, therefore, is an attempt to fill the gap by providing a brief sketch of the Ottoman press censorship's evolution from a set of ad hoc measures into an institutionalized form of social and political control.

The fact that July 24th—the day that marks the end of the *ancien régime* with the reinstatement of the constitution—is still celebrated as “national press day” in Turkey attests to the unchallenged legacy of the Young Turk period as one of liberalism, during which the press, quiet and suppressed under Hamidian autocracy, rejoiced in its new-found freedoms. However, a closer look at the period demonstrates how, once the euphoric days following the revolution had passed, the Committee of Union and Progress did not even wait for a significant challenge to its authority before suppressing the country's civil institutions, including its press. Continuities from the preceding era were common, such as the inefficiency of the measures taken, but departures were also significant; witness, for example, the phenomenon of

¹On state ideology during the reign of Abdülhamid II, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998). Satire magazines of the revolutionary period are the subject matter of Palmira Brummett's *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); and women's press during the Hamidian period has been scrutinized by Elisabeth Frierson in “Unimagined Communities: State, Press and Gender in the Hamidian Era” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1996).

devising regulations that banned books and periodicals without ever using the word “censor” in bureaucratic correspondence.

This article is a case study of censorship as a mechanism of political control, and it focuses more on censorship as a “process”—an indicator of the current political climate and state modernization—than on the print culture that was subject to censorship. Therefore, most of the sources used here are drawn from state archives and tell the story of censorship as it was exercised, and only cursory references are made to the texts that were actually censored. In the following pages I first provide a description of the legal framework for censorship before the reign of Abdülhamid II. A discussion of Hamidian censorship with respect to its legal and political formulations follows this introduction. The next section gives a brief description of the major developments after the revolution of 1908, followed by an analysis of the legal changes and the increasing prominence of the Ministry of the Interior in the redefinition of press censorship under the Young Turks. Finally, we go back to the foreign post offices, those recurrent nightmares of central authority during both the reign of Abdülhamid II and the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress, to delineate further continuities and contrasts between these two periods in terms of the political culture they fostered.

An Overview of the Legal Framework until the Reign of Abdülhamid II

Conversation between Karagöz and Hacivat; Karagöz’s hands are tightly wrapped in chains:



Hacivat: What’s up with these chains?

Karagöz: It’s called “freedom within the limits of law,” Hacivat.²

²Hayâl, February, 1877.

The Ottoman state devised mechanisms in order to control printed material as a gradual response to the development of a print culture, which happened relatively late, around the middle of the nineteenth century. These mechanisms, in their origins, were case- and need-based provisions. The first Ottoman Turkish newspaper *Takvim-i Vekâyi* (The Calendar of Events) appeared in November 1831 during the reign of Mahmud II, under the initiative of the Sultan himself.³ It was followed in 1840 by *Cerîde-i Havâdis* (Register of News), published by an English resident of the Empire, William Churchill. This newspaper was subsidized by the state and eventually turned into a semi-official gazette.

Until the publication of the first private daily in Ottoman Turkish in 1860, these two papers constituted the rather meager inventory of the Ottoman press. The state did not issue any laws or provisions directly dealing with the dissemination of information in this period, the only exception being a communiqué issued on June 11, 1849, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requiring every embassy to notify the Ministry before publishing books and periodicals.⁴ During this period, the Ministry of the Interior's authority did not yet extend to the press; control was in the hands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, probably because imports and embassy publications continued to outweigh domestic publication in Ottoman Turkish. In 1857, more formal press regulations were issued requiring Ottoman citizens to apply to the Council of Education and the Ministry of Police to obtain publication licenses.⁵ A *Matbuât Müdürlüğü* (Administration of Press Affairs) was established in 1862,⁶ and equipped in 1864 with a new Press Regulation that would allow it to keep closer tabs on the two privately-owned newspapers, *Tercümân-ı Ahvâl* [Interpreter of Conditions] and *Tasvîr-i Efkâr* (Depiction of Ideas), in which criticism of the government was increasing. The 1864 Press Regulation was in effect an adaptation of the 1852 Press Law of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte.⁷ Described as “[one] of the most ingenious punitive-censorship

³The gazette was apparently inspired by the *Vekâyi-i Mısırîye* [Egyptian Events], established by the sultan's archenemy, Mehmed Ali, in 1828 in Egypt. According to Ahmed Emin Yalman, *The Development of Modern Turkey as Measured by Its Press* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), 29–30, Mahmud II paid attention even to the stylistic details of this first official gazette of Ottoman news.

⁴Server İskit, *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri ve Politikaları* (Ankara: Basın ve Yayın Umum Müdürlüğü, 1943), 5.

⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

⁶There is disagreement on the precise date of the foundation of this bureau: According to Alpay Kabacalı it was founded around 1858—*Başlangıcından Günümüze Türkiye'de Basın Sansürü* (Istanbul: Gazeteciler Cemiyeti, 1990), 22—whereas İskit holds that it should have been formed around 1862: *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri*, 14.

⁷*Ibid.*, 14.

laws of nineteenth-century Europe,”⁸ the regulations were disproportionately—or preemptively—limiting for the embryonic Ottoman Press. Ottoman subjects and foreigners were required to apply to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs respectively to obtain a license before starting publication, and these licenses could at any point be suspended or annulled by the state if it was deemed necessary. Punitive responsibility was shared by the editor and the publisher, who would sign each issue of the periodical and send a copy to the Administrator of Press Affairs in the capital, or to the governor in the provinces. These regulations also listed what would constitute a press offense and the corresponding punishment. The definitions were quite vague at times, which gave the censors full discretionary capacity. They also provisioned that the publication of a newspaper could be suspended or its license definitively annulled if prosecuted three times by courts within a time span of two years.⁹

Muhbir (The Informer) was the first victim of the new Press Regulations.¹⁰ The paper, owned by Filip Efendi, was effectively run by its editor-in-chief Ali Suâvi, who was extremely critical of the government, especially in regard to the crisis breaking out in Crete.¹¹ It was an entirely different topic, however, and not even an article, but a “reader’s letter,” penned by none other than Suâvi himself, on the concession of the fortress of Belgrade, that got the paper closed down on March 8, 1867.¹² An ordinance forwarded to newspapers a few days later expressed that the state wanted to “grant a certain extent of liberty” to the press, but it could not permit the dissemination of “mind-confusing lies.”¹³ When Ali Suâvi fled the increasingly oppressive climate of the Ottoman Empire and started publishing *Muhbir* in London on

⁸Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Censorship of the Arts and Press in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 44.

⁹İskit, *Türkiye’de Matbuat İdareleri*, 15–18.

¹⁰Kabacalı, citing an article published in *Tercümân-i Ahvâl* (1866, no. 789), argues that the first newspaper to be closed down was actually *Mecmuâ-yı Havâdis*, (*Başlangıcından Günümüze*, p. 27). However, there are no surviving copies of this periodical, and given the large impact of *Muhbir*’s closing down, I find it appropriate to cite it as the first example of punitive censorship following the 1864 Regulation.

¹¹Ali Suâvi, an important figure among the “Young Ottoman” political dissidents, is best remembered as the mastermind of the Çırağan Vak’âsı (Çırağan Incident), an unsuccessful popular coup attempt to depose Abdülhamid, which resulted in Suâvi’s death. For a detailed biography see Hüseyin Çelik, *Ali Suâvi ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994).

¹²İskit, *Türkiye’de Matbuat İdareleri*, 22.

¹³*Ibid.*, 25. Journalists referred to this ordinance with a pun as the “Âli Ordinance” from “kararnâme-i âli,” *âli* both meaning sublime or grand and also being the name of the Grand Vezir notorious for his arbitrariness.

August 31, 1867, he was also initiating a tradition in Ottoman political opposition, namely, expatriate journals.

The Grand Vezir Mahmud Nedim Paşa tightened the state's control over the press even further. His first strategy was appeasement, which did succeed in luring the leading dissidents to return home. These figures were then tucked into cushy but inconsequential posts in remote corners of the Empire.¹⁴ During his second term in office, coercion gradually replaced appeasement. A government decree issued on April 17, 1876, identified the problem of "smuggled publications" for the first time. This decree ordered a "certificate of approval" mandatory for every publication. It further required the "checking and examination" of all publications coming from abroad. In addition to these measures, a financial disincentive for the press was also introduced in the form of a stamp duty imposed on each published copy of a newspaper.¹⁵ An official order published in the daily *Sabah* (Morning) on May 8, 1876, banned the publication of any issues related to government or international affairs unless the information was approved by an official authority. It was modified only four days later: all newspapers were to be inspected before publication by the officials of the Administration of Press Affairs in Istanbul, and by appointees of local governments in the provinces.¹⁶ The order, which the press immediately protested by running entirely blank or black pages, was declared void shortly after the dethronement of Sultan Abdülaziz in May 1876. However, the reprieve was very short-lived: a new "warning" was published in the official gazette on June 20, 1876, requiring the papers to obtain the approval of the Administration of Press Affairs before publishing on governmental issues.¹⁷ Censorship was re-established and it would only become more pervasive during the reign of Abdülhamid II, who replaced the mentally unstable Sultan Murad V and ascended the throne on August 31, 1876.

The first Ottoman Constitution that Abdülhamid II vowed to protect in December 1876 had guaranteed a degree of liberty to the press in its twelfth article, which stated "press is free within the limits of law." The law in question was none other than the 1864 Press Regulation, the limits of which had

¹⁴For instance, Namık Kemal, the great literary figure and arguably the most prominent young Ottoman, was appointed governor to Gallipoli.

¹⁵Stamp taxes were used commonly in Europe during this period, in the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, France, Germany, and Britain. In Britain the stamp tax seriously hindered newspaper circulation between 1815 and 1836. Goldstein, *Political Censorship*, 52–54.

¹⁶ İskit, *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri*, 50.

¹⁷For a description of the flow of events and celebrations, see Cevdet Kudret, *Abdülhamid Devrinde Şansür* (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1977), 10; Yalman, *Development of Modern Turkey*, 49–52.

been learned the hard way by many members of the Ottoman press. Theodor Kasap, the founder of *Diyojen* (Diogenes), *Hayâl* (Dream—Ottoman Puppet Theater) and *Çingiraklı Tatar* (Courier with Bells),¹⁸ major satire magazines of the Tanzimat era, ridiculed this “guarantee” quite effectively by displaying a chained-up Karagöz on the cover of *Hayâl*; so much so that he was sentenced to three years in prison for this one cartoon.¹⁹ But these were still relatively more liberal days, in which satire magazines were printed within the Empire even though their existence depended on staying on the good side of the Administration of Press Affairs. As soon as Abdülhamid II replaced the parliamentary régime with his absolute rule through a hand-picked palace clique, the satire magazines were the first to be silenced.

The Establishment, Expansion, and Extent of Hamidian Censorship:

A conversation between Beberuhi and Karagöz in the satire magazine *Beberuhi*:

Beberuhi: The Sultan [Abdülhamid II] wants to know where Geneva is. He is told to address himself to the French Ambassador, who answers that Geneva is not in France. After thinking for a long time, the entourage of the sovereign remembers that Geneva must be in Italy. Decorations and money are prepared. Italy takes the money and replies that there are no Turks in Genoa: general stupefaction. “Why don’t you ask Münir Paşa? Idiots!” says the Sultan. Münir Paşa replies that Geneva is in Switzerland. The Sultan learns that Switzerland is a Republic and loses his mind.

Karagöz: Get out, Beberuhi, you’re kidding! The Sultan could not have lost what he does not have to begin with.²⁰

On December 1897, more than twenty years after Abdülhamid II’s accession to the throne, when his intricate and somewhat bizarre network of spies

¹⁸Theodore Kasap also published a Greek version of *Hayâl*. His collaborators were Namık Kemal, Ebuzziya Tevfik, and [Çaylak] Mehmet Tevfik. Namık Kemal contributed the famous *Kedi Mersiyesi* (Cat Elegy) to *Diyojen* in 1872 after the termination of Mahmud Nedim Paşa’s first term in office. The cat in question was none other than the Grand Vezir who had just fallen from grace. The elegy became an instant hit, reprinted and turned into a song, the sheet music for which quickly sold out. See Turgut Çeviker, *Gelişim Sürecinde Türk Karikatürü*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Adam Yayıncılık, 1986), 67–72, 124.

¹⁹It is rumored that Kasap’s sentence was particularly harsh because of his translation, years earlier, of Molière’s *l’Avare* into Ottoman Turkish under the title *Pinti Hamit* (Hamid the Miser), which must not have pleased the royal namesake. See Teodor Kasap, *Pinti Hamit: Beş fasıldan ibaret mudhikedir* (Istanbul: Çingiraklı Tatar Matbaası, 1873).

²⁰*Beberuhi*, April 1, 1898, quoted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Henceforth MAE), France, vol. 393 (Constantinople, Presse et Censure).

and censors had been spread around the “protected domains” and elsewhere in a relentless search for “mind-confusing” lies in print, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabriel Honataux received a telegram from the Republic’s Embassy in Istanbul, relating to him that the Sultan had been gravely insulted by the first issue of the Turkish-language journal *Osmanlı*, apparently published in Paris. The telegram also reported that his majesty felt “there is solidarity between the chiefs of state, who should protect each other against revolutionaries and anarchists.”²¹ Honataux’s response a day later signified the extent of his solidarity with Abdülhamid II: “There is no one here that knows about the existence of *Osmanlı* [sic]. It is probably one of those leaflets without any influence or impact that are published in infinite numbers, a sample of which was addressed to the Sultan with the simple purpose of being seized.”²² In any case, the Minister pointed out, it was necessary that the place of publication of the journal be indicated. Despite Honataux’s apparent irritation, it seems that another request was made for a ban on the journal, to which he replied on December 20, 1897: “[t]he information [...] that you have transmitted to me is completely false. It is notably inaccurate that *Osmanlı* [sic] is published in Paris. That journal is published in Geneva.”²³

One is tempted to think that Honataux’s correspondence with the French Embassy had been leaked to the editor of *Beberuhi* given the conversation between Beberuhi and Karagöz quoted. On the other hand, the Ottoman authorities’ difficulties with establishing the origins of “harmful publications” were not limited to the case of *Osmanlı*; neither were *Osmanlı* and *Beberuhi* the only two opposition papers published in Geneva. In fact, at least twenty more Young Turk journals had their headquarters in this city at one point or another during the reign of Abdülhamid II, which makes it more likely that every censor in the administration, however ignorant of geography, had learned exactly where it was.²⁴ However, the correspondence and the imaginary dialogue reflect two major qualities of Hamidian censorship: its ubiquity and its ineffectiveness.

As with other aspects of Abdülhamid II’s autocracy, control over the press was also tightened gradually. Periodicals were hit hard early on; other printed works such as scientific books and pamphlets that could circulate easily during the first decade of his reign were found harmful in later years. The new political system introduced and propagated by Abdülhamid II with the

²¹MAE, vol. 393, f. 570.

²²MAE, vol. 393, f. 670.

²³MAE, vol. 393, December 20, 1897. Honataux to Embassy in Constantinople.

²⁴Şükrü Hanioglu cites fifty-eight journals published by Young Turks in exile during Abdülhamid II’s reign, twenty-three of which were published in Geneva. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 375–376.

aid of the palace clique ensured that demonstration of personal loyalty to the sultan was the only means of promotion. Earning the favor and blessings of the sultan was seen as a zero-sum game, where one person's gain would mean another's loss, and it was not possible to escape this morally ambiguous competition through neutrality; one was either with the sultan or against him. These principles applied not only to the very high echelons of bureaucracy, but permeated each level of society involved in the current political culture, including the press. The control mechanism generated by this unique political culture had two major components: self-censorship and informing.

Self-censorship functioned in more subtle ways during the earlier years of Abdülhamid II's reign,²⁵ but reached preposterous levels in a few years, not only in its avoidance of publishing words that might be associated with subversion, but also in the compilation of lists of words that might offend the Sultan personally. Politically subversive words banned in dictionaries included constitution, parliament, bomb, dynamite, dictator, anarchism, nihilism, free, liberty, socialism, Darwinism, democrat, discipline, clique, clerical, conservative.²⁶ When one of these words did find its way into a dictionary, its "translation" was significantly truncated. For instance, in the 1901 edition of Şemseddin Sami's French-Ottoman Turkish dictionary, the word "révolution" was defined simply as "The turning of celestial objects on their orbits, and the period for this journey."²⁷ In addition to these, there were

²⁵See, for instance, the English translation of Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī's (Hayreddin Paşa's) famous treatise *Aqwām al-masālik fī ma'rīfat ahwāl al-Mamālik*. (Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, *The Surest Path: The Political Treatise of a Nineteenth Century Muslim Statesman*, trans. Leon Carl Brown [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967], 162.) Hayreddin Paşa, who supported a parliamentary political system, had also surprisingly served as Grand Vezir to Abdülhamid II for a brief term. This is how he defined "freedom of the press" in the Arabic original of his work: "... there remains to the public something else which is called the freedom of the press, i.e., no one can be prevented from writing what seems to him to be in the public interest in books or newspapers which can be read by the public. Or anyone can present his views to the state or the chambers even if this includes opposition to the state's policy. The same excerpt was translated in the Ottoman Turkish edition published in Istanbul in 1879: "[t]he [liberty] of people to write in books and newspapers their personal opinions concerning the affairs and events that they obtain information about, with the purpose of presenting these to the views of the state and the deputies of government, and to render possible the rejection of actions that are against the accepted norm." (Hayreddin Paşa, *Mukaddime-yi akvem ül-mesalik fī marifet-i ahval il-memâlik tercümesi*, trans. Abdurrahman Efendi [Istanbul: El-Cevâib Matbaası, 1879], 127.)

²⁶Examples from a list of words, the entries of which in a dictionary were not allowed. Kabacalı, *Başlangıcından Günümüze*, 66.

²⁷Şemseddin Sâmî, *Dictionnaire Français-Turc*, (Istanbul: Imprimerie Mihran 1901), 1913.

unmentionable words like the notorious “nose,” in (avoiding) allusion to the Sultan’s rather protruding facial feature. Hüseyin Câhid, a prominent journalist of the period, could not help wondering:

If someone were to tell Abdülhamid that the word “nose” was forbidden in the Press, how would the people around him explain this? Would they say to the caliph of the earth: Your majesty, you have quite an ugly nose, that is why we banned this word...²⁸

The paranoia surrounding words was not the only pathology caused by exaggerated efforts to prove unconditional loyalty to the Sultan. Civil servants, or simple subjects, vying for opportunities to display zealotry that would presumably assist them climbing the bureaucratic or the social ladder, did not shy away from reporting breaches perceived to threaten the stability of the Sultan’s domains, often informing on other clerks or officials. They wrote their suspicions incessantly to any authority that they hoped would read, contributing further to the atmosphere of uncertainty and mistrust.²⁹

“*Jurnal*” was the name given to these reports sent directly to Yıldız Palace informing the Sultan of the alleged subversive activities. *Journals* completed the panopticon of Hamidian autocracy, because they were written and sent not only by the known or secret spies on the palace’s payroll but also by simple subjects who hoped for remuneration or who were simply attempting to comply instead of being labeled a dissident. After the reinstatement of the Constitution in July 1908, some twenty thousand of these were found in Yıldız Palace, and a commission was set up for their classification and registration. Probably much to the benefit of public peace, the commission decided to destroy these letters, many of which were actually written by opponents of the regime.³⁰

Considering the magnitude of the regime’s concern with controlling the flow of information in print, the Hamidian period witnessed a surprisingly modest amount of legislation concerning censorship. In contrast with the

²⁸Hüseyin Câhid [Yalçın], *Edebî Hâtîrâlar* (Istanbul: Akşam Kitaphanesi, 1935), 108. Hüseyin Cahid refers to the sultan as “the caliph of the earth” in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, since this was a classical title revived by Abdülhamid II himself.

²⁹For instance, the *kaymakam* (sub-governor) of Jaffa was urged to send reports to the Ministry of the Interior concerning the infiltration of “harmful” publications from the special province of Egypt and abroad after receiving letters from a conscientious Bedirhanzâde Mehmed Sâlih, who threatened that he would “inform the proper authorities” unless the *kaymakam* fulfilled his responsibilities. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (henceforth BBA) Bâb-ı Âli Evrak Odası (henceforth BEO), Mümtâze Mısır, 37/2.

³⁰Asaf Tugay, *İbret: Abdülhamid’e Verilen Jurnaller ve Jurnalciler* (Istanbul: Okat Yayınevi, 1960), 17–22. The actual figure was probably much larger.

Young Turk period that followed, when censorship authority was centralized under auspices of the Ministry of the Interior, during Abdülhamid II's reign the task was spread over a vast number of bureaus and ministries. Within the first year of his ascending the throne, when the parliament had not yet been disbanded, the first debates concerning dissemination of printed material were prompted by the satire press. Some deputies defended an outright suspension of all satire magazines, which they portrayed as "immoral and redundant," while others warned that periodicals of this sort were an expression of free speech and only banned in "countries like Russia."³¹ The Meclis-i Âyân (Senate) finally amended a revised version of the 1864 Regulation on May 24, 1877, and ruled out a ban on satire magazines—a decision that would soon prove insufficient to save the satire magazines from the wrath of the Hamidian regime.³²

This modified version of the 1864 Press Regulations remained valid in theory through Abdülhamid II's reign, but press affairs were in practice administered through arbitrary measures. After 1878, the inspection of all printed material, as well as printing houses and theaters, was placed under the authority of Matbuat Müdürlüğü (Management of Press Affairs), which was overseen by the Ministries of Police and of Education.³³ In 1885, a new bureau was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entitled Matbuât-ı Ecnebiye Müdürlüğü (Administration of Foreign Press Affairs).³⁴ This bureau was responsible for inspecting foreign language material, domestically printed as well as imported. The Ministries of Commerce and Communication were also involved in the censorship process, since the really "dangerous" publications came from abroad.

Yıldız Palace, the headquarters of the Hamidian regime, was the destination of regular reports on "harmful" publications drafted by various bureaus, such as the branches of the Ministries of Communication, or by governors.³⁵ While censorship was the task of governorships or customs bureaus

³¹Turgut Çeviker, *Gelişim Sürecinde Türk Karikatürü*, 3 vols. (Istanbul: Adam Yayıncılık, 1986).

³²İskit, *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri*, 70.

³³Ibid., 112-114.

³⁴Ibid., 80.

³⁵For instance, in 1902 the governor of Beirut sent to the Sublime Porte a report listing the papers banned from entering the empire and the reasons for the ban. Some of these papers were *Al-Hayât*, *Al-Ahrâm*, *Al-Hakim*, *Al-Cerîde*, and *Al-Mü'eyyed* in Arabic, and *Journal de Caire* and *Le Figaro* in French. It is interesting to note that the governor proposed a ban only for certain issues of these papers, and the memoranda were sent at least a week after each of these papers had been published. (BBA, BEO Mümtâze, Mısır, 37/2.) Given that these dispatches would take another week to reach the imperial center, it is reasonable to assume that the same papers would have already entered circulation within the Empire from other customs points.

in the provinces, and of ministries in Istanbul, it was also common practice to have a censor from the Ministry of Education in the customs and mail offices. One of the novel legal arrangements of the period was the Law of Printing Presses of February 22, 1888.³⁶ According to this law, publishers of books and periodicals were required to obtain licenses from the Ministry of Education in Istanbul prior to publication. In the provinces, governors were authorized to issue such licenses. Police officers were authorized to search bookshops.³⁷

Both punitive (post-publication) and preliminary (pre-publication) censorship were in effect during this period, even though the press had been rendered incapable of publishing any material worth censoring. All newspapers and journals of this period were granted state subsidies, which were aimed at not simply keeping them afloat but rather at strengthening the Palace's sway through an alternative strategy of appeasement. The first editions of all dailies, which were called *prova* (proofs), were first inspected by the paper's editor, who carried punitive responsibility, and then sent to the censor's office, where they were double-checked before circulation.³⁸

Despite these measures, violations could and did occur, and the lack of an articulate Press Law clearly defining the boundaries of press offenses empowered the censors in their quest to earn favors by "discovering" vice where everyone else failed to see it. Even the official gazette, *Takvim-i Vekâyi*, was not exempt from the scourge of the unforgiving censor.³⁹ This resembled the fate that befell the state's official printing house, Matbaa-ı Âmire, which was closed down in 1902. One of the tasks of this printing house was to publish the *salnâmeler* (state yearbooks or almanacs of statistics), about which Abdülhamid II was particularly sensitive. These almanacs were published every year along with a copy of the constitution, which was in theory still valid, even though the very act of publishing the word "constitution" would almost certainly end up in banishment for the editor who dared to do so.⁴⁰ That year, the *salnâme's* gold illuminated panel, which included a

³⁶İskit, *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri*, 82.

³⁷It is worth noting that this law also included regulations on printing house floor plans: the doors could not be locked, and there would be no passages, doors, or windows between the printing house and the neighboring buildings.

³⁸Ahmet İhsan Tokgöz, *Matbuât Hatıralarım*, ed. Alpay Kabacalı (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1993), 70–71.

³⁹It was closed down immediately after publishing a routine announcement of a state official's termination of mission, because the letter "eliflâm" in "*hasbelicab*" (as necessary, referring to the termination) was misspelled which made the word read like "*hasb-lâ-icab*" (unnecessary). Reşid Mümtaz Paşa, who was the secretary of the Ministry of the Interior responsible for the paper, was also permanently removed from government office. Tokgöz, *Matbuât Hatıralarım*, 75.

⁴⁰It is commonly accepted that Abdülhamid had suspended the constitution along

composition in *celî dîvanî* script describing the ascension of Abdülhamid II to the throne, had mistakenly been bound to the volume up-side-down. For some opportunists, who lost no time informing the palace, this was enough proof that the real implication was a desire to see the sultan himself toppled. The *Matbaa-i Âmire* was shut down; its doors sealed, and it remained closed until August 4, 1908, when it was reopened by the new regime's Minister of Education.⁴¹ The *salnâmes* were reprinted in Ahmed İhsan's privately owned printing press, under the close scrutiny of officials called upon the request of İhsan himself, who wanted to make sure that every precaution was taken to preempt further trouble.⁴²

Scholars of the period have recently attempted to place Hamidian censorship in a more complex framework than those of Oriental despotism and social hysteria. Elizabeth Frierson, for instance, deducing from the evidence that she presented concerning the women's press of the period, argued that

[c]ensorship was not operating as the dead hand of the state, or even as a multiplicity of highly effective enforcers busily inspecting and shutting down presses in uniform accordance with the letter and spirit of Press Laws, Rules and Regulations ... [t]he corpus of laws and regulations dealing with the press represented a fluid environment which could be navigated by bureaucrats and by journalists to allow considerable leeway in publication ... [t]he laws and regulations were tools of considerable precision, which were used in as many ways as there were bureaucrats and journalists to use them.⁴³

I would agree with the above observation, with the significant reservation that the "fluid environment" of laws and regulations that ensured a limited degree of leeway for journalists could just as easily work to their detriment as to their advantage. Survival required, in addition to a stringent application of self-censorship, a pledge of allegiance to the system that was performed in ways that confirmed the status of the Hamidian Press as a mouthpiece of the regime. For instance, *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Newspa-

with the parliament, but in theory the constitution was valid throughout Abdülhamid II's reign, and he made the point by having it published every year in the text of the *salnâme*. Tokgöz, *Matbuât Hatırlarım*, 111-112.

⁴¹Ibid., 110-111.

⁴²It was a wise decision on İhsan's part not to trust the inspection of the censors: apparently another stray "elif" in the type set had changed the word from "rightful" to "unrightful." Since it was a reference to Abdülhamid's accession to the throne, Ahmet İhsan saved himself from a guaranteed exile sentence. Tokgöz, *Matbuât Hatırlarım*, 113-114.

⁴³Elizabeth Frierson, "Unimagined Communities," 289.

per for Women), which Frierson focused on, could maintain a fourteen-year publishing record not only through wise management decisions such as accepting imperial patronage in the form of direct subsidies from the Palace, but also thanks to a less savory and more active complicity in the system ensured by *journals* diligently dispatched to the Palace by Fatma Aliye Hanım, its most prominent contributor.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it must be noted that, rather than the *mot-à-mot* enforcement of laws and regulations, it was their absence that made it easier to establish an arbitrary control over the press. The definition of a press offense and its punishment were left under the discretion of the bureaucrats on a case-by-case basis.

However, Hamidian censorship also had an Achilles' heel in the foreign post offices operating within the Empire. Despite the zeal of the enthusiastic army of censors, spies, petty clerks, and customs officials, their otherwise able hands were effectively tied when "harmful" publications were mailed directly to these offices and picked up by non-Ottoman nationals. One of the Ottoman Empire's many concessions to the European powers arising from its financial woes, foreign post offices were exempt from the legislation that applied to their domestic counterparts. This was a loophole that was easily discovered and exploited by the opposition abroad, as well as in the province of Egypt, which, thanks to its "special" status, had quickly become a Mecca of dissidents. Journals were sent in packages to these offices, where they would be picked up by the addressee and taken home to be distributed through a network, or simply passed from hand to hand. The police were fast to figure out this rather transparent scheme, and started searching people leaving foreign offices with "suspicious packages," which made it necessary to enlist the help of non-Ottoman nationals for pickup and delivery.

The Hamidian regime's standard method of controlling the "damage" done by periodicals infiltrating the country through foreign post offices was to dispatch "verbal notes" from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy of the relevant country, demanding the interception of these publications at the post office. In general, they specified the publication by title, date, and number, instead of issuing a blanket order against certain publications, even though this implied that the lists would be endless and a new "verbal note" would be necessary every other day. Especially during the later years of Abdülhamid II's reign, the lists could and did include in addition blanket statements such as "all illustrated journals containing images related to the assassinations committed against their majesties the King of Italy and the Shah of Persia," "all historical newspapers for the year 1908 published in France," or "all journals published in Paris on February 29, 1908." Banned book and journal titles included, in addition to the usual suspects like Paul

⁴⁴Tugay, *İbret*, 37.

Fesch's *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, titles that seemed to have ended up in the list quite arbitrarily. For instance, "Dictionnaire Théologie Catholique," or "manael of artificial limes [sic]" were asked to be intercepted at the post office.⁴⁵ The violation that warranted their censure could have been as "grave" as a caricature of Abdülhamid II or as minute as the mere mention of a "mind-confusing" word. The sky was the limit for the censors, who could read subversion in practically anything printed on a piece of paper, be it a tram ticket or a cognac label, or a pamphlet on "Morphism."⁴⁶

Some of the banned materials were "smuggled" into the country hidden in larger packages, printed on very fine paper that made it easier to conceal the contents. Nevertheless, it seems that this was not a necessary precaution before 1899–1900, years during which the Sublime Porte intensified its attempts to curtail the brokerage of foreign post offices in the dissemination of banned material. A letter of the French Consul in Syria to Ambassador Cambon in Istanbul reveals that forbidden journals came "wrapped in various leaflets," but in such a condition that a "simple inspection" would expose them immediately. The Consul asked how to proceed in such a situation.⁴⁷ Cambon's response to this inquiry was that any action on the consul's part would be "excessive," since they were not mailed in a "conspicuous manner."⁴⁸ In fact, the French Foreign Ministry officials were extremely reluctant to accommodate the Sublime Porte's repeated demands to search and

⁴⁵MAE Sublime Porte to the French Embassy in Constantinople, vol. 392, April 24, 1891; vol. 393, February 13, 1897; vol. 394, August 8, 1900; vol. 395, September 2, November 23, December 28, and December 31, 1907. These pages refer only to the examples cited above; it is well beyond the efforts of an individual researcher to give a complete count of the verbal notes extended by the Porte, since they were being issued practically every other day. Paul Fesch's book, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul-Hamid*, was published in Paris in 1907; the dictionary mentioned is probably *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, that had started publication in 1899, and the "manael" could be George E. Marks's *Manual of Artificial Limbs* (New York: A.A.Marks, 1905).

⁴⁶The tram tickets were reprinted because the destination "Sultan Mahmud," which stood for the neighborhood around the tomb of the sultan, was printed in the old tickets. Since passengers could throw away pieces of paper with the name of the sultan printed, it was suggested that the destination name should be changed (Kabacalı, *Başlangıcından Günümüze*, 71–72). A journal written by Müstecabizâde İsmet Bey reported that the matchboxes imported from England had a color like blood, the brand-name was written in the shape of a sword, and furthermore, the word "union" was printed on them (Tugay, *İbret*, 29). Apparently Ottoman censors were not the only ones threatened by the power of certain words; a similar incident was witnessed in Austria around the same time, and the word "liberté" painted on some china boxes imported from France was erased by authorities (Goldstein, *Political Censorship*, 41).

⁴⁷MAE, vol. 393, Consul Souhart to Cambon, June 26, 1896.

⁴⁸MAE, vol. 393, Cambon to Souhart, July 21, 1896.

intercept packages at their post offices. The policy advised by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the post office administration in the Empire was to avoid “violating the privacy of correspondence” and compromising the “good reputation” of their institution.⁴⁹ It was understood that a blind eye would be turned on “suspicious packages” as long as they were sealed. The only compromise that French officials were willing to grant the Sublime Porte so that their bureau did not “serve as a transmission agent for writings injurious to the Ottoman government,” was to agree to intercept and return to sender publications that arrived unsealed—which was almost never the case.

The Palace, growing increasingly irritated by this state of affairs, asked permission to place inspectors in French post offices in 1897.⁵⁰ The attempt was a failure, and banned publications continued to circulate through foreign bookstores and personal networks with the relative ease that they had always enjoyed. In retaliation, the police extended their tactics to stalking non-Ottoman citizens leaving foreign post offices, and seizing the publications they were carrying. A warning was also issued that the seized publications would no longer be sent back to their country of origin, but be held by customs.⁵¹

In November 1899, a certain M. Audibert of French nationality was caught with fifty copies of a Young Turk journal outside the British post office. Tevfik Paşa demanded Audibert’s deportation from the country, which was refused by the French Embassy on the grounds that the sentence was based on an act performed illegally by the police. The matter was closed but Ambassador Constans worried that this sort of incident would not stop there because the Porte, invoking the Washington Convention’s 16th Article, had challenged the legal rights of foreign post offices to distribute banned publications within the Empire. Tevfik Paşa noted that the practice was “doubly abusive” since the functioning of these offices within the Empire had never been sanctioned by treaties.⁵² It would be difficult, Constans reckoned, to avoid ultimately giving in to the Porte’s repeated demands.⁵³ This echoed a sentiment that had been voiced recently by the foreign Minister Delcassé himself, when he reminded Constans of the established principle in dealing with the situation: the Sublime Porte could demand the interception of journals arriving without a cover, but this did not extend to sealed packages.⁵⁴

⁴⁹MAE, vol. 392, Department to Embassy, April 25, 1891; May 4, 1891.

⁵⁰MAE, vol. 393, Verbal note to the French Embassy, July 6, 1897.

⁵¹MAE, vol. 394, Consul in Smyrne to Constans, October 10, 1899.

⁵²MAE, vol. 394, Sublime Porte, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the French Embassy in Constantinople, November 18, 1899.

⁵³MAE, vol. 394, Constans to Delcassé, November 22, 1899.

⁵⁴MAE, vol. 394, Delcassé to Constans, October 22, 1899.

In practice, however, it seems that the French Post Office Administration, with the complicity of the French Foreign Ministry, applied this principle only temporarily, and in cases where the publications were not of French origin and ranked high in the “seditious publications” list. Preserving French cultural and political influence continued to be the major motive of the Embassy in resisting Ottoman censors.⁵⁵ It was this sensitivity to which the director of the Arabic journal *Al-Ahram* appealed, in his letter to Ambassador Constans dated January 16, 1900. The director complained that the French Post Office categorically refused to distribute their journals, which were published “under French influence.” Besides, *Al-Ahram* had just been published in a French edition titled “Les Pyramides,” a copy of which was presented to the Ambassador.⁵⁶ Constans’ reply simply stated that the distribution of banned papers by the French Post Office would not prevent their being seized by the police outside their bureaus. Therefore, the suspension had been necessary in order to avoid these regrettable scenes.⁵⁷

The Sublime Porte simply lacked the diplomatic weight necessary to enforce its threats effectively, and banned publications continued to pour into the country from the endless entry points. A letter by the director of the French Post Office in Istanbul to Ambassador Constans perfectly summarizes their policy toward the demands of the Porte. The letter was a reply to an inquiry precipitated by a complaint from the editor of the Paris-based “*La Revue*” that the journal’s distribution by the French Post had been suspended in accordance with the Ottoman censor’s demands. The following excerpt from the director’s response alone is sufficient to demonstrate why, despite its ubiquity, Hamidian censorship was bound to remain largely ineffective:

Your excellency knows that almost all journals published in Paris except “*Journal des Débats*” are banned in Turkey in a definitive manner. We distribute them, however, everyday, and if, occasionally, you order me to hold certain journals the prohibition of which has been requested by the Ottoman government with an insistence that makes one worry about the arrest of Ottoman subjects leaving our bureaus, or attempts [of arrests] on our postmen, I have always taken care, as you have kindly asked me to, to hold these journals on the day of their arrival, not to distribute them until one or two days later when police surveillance is loosened.⁵⁸

⁵⁵MAE, vol. 395, Consul in Salonika to Constans, May 15, 1908.

⁵⁶MAE, vol. 394, M. Tahlo, *Al-Ahram* Director, Cairo to Constans, January 16, 1900.

⁵⁷MAE, vol. 394, Constans to M. Tahlo, January 24, 1900.

⁵⁸MAE, vol. 395, M. Agélou, director of French Post Service in Constantinople to Constans, March 14, 1907.

Young Turks in Power

Working conditions of the Ottoman press under Hamidian autocracy have often been characterized as a state of coma that would only be disturbed by its “liberators” in 1908. I would suggest, however, that this period can more precisely be considered a comma, rather than a coma, given that its inertia was charged with a significant potential for growth. Abdülhamid II did not put to “sleep” a full-grown press, which suddenly revived after 1908. The press that the Hamidian period inherited was financially weak and unable to sustain itself, despite its energy and political activism. Under the regime of Abdülhamid II it was deprived of all its political character and of its defining purpose of existence, namely, reporting “the news.” On the other hand, by removing the stamp-tax on newspapers and providing subsidies, the state had directly assisted in the construction of an infrastructure for the press. More importantly, the potential for newspaper readership was broadened thanks to the increase in the accessibility and efficiency of public education. Ironically enough, most of the Hamidian regime’s opponents were raised in educational institutions that the sultan himself had inaugurated with great fanfare. Public education was a sword that could cut both ways, creating paradoxical policy decisions for modernizing monarchies all over Europe. The famous words of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Witte would have characterized the dilemmas of the Ottoman Sultan just as well: “Education foments social revolution, but popular ignorance loses wars.”⁵⁹

The revolution that ended the three-decade-long autocracy of Abdülhamid II was not led by the oppressed public, nor was it centered in the capital. It came from military leaders in Macedonia who threatened to march on Istanbul with the Second and Third Armies of the Empire under their command unless the constitution and the parliament were restored. On July 24, 1908, the day that the proclamation of the constitution was already being celebrated in Selânik by thousands gathered around the Konak (Governor’s mansion), Istanbul newspapers published, in small print, the news that elections for a new parliament would be held soon.

One day after this announcement, journalists in Istanbul were still hesitant about how to react to the reestablishment of the constitution. There was some concern that this might be a trap to identify all dissidents. In the recollection of Ahmet İhsan Tokgöz, the editor of *Servet-i Fünûn* (The Treasure of Sciences):

On Friday I walked to the port and bought a newspaper early in the morning. I was astounded by the three-line news that I read in the “official announcements” section. To be more precise, I simply could not believe my eyes. I looked

⁵⁹Quoted in Goldstein, *Political Censorship*, 10.

around; the ones who were holding papers in their hands were immobilized like me; they were reading the lines, asking “could it be true?,” but with the fearfulness of their souls, silenced by the execution of the oppressive regime, no one could utter a single word.⁶⁰

After the authenticity of the news was verified, the journalists, who had congregated in order to discuss their next step, decided to abolish censorship unilaterally.⁶¹ When the censors made their routine visit to collect copies of newspapers the day after, they were asked to leave, and they complied. For nearly another year, the abolition of all censorship was a *de facto* phenomenon, although it was not yet legally recognized.⁶²

During the first one and a half months following the reinstatement of the constitution, some two hundred newspaper licenses were issued. The circulation figures, which had been on average around two thousand copies, peaked to fifty thousand for certain periodicals.⁶³ The demand for newspaper licenses was at a steady increase, but this situation was also attributable to the emergence of a large number of papers, the primary objects of which were public display and humiliation of the alleged “spies” of the Hamidian era. During this feeding frenzy, exhibitions of the so-called “enemies of liberty” on front pages became the custom, and the destination of Hamidian-style *journals* diverted from the Yıldız Palace to newspaper bureaus.⁶⁴ Freedom of the press, as well as other civil liberties granted after the revolution, went virtually unchecked until the incident of March 31 (April 13), 1909, when a coup attempt to “restore the sharia” provided the Committee of Union and Progress with the pretext it needed to establish firmer control.

The Committee of Union and Progress combined two legacies of opposition to Abdülhamid II, those of exiled intellectuals and of an underground and more militant organization within the Empire that ultimately led the

⁶⁰Tokgöz, *Matbuât Hatıralarım*, 126. *Servet-i Fünûn* occupies a special place in Turkish literary history for starting a new literary trend named *Edebiyât-i Cedîde* (The New Literature). It was published continuously throughout the tumultuous period between 1891 and 1942, except for the three years following the First World War.

⁶¹Yalman, *Gördüklerim*, 62.

⁶²According to Ahmet İhsan, an ordinance was sent from the Ministry of Interior to all the post offices stating that all correspondence and printed material were free from censorship as of July 30, 1908. Yalman, *Gördüklerim*, 144.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 144–148. This figure should be read as an estimate rather than an exact number. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the circulation of periodicals had skyrocketed at this period. Tokgöz remarks that the distributors were crowding in front of the service door to their printing house and yelling for them to print faster. He also states that the circulation of *Servet-i Fünûn*, which had been turned into a daily at this time, had reached more than twenty thousand copies (Tokgöz, *Matbuât Hatıralarım*, 130).

⁶⁴İskit, *Türkiye’de Matbuat İdareleri*, 146; Yalman, *Gördüklerim*, 64.

movement for change of regime. Divisions within what was basically a loose alliance between fronts united exclusively by a shared hatred of Abdülhamid II and his regime had already been troubling the movement during its years in opposition.⁶⁵ When the Committee was recast as a legitimate political organization after the 1908 revolution, these rifts widened, and a struggle between the civil and military wings ensued, which would ultimately end with the dominance of the latter.

The Committee of Union and Progress (henceforth CUP) ruled the Ottoman Empire after 1908 until the end of the First World War in 1918. Exceptional and brief challenges to their authority were the March 31 incident in 1909 and the opposition coalition's incumbency from July 1912 to January 1913. Even though a parliamentary system had been adopted immediately following the revolution, regime change was attempted and prevented both times through the use of military force. The only potential for a more "democratic" challenge by the opposition parties that were combined under the umbrella of Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası (Party of Liberty and Consensus or Entente Libérale) was muted by CUP's coercion tactics during the elections of 1912, which were so corrupted that they came to be known as the "*sopalı seçim*" (election with the stick). The election itself had been called for as a response to a major government crisis following a by-election in December 1911 that had clearly demonstrated that CUP's hold on the senate and the parliament was no longer certain. Ironically, the Party of Liberty and Consensus took over the government not through elections, but with the intervention of a paramilitary group named Halaskâr Zâbitân (Savior Officials) in July 1912, ushering in the rule of what came to be called the Büyük Kabine (Grand Cabinet), which proved to be at least equally, if not more, repressive in its dealings with the opposition. The Büyük Kabine stayed in power until the coup of January 23, 1913, when it had to resign, literally at gunpoint. The coup led by Enver Bey (later Enver Paşa) first restored power to the CUP, and shortly afterward ended this episode of what would have been multi-party parliamentary regime in the Ottoman Empire.

The Legal Framework and the Ministry of the Interior

The period 1908–1913 for the Ottoman press may be characterized by certain features that were shared with the Hamidian times, such as the perpetual troubles with foreign post offices and periodical migrations of the opposition abroad. After they came to power, the Young Turks did not construct a central bureaucracy from scratch. They inherited an articulate net-

⁶⁵An exhaustive account of these years is found in M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, and Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

work of *governing* that functioned as a reflection of the state ideology. It was exactly this ideology that the Young Turks set out to replace. The ideal of a “loyal subject” gave way to another ideal of “loyal citizen,” whereby allegiances would be paid to the *system* rather than the person of the sultan. The CUP rule also attempted to normalize the process of social and political control, a task that was started but not completed during the reign of Abdülhamid II. The principal demonstrations of this effort were the centralization of the control of press affairs under the Ministry of the Interior and the enactment of the first body of legislation concerning the press in 1909. After the constitution was reestablished, its twelfth article concerning the press, which stated “press is free within the limits of law,” remained in effect. As the constitution was being revised in April 1909, another clause was appended: “by no means can it be subject to prior inspection and examination,”⁶⁶ which registered the abolition of censorship in the constitution. The Law that would that would define the “limits of freedom” for the press was issued on July 29, 1909.⁶⁷

The law of 1909 consisted of four sections that covered general legal requirements, penal provisions, conditions of libel, and other miscellaneous items. The first section concerned the *müdîr-i mes’ul* (responsible manager, or editor-in-chief), whom every periodical had to appoint. He or she could be any Ottoman citizen above the age of twenty-one of sound mind, with no prior convictions for inferior crimes, and fluent in the language of the publication. License applications had to include information about the publication, including its title, location, and language, the name, residence, and occupation of the editor, and the subject of focus for the periodical. The Ministry of the Interior in Istanbul and governorships in the provinces would be the issuing agencies for periodical licenses.

The second section defined offenses that required penal action. Major categories were: calumny, publishing information about secret court sessions, publishing issues declared contrary to morals by courts, offending any of the recognized religions, sects, or ethnicities, and publishing false information. In addition, this legislation authorized the suspension of a periodical charged with provoking and encouraging crime against the government until the court case against it was finalized (Articles 17 and 23). Another significant feature of this section was its ranking of criminal responsibility. The ranking started with the editor or his/her representative at the top, and continued as follows: the author of the article in question, the printer, and finally, the vendors (including newspaper boys). In other words, every-

⁶⁶Kabacalı, *Başlangıcından Günümüze*, 83.

⁶⁷*Düstûr*, 1325, vol. 1 (1909). All the following references to this law will be from this *Düstûr* (Law Book) unless indicated otherwise.

body engaged in production and sales, with the sole exception of the reader, shared criminal liability.⁶⁸

The third section defined what constituted *zemm ü kadh* (libel) against the sultan, the rulers or governments of friendly countries, the Ottoman parliament and senate members, and ordinary individuals. Damage to personal integrity or pride was recognized as the precondition of libel, while criticism would not require punitive action. The fourth section stated which courts would be in charge of hearing press offenses, and how information concerning the state's defense policy during war or threat of war would be published. The thirty-fifth article of this section, which set forth the terms for banning the importation of periodicals from abroad and from the autonomous province of Egypt, would become the most frequently quoted part of the Press Law of 1909, since the hardest task for the central authority continued to be the control of the flow of "harmful" publications from abroad.

The Press Law of 1909 did not provide for any pre-publication assessment; its main emphasis was on circulation. However, this would prove to be more detrimental for publishers, who under the previous administration did not have to take the financial risk of recalls. Modifications to the law were made throughout this period, as experience indicated the need, and the Press Law was continuously appended with "temporary" provisions that made it more restrictive, like the revision of March 1912,⁶⁹ which established a minimum education requirement for editors. The same provision also required that editor and the publisher deposit a *kefâlet akçası* (bond)—with the exception of editors and publishers of the already existing periodicals. Another article was appended at the same time prohibiting state officials from declaring their opinions of state departments, foreign or domestic policy, or criticism of martial rule. The publication of such announcements was banned, and editors were held criminally liable for hiding the names of persons sending such articles. Martial law, justified by the Balkan crisis, gave the state the authority to tighten control on the flow of information. For instance, publication of material that would encourage Ottoman soldiers to disobey was banned, and violation of this ban was punishable with *kala'abendlik* (confinement in a fortress).⁷⁰ In addition to publications, meetings and conferences convened for the same purpose were banned. On September 24, 1912, a tem-

⁶⁸Although there were no legal provisions stating that the reader shared criminal liability for possessing a banned publication, there were cases of people being arrested for this reason. BBA, DH SYS 55–2/2, Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice, July 5, 1912.

⁶⁹*Düstûr*, vol. 3, 1328 (1912), p. 365.

⁷⁰*Düstûr*, vol. 3, 1328 (1912), p. 632.

porary provision was also added to the Law of Penal Court Procedures, to minimize the duration of legal procedures invoked by a press offense.⁷¹

In March 1913, the Press Law underwent extensive modification, which made it even more restrictive. Governors, who were responsible for enforcing the Press Law in the provinces, had been complaining about its incapacity,⁷² but it is more likely that the motive for the revision was to eliminate the possibility of another Grand Cabinet-style opposition rather than accommodating their concerns, since these warnings had gone unheeded by the central authority before.⁷³ The March 1912 provision concerning editors would be applied retroactively to all periodicals. Senators, deputies, and all state officials were also prohibited from becoming editors of newspapers.⁷⁴

A loophole in the original 1909 Law had allowed suspended newspapers to escape court orders by reappearing under different names. In fact, it seems that some editors kept a few extra licenses handy for a rainy day, so the paper could continue publication without the interruption of a lengthy bureaucratic procedure. The names under which the papers reappeared rhymed ridiculously with the one they replaced, revealing that the charade was carried out in complete and open defiance of authorities. Hüseyin Câhid's *Tanin* (Echo) probably held the record with this practice, having appeared under the names *Cenin* (Fetus), *Renin* (Scream), and *Senin* (Yours) within less than a six-month period.⁷⁵ The correspondence of the *Matbu'at-ı Dâhiliye Müdüriyeti* (Administration of Internal Press Affairs) with the Ministry of the Interior in December reveals that the final attempt of the *Tanin* administration to circumvent the authorities by publishing the paper under the name *Hak* (Right) was prevented with a decision dated November 25, 1912, which preemptively banned all newspapers that would be published by the board of *Tanin* no matter what their titles were.⁷⁶ The revision sought

⁷¹*Düstûr*, vol. 3, 1328 (1912), pp. 633-635.

⁷²The governors of Baghdad and Syria, for instance, had written to the Ministry of the Interior in December 1910 and March 1911 respectively, complaining that the existing law was too flexible to cope with harmful publications. BBA, DH SYS 55-1/77, DH SYS 64/25.

⁷³In an encrypted message addressed to the Ministry of the Interior dated December 11, the governor of Baghdad had asserted that the strategically dangerous position of the region required immediate intervention, whereas the approval of a new provision would take some time. He was implying that extra-legal action was necessary. However, the Ministry of the Interior did not approve the imposition of *mu'amele-i şedîde* (forceful treatment), proposed by the governor. On December 21, 1910, the legal consultant of the ministry stamped the governor's letter, stating it was not advisable to exceed the limits set by law. BBA, DH SYS 55-1/77.

⁷⁴*Düstûr*, vol. 4, 1329 (1913), 181-185.

⁷⁵İskit, *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri*, 174.

⁷⁶BBA, DH SYS 57-2/42.

to consolidate this practice by further specifying that at least fifteen years had to pass before the same or similar title of a previously suspended newspaper could be used by another one.

The 1909 prohibition on vendors publicizing the contents of papers by shouting was reasserted. Vendors were further required to register at the local police stations, where they would be issued a permit free of charge. All agents engaged in the act of publishing and distributing a periodical, from the editor to the street vendor, would thus be officially registered, classified, and controlled. The government was determined not to leave a “single crime without a corresponding law.” The nineteenth article, for instance, which was originally a modest ban on inauthentic information, was re-written, classifying the reporting of inauthentic news or altering the contents of official announcements or speeches as seditious libel. Quoting such news would constitute a separate crime in itself, and enclosing a note of caution or disapproval would not exempt the publisher from criminal responsibility. The definition of a political press offense and its sphere of responsibility had been broadened. An interesting aspect of the revision was that it also banned the publisher from launching a campaign of support to cover the financial losses in the event that the newspaper was closed down by the government.

The absence of pre-publication surveillance, combined with such a tight legal framework, actually increased the stakes for publishers and journalists who had to take larger financial risks than under the previous regime, during which papers were approved by the censors before circulation, which minimized suspension risks. This was a problem suffered by many journalists, reflected in petitions to the Ministry of the Interior. Surprisingly enough, the journalists’ demands of some kind of financial assistance or reduction in their terms were often granted. For instance, the governor of Kastamoni wrote to the Ministry of the Interior on March 11, 1910, asking for a special allocation of one *mecidiye* for Hüseyin Hilmi of the socialist newspaper *İnsâniyet* (Humanity), who had been exiled to Kastamoni. Similarly, on April 17, 1910, the editor and publisher of *Mu’âhede* (Pact), Hamdi Subhi, petitioned the Ministry of the Interior, complaining about not receiving the slightest sympathy and charity that even “dogs” seemed to be enjoying. Apparently, Hamdi Subhi’s wording of his wishes did not help improve his situation initially. It seems, however, that he eventually managed to obtain a modest allocation, since the governor of Ankara himself wrote to the Ministry on March 23, 1911, asking for pocket money for Subhi and for İsmâil Fâik, the publisher of *İnsâniyet*.⁷⁷ In similar fashion, Ayşe Hanım, the wife of Kadri Bey, a columnist of the newspaper *Meslek* (Policy), handed a petition to the Minis-

⁷⁷BBA, DH SYS 55–1/34.

try of the Interior on January 3, 1912, pleading that she and her five children were in a difficult situation, since they were deprived of their only source of income after Kadri Bey's arrest by a martial court. Ayşe Hanım requested that Kadri Bey's term of sentence be shortened, which was approved by the Ministry of Interior on February 6, 1912.⁷⁸

The similarity of this practice with Abdülhamid II's methods of co-opting or buying off opponents is striking. Yet, there was a significant difference between the two regimes in that punishment and benevolence were now granted through a bureaucratic procedure in a more impersonal manner, not as acts of grace or chastisement of a "father" toward his irresponsible children. The real break with the past was manifested most clearly in the expansion of the sphere of influence of the Ministry of the Interior, which emerged as the main authority overseeing the flow of printed material during this period.

A perfect example demonstrating this new crystallization of authority and strict division of tasks across different government bureaus is the handling of the case of Hüseyin Câhid, who was harassed frequently by authorities during the short term of the Grand Cabinet, since he was an open CUP supporter. Hüseyin Câhid had suspended the publication of his paper, *Tanin*, between July 28 and August 8, 1912, as an act of protest against the dissolution of the parliament.⁷⁹ Shortly after resuming publication, he was sentenced to one month in prison by a martial court with charges that his articles "threatened public order." The author's decision to continue writing articles from prison resulted in an interesting dispute between the Ministries of Justice and of the Interior, which held entirely opposing notions on the legitimacy of this act.

In a petition summoned to İstînâf Müddei-i Umûmîliği (Office of Public Prosecution), Hüseyin Câhid argued that neither the Press Law nor the General Penitentiary Regulation included an article against his writing and sending articles to his paper during the time he was in jail, but he was being prevented on orders by the Minister of the Interior. This petition was evidently passed on to the Ministry of Justice, which would decide whether Hüseyin Câhid's complaint was justified. Ali Kemal, the Minister of Justice, wrote to the Ministry of the Interior on September 10, 1912, stating it had been verified by the Polis Müdîr-i Umûmîliği (General Administration of Police) and the penitentiary management that Hüseyin Câhid was prevented from sending his articles by the Ministry's order. This situation "required an explanation" since it was not "approvable to ban things that are not *legally* banned." Before replying to this communiqué, the Ministry of the In-

⁷⁸BBA, DH SYS 55-1/88.

⁷⁹İskit, *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri*, 174.

terior referred to its legal consultant, who argued that while it was obvious that sending articles from jail was not illegal, this author had been writing articles that threatened general security, and therefore was banned from writing, for the maintenance of order and security. It is remarkable that the Ministry of the Interior needed “legal” advice from a consultant to defend its decision regarding a journalist who had been sentenced to prison because of his writings in the first place.

Having received the required “legal” report, the Ministry of the Interior wrote back to the Ministry of Justice on September 13, 1912. In a style that bordered on arrogance, it was stated that the Ministry of the Interior was “the sole authority to decide” what was “mind-confusing” and what was not. Therefore, the intervention of the Court of Appeal was incomprehensible.⁸⁰ There were no other documents in this folder hinting that the dispute continued, but Hüseyin Câhid was released soon after this, thanks to an *irâde* (imperial decree) issued on September 22, 1912.

After 1909, the Ministry of the Interior’s authority was also extended to the control of publications entering the country from abroad or from the autonomous province of Egypt. Even though provincial governorships were responsible and authorized to alert the center about “mind-confusing” publications being handled by post offices in their jurisdiction, the final banning decisions were issued by the Ministry of the Interior. The wording of the governor’s repetitive complaints to the Ministry of the Interior about neglect of duty or legislative laxity concerning “harmful” periodicals suggests that the provincial administrators took a long time to shed their old habits and adjust to the shift in state ideology that no longer rewarded personal initiative. Correspondence between the Ministry of the Interior and the governor of Edirne dating from 1911 illustrates this point quite forcefully. The governor expressed his alarm that despite a ban of the Ministry, the *hezeyannâme* (delirious writings) named *Meşrûtiyet*⁸¹ continued to be delivered via Ottoman post offices because of clerks who overlooked “obviously suspicious” packages containing this newspaper. The governor asserted that “spies” must have been planted as workers at the post offices, given that it was inconceivable that a state official would engage in such a “treasonous neglect of duty.” These persons were either “traitors” or they lacked “intellect and reason,” but in either case, something had to be done against the managers who employed them. One month later, on March 19, 1911, the same governor would write again to express his disappointment with the Ministry of the Interior’s lack of interest on the issue. The Ministry

⁸⁰BBA, DH SYS 57-2/32.

⁸¹*Meşrûtiyet* was among the most frequently suspended and also most popular newspapers; BBA, MV 133/79; MV 137/55.

of the Interior found the solution in referring the issue to the Ministry of Commerce on April 4, 1911.⁸² There was no indication, however, that the governor's worries were addressed in any serious fashion.

Similar reports dispatched from other provinces testify to the effect that the governor of Edirne was not an exceptional relic of the past.⁸³ Nostalgia about the Hamidian times was voiced even more effectively by the governor of Selânik, who protested the mail workers' smug incompetence in a letter to the Ministry dated October 26, 1910, with the following words: "It is regretful that in contrast to the preceding period, when we did not even allow birds to fly over the post office, such an obvious situation is tolerated under the present administration." The response of the Ministry of the Interior signifies that the change that took place under the "present administration" extended not only to the birds flying over the unprotected post office. In a letter dated November 2, 1910, the governor was informed that sealed envelopes could not be inspected by office clerks because of a prior announcement asserting compliance with an article of the constitution that protected the privacy of letters.⁸⁴

The Ministry's sensitivity on the constitution's article that protected the privacy of correspondence should not, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered as an indicator of the regime's commitment to "constitutionalism." The Ministry was in effect informing the governor of an announcement that had been issued by the center and reminding him that everything was under (their) control. It is likely that this was another marker that the new regime used in order to distinguish itself from the old. However, just like the abolition of pre-publication censorship, this new principle represented more a concern with appearances than substantial change. It should not come as a surprise, then, that many journalists were serving indefinite terms of exile in the Aegean islands, while the Ministry of the Interior dispensed lessons on the constitution to the governor of Selânik.⁸⁵ Besides, the Ministry was well aware that the same journals that prompted governors to draft lengthy and almost hysterical reports were tolerated and widely read in the capital. A memorandum sent on November 10, 1909, from the undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior to the Şurâ-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 cus-

⁸²BBA, DH SYS 57-1/18.

⁸³BBA, DH SYS 55-1/77; DH SYS 64/25.

⁸⁴BBA, DH SYS 57-1/18.

⁸⁵One famous exile was Mizancı Murad, who spent time in Rhodes and Mitylene (Island of Lesbos). He was pardoned in a general amnesty on May 1, 1912. BBA, DH SYS 41/6.

toms officials at the borders, namely, *Serbestî* (Liberty). This memorandum stated that copies of *Serbestî* were seen on desks in many official bureaus. It was stated matter-of-factly that care should be taken not to leave these copies lying around on desks.⁸⁶ The Hamidian days when even the smallest act of loyalty found its reward were over, and the bureaucratic hierarchy, especially the post office clerks, no longer had a solid incentive to search every package that came into their bureaus. In fact, the real problem for the newspaper subscriber during this period not that their packages were being intercepted because the contents were banned but because the clerks wanted to read the papers themselves. In a caricature by Halit Naci published in April 1910, a mailman delivers a package to Karagöz, telling him he also had a few newspapers but his friend at the office is still reading them, to which Karagöz replies: "Well then, at least let me know which ones you prefer, I shall subscribe to those."⁸⁷



Foreign Post Offices and Subversion:

The CUP introduced two new legislative and administrative devices for the regulation of imported periodicals. The first one was the thirty-fifth article of the 1909 Press Law, according to which:

The banning of publication and distribution in the Ottoman Empire of periodicals published abroad or in the autonomous province [Egypt] occurs upon

⁸⁶BBA, ŞD Dahiliye 26/3. I would like to thank Prof. Hanioğlu for bringing this document to my attention.

⁸⁷Karagöz, no. 190 (April 24, 1910), p. 4, reprinted in Çeviker, *Gelişim Sürecinde Türk Karikatürü*, vol. 2, 230.

a proper decision taken by the Council of Ministers, and only one issue can be banned following an order by the Ministry of Interior. Those who deliberately sell or distribute a periodical that has thus been banned are liable for a penalty of two to fifteen liras.⁸⁸

The second was a bureau named *Matbuat Müdüriyet-i Umûmiyesi* (General Management of Press Affairs), formed by merging the Administrations of Internal and Foreign Press Affairs on April 17, 1913, which used to be two separate bureaus under the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs.⁸⁹ The new bureau was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, most probably because they had qualified personnel who could read publications in various foreign languages. It should be noted, however, that the role of this bureau in the banning procedure was secondary compared to that of the Ministry of the Interior and the governorships. In cases that required close inspection of a certain foreign periodical in order to determine the degree of potential “harm” posed by the publication, the matter was first referred to the Administration of Press Affairs, which had a bureau in Istanbul. This time-consuming forwarding procedure often made it inconvenient to send material from faraway provinces. Especially in the case of the province of Egypt, which, by virtue of being only nominally under Ottoman suzerainty, hosted many of the publications regarded as pests by the center, it was common practice by the local Ottoman administrator to take the initiative and recommend a banning decision to the central authority.⁹⁰

Since the importation or “smuggling” of periodicals was a matter of concern for the customs and post offices, the banning decision was also forwarded to the Ministries of Commerce and Communication and, in certain cases, Foreign Affairs.⁹¹ Article thirty-five was the most frequently quoted legal clause in all of these documents, underscoring its importance in the new censorship mechanism. The article did not authorize indefinite banning decisions, but in many cases it could constitute a legal pretext to stop the importation of a certain periodical for extended periods of time, especially if the periodical had a history of conflict with the CUP.

A decision to ban the import of a certain publication was the outcome of a fairly complex bureaucratic process. After the governor—or the Commis-

⁸⁸*Düstur*, vol. 1, 1325 (1909), p. 403.

⁸⁹*Düstur*, vol. 4, 1329 (1913), pp. 308–309.

⁹⁰BBA, BEO MTZ (Egypt) 9-C/299-4, Ottoman High Commissioner in Egypt to the Grand Vezir, February 26, 1912; BBA, DH SYS 55-1/77, governor of Baghdad to the Ministry of the Interior, December 11, 1910.

⁹¹BBA, BEO MTZ 9-C/299-4, Bureau of the autonomous province of Egypt to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 9, 1912; from the same bureau to the Ministries of the Interior, Commerce, and Communication, February 27, 1912.

sioner, in the case of Egypt—informed the center of a problem publication, it was determined whether the act was a repetitive offense, in which case the Ministry of the Interior wrote a memorandum to the Grand Vezir's office, asking the Meclis-i Vükelâ (Council of Ministers) to formally authorize the decision and issue a banning order based on the thirty-fifth article of the Press Law.⁹² After the order was issued, it was passed on to all relevant bureaus and ministries such as the post offices, customs, and the Ministries of Commerce and Communication. The time lapse between a newspaper being published and the Meclis-i Vükelâ issuing the decision could be relatively short, thanks to an efficient telegram network inherited from the Hamidian times, but it also took a while until the decision was actually enacted, and given that the publications in question were usually dailies or weeklies, it was still a considerable lapse.⁹³

A glance through the *Meclis-i Vükelâ Mazbataları* (Proceedings of the Council of Ministers) of this period reveals that three categories of publications were frequently targeted. These were the nationalist presses, the Islamist Press, and organs of political groups in opposition to the CUP (or the CUP supporters themselves during the time of the Grand Cabinet).⁹⁴ Just as in the Hamidian period, publishers favored the time-honored method of using non-Ottoman proxies to circumvent these decisions. An important example is the newspaper *Serbestî*, published by a pro-British opponent of the CUP, Mevlanzâde Rif'at. Mevlanzâde was among the dissidents who had fled the country after the intervention of the Hareket Ordusu to suppress the April 13 counterrevolution. He reestablished *Serbestî* in Paris, but its importation

⁹²It is interesting to note that officials in Egypt, in a majority of the cases, reported to the Grand Vezir's office, upon which the Eyâlât-ı Mümtâze Kalemî (The Bureau of the Autonomous Provinces) within the Grand Vezir's office informed the Ministry of the Interior (BBA, BEO MTZ 9-C/299-4 February 27, 1912), whereas the standard procedure for other provinces was to bring the publication directly to the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See also BBA, BEO MTZ 9-C/299-4, Ministry of the Interior to the Grand Vezirate, March 24, 1912. It was only occasionally that the periodicals would be sent to the Matbuat Müdüriyet-i Umûmiyesi, BBA, BEO MTZ 30/27.

⁹³For instance, an article published in *al-Mu'ayyad* by Azimzâde Refik on February 18, 1913, was brought to the attention of the Grand Vezirate on February 24, and the *Meclis-i Vükelâ*'s decision suspending the importation of *al-Mu'ayyad*, based on the thirty-fifth article of the Press Law, was issued on February 26, 1913. BBA, BEO MTZ 9-C/299-4, Ministry of Interior to the Grand Vezirate; BBA, MV 174/99.

⁹⁴Greek and Arab nationalist presses seem to have dominated the list of nationalist papers, for which see BBA, MV 133/81, 141/71, 142/76, 165/71, 151/59, 175/54; and BBA, MV 139/13, 143/5, 144/20, 165/59, 174/38, 174/99, 175/46. For the Islamist press, BBA, MV 126/53, 128/42; and for publications of Ottoman political opposition in Europe and Egypt, BBA, MV 130/61, 133/79, 133/86, 174/21. Individual lists are too numerous to cite here.

was banned with a decision of the Meclis-i Vükelâ on August 8, 1909.⁹⁵ Mevlanzâde then moved his paper to Cairo, and started publishing it under the name *Yeni Serbestî* (New Serbestî) on January 17, 1910. The Ottoman High Commissioner in Egypt promptly informed the Grand Vezir's office of this event, asserting that Mevlanzâde was not given permission by the local government.⁹⁶ He had found, however, a French national to assume responsibility of his newspaper, which made an intervention at the consular level necessary. Although an official from the Commissioner's office had been sent to the consulate to settle the problem, he had been told in reply that an evaluation of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs was required before they could take any action.

The rest of the story reflects perfectly how difficult it was for the Ottoman government to operate a control mechanism against a publication under the indifferent—yet protective—shield of European Powers. A few days later, on January 23, 1910, the Commissioner's Office sent another message stating that the newspaper was banned by the government, and the printing house where it was being published had been surrounded by the police in order to seize the copies that had left the building. In the meantime, the second issue had already been printed.⁹⁷ Since the owner of the printing press was French, the police could not break in. The Commissioner asked the Porte to initiate negotiations with the French Embassy in Istanbul. While they were busy policing the printing press in Cairo, the Ministry of the Interior was dealing with the legal side of the issue in Istanbul. The ministry wrote a memo to the Grand Vezirate stating that *Serbestî* had started publication in Egypt, and in order to eliminate any confusion that might arise from the change in the location of this publication, all the proper bureaus needed to be warned. Therefore, the Meclis-i Vükelâ was asked to issue another decision banning the importation of *Serbestî* based upon the thirty-fifth article of the Press Law.⁹⁸

There is no mention as to whether the Sublime Porte did try to negotiate the issue with the Embassy in Istanbul, but apparently there were further inquiries at the consulate level in Egypt.⁹⁹ However, it is likely that the at-

⁹⁵BBA, MV 130/61.

⁹⁶BBA, BEO MTZ 5-D/201, decipher from the Ottoman High Commissioner's office in Egypt to the Grand Vezirate, January 19, 1910.

⁹⁷BBA, BEO MTZ 5-D/201, the Commissioner to the Grand Vezir, January 23, 1910.

⁹⁸BBA, BEO MTZ 5-D/201, Ministry of the Interior to the Grand Vezir, January 31, 1910. The Council of Ministers issued the decision on February 3, 1910.

⁹⁹Unfortunately, I was not able to locate the file at the MMA archives in Nantes that would have provided the French side of the story. Given their previous record and the Commissioner's letter to the Porte, however, it is reasonable to assume that the French would express standard assurances without really interfering with the matter.

tempts to solve the problem via the consulate were fruitless. The superintendent informed the Porte on February 1, 1910, that the consulate was not able to take action against the editor, who had turned out to be a Belgian citizen. The owner of the printing press was French, though, and the consulate had assured that he would be “ordered and warned” not to publish the paper.¹⁰⁰

Clearly the Ottoman government could establish no real control over the publications entering the country through foreign post offices as long as the Empire lacked any leverage that it might use against the European Powers that operated them. The helpless situation of publications “unfavorable” to the Empire was alleviated, to the extent possible, through a very Hamidian tactic of retaliation by “favorable” publications. Even though remuneration must have been modest compared with the previous period, the opulence of which had generated a side-industry, it was not uncommon to find journalists receiving a little “encouragement” from the Ottoman government under the Young Turks. For instance, a certain “Monsieur Colrat” financed his “business travels” in 1912 by the graciousness of the Ottoman government. In a top-secret correspondence dated March 30, 1912, the bureau of the autonomous province of Egypt informed the Ministry of War that Monsieur Colrat, the publisher and columnist of the newspaper *Le Nil*, was giving the enemies of the empire the answers that they deserved with his articles. Therefore, it was recommended that he be assigned the sixty gold liras, allowance he demanded for his travel to the “abode of war.”¹⁰¹ The allowance was approved by the Ministry of War on April 7, 1912.¹⁰² Strikingly, this policy was continued during the administration of the so-called Grand Cabinet as well, which suggests that the practice must have been adopted as a policy staple. The Ottoman High Commissioner of Egypt, in a correspondence dated September 11, 1912, informed the Grand Vezirate that Monsieur Colrat would have to close down his paper upon his return from the abode of war due to his financial problems. It was suggested that he be assigned a monthly allowance of 30 or 40 liras.¹⁰³ Monsieur Colrat had discovered a source

¹⁰⁰BBA, BEO MTZ 5-D/201, Ottoman High Commissioner to the Grand Vezir’s office, February 1, 1910.

¹⁰¹BBA, BEO MTZ 9-C/299-4.

¹⁰²Bureau of the autonomous province of Egypt to Office of the High Commissioner, April 7, 1912. Another top-secret correspondence from the Ministry of War to the Grand Vezirate dated April 2, 1912, indicates that Monsieur Colrat had a monthly allowance of twelve golden liras. The same document reveals that the Ministry of War wanted to put another newspaper on the payroll and asked for an approval. BBA, BEO MTZ 9-C/299-4.

¹⁰³Ibid. The Ottoman High Commissioner reported that Colrat had acted in favor of the Ottoman state in the articles that he published as well as the reports he gave to foreign newspapers.

of income as stable as a pension plan, which was not even influenced by changes of cabinets.

The CUP's tactics in dealing with political opposition and subversion were not always as compassionate as the examples of journalists pardoned to resume their means of living, or bribes offered for friendly editorials, might lead us to believe. It must be remembered that the CUP also introduced the use of violence against political opposition, including journalists. The assassinations of Hasan Fehmi, the editor of *Hukûk-u Umûmiye* (General Rights), in 1909 and of Ahmet Samim, writer for *Sadâ-yı Millet* (Voice of the People) in 1910, constitute the best-known examples.¹⁰⁴ Even though the perpetrators were never brought to justice, it was publicly known that CUP *fedâis* (self-sacrificing volunteers) were responsible for both crimes, and the victims' funerals, especially that of Hasan Fehmi, were turned into demonstrations against the party's authoritarianism.

The *fedâis* were an off-shoot of the CUP's maintenance of its underground "committee" characteristic even after its emergence as a legitimate political party. As unregistered volunteers, the *fedâis* conveniently took the burden of legal accountability off the Party's shoulders whenever a misuse of power was in question, and performed all the unsavory tasks that an elected political party should have vowed to prevent.¹⁰⁵ Beating up newspaper boys selling pro-opposition papers was one of these.¹⁰⁶ Others included beating up representatives of the opposition party, *Hürriyet ve İtilâf* (henceforth HI), when it looked like they exercised their constitutional right to convene and talk to the public.¹⁰⁷ In a petition to the Ministry of the Interior dated January 27, 1911, the HI central committee complained that their representative, Mustafa Nuri Bey, who was in Serez to open up a branch in compliance with the law, had "hardly saved his life from a *fedâi* of the committee," who had beaten him more than five hundred times with a stick. Although it is quite clear, from an encrypted message sent by the Governor to the Ministry of

¹⁰⁴Hasan Fehmi was also writing for Mevlanzade Rifat's aforementioned *Serbestî*. One rumor was that the assassin had shouted "Here is for you, Mevlân!" before shooting at Fehmi, which may mean that he was actually after Rifat. Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihad ve Terakkî* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1987), 122-123.

¹⁰⁵Eventually this "informal" group was organized under the name *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa* [Special Organization] in 1914. They were not only instrumental in petty political crimes, but also in larger-scale "activities," such as suppressing nationalist rebellions and ultimately the massacre of Ottoman Armenians; see Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 119.

¹⁰⁶As a general rule, a person could not sell papers of different political camps. Personal communication with Prof. Şükrü Hanioglu, April 2, 1997.

¹⁰⁷A relatively less violent method was preventing the party members from traveling. For instance, two HI representatives were sent back to Amasya by the local government of Zile, where they had gone to open up a branch. BBA, DH SYS 53/54.

the Interior, that the identity of the *fedâi* was known, it is doubtful whether he was actually charged and sentenced. In another encrypted message sent by the Vâli Vekîli Tahrirât Müdîri (Secretary General of the Assistant Governor), it was reported that the *fedâi*, Muhacir Ahmed, had come to the Governorship himself to report what had happened. Both reports asserted that Muhacir Ahmed had been (rightfully) provoked by words said against the Sultan by Mustafa Nuri. The governor refrained from condemning the incident and stated that a sentence could only be issued after an “objective” investigation, which suggests that Muhacir Ahmed got away with the five hundred blows he had delivered.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

This article has sketches the development of press censorship in the Ottoman Empire from its inception in the second half of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of the First World War. Special emphasis was placed on the transformation and institutionalization of censorship under the Young Turks, countering the myth that the second constitutional period was a time of unbounded liberty for the Ottoman press. Viewing press censorship as a reflection of the dominant political culture of the period, and also as an indicator of state modernization, the following concluding remarks concern the resemblances and discontinuities between Hamidian censorship and censorship under the Young Turks.

Abdülhamid II attempted to revive the classic concept of Sultanic legitimacy for the Ottoman state, the most important component of which was a class of *kuls*, or in this case palace officials, whose only *raison d'être* was loyalty to the sultan. Taken to its logical extreme, and adopted by a bureaucracy of Kafkaesque proportions, this system produced an unspoken set of rules that determined which printed words could circulate within the Empire, and which would “confuse minds.” The suffocating atmosphere in which the press was the forced to function owed its existence not so much to draconian rules and regulations as to the creation of a hierarchical system that rewarded only personal loyalty to the sultan, generating self-censorship as a form of control with an independent dynamic of its own. The corollary to self-censorship was informing, because following the unspoken rules was not sufficient proof of loyalty; one also had to demonstrate that s/he was watching those who did not. In this respect, it was the threat of censorship, rather than censorship, itself that ensured the perpetuation of this unique political culture.

As was clearly revealed by the sources cited above, the palace was well aware of the limitations that rendered a total control over the circulation of

¹⁰⁸BBA, DH SYS 53/28, January 25 and 26, 1911.

banned publications within the Empire impossible. Abdülhamid II's obsession with controlling the printed word may have been aggravated by his personality, but it was primarily induced by his beliefs about preserving the state, and he did not differ much from his opponents, the Young Turks, in this respect. Painfully aware of the Ottoman Empire's transition from world power into a political entity at the fringes of Western European capitalism, he tried to hold this collapsing venture together by simulating the glory of its past through the revival of its classical institutions like the caliphate, but just as easily adopted methods offered by modernity, such as centralized education, communications, and even photography to foster and propagate the integrity of the Empire.¹⁰⁹ Censorship was a cocoon Abdülhamid II wove around his "well-protected domains" that insulated, albeit imperfectly, the Empire and its subjects from the offensive realities of European power politics, as if all the humiliations that led to the Treaty of Berlin could be erased by touch of magic—or Chinese ink, in this particular case—when the "Dictionnaire complet illustré de Larousse" was made to excise the date 1878 and all that it invoked from its entry on Berlin.¹¹⁰

Under the CUP, however, 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 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. The abolition of pre-publication censorship was a superficial demonstration of liberalism, which in fact placed a higher burden on everyone involved in the publication and sale of a periodical or a book, since they were now *legally* liable for its contents, and petitions and reports to officials no longer guaranteed a pardon from the state.

The CUP administration was more interested in keeping popular meetings and conferences organized by HI under surveillance than in censoring their publications, which they knew, from their own experience in opposition, were bound to circulate.¹¹¹ Their open prevention did not match the "liberal" image that the party wanted to promote, and the limited appeal of the printed word to the crowds that both parties wanted to enlist made the effort a relatively worthless one in the eyes of the administrators. In re-

¹⁰⁹For an authoritative analysis of the recasting of state ideology during the reign of Abdülhamid II, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*.

¹¹⁰MAE, vol. 392, French Embassy to M. Hollier Larousse and associates, October 3, 1893.

¹¹¹Provincial administrators regularly sent detailed reports to the Ministry of the Interior about these meetings. BBA, DH-SYS 53/28, 53/29, 53/41, 53/46, 53/50, 53/52, 53/54, 55-1/97, 55-2/3-26.

sponse to a warning by the Ministry of Interior about a general propaganda pamphlet that the HI was distributing in the provinces, for instance, the governor of Van wrote that the general education level of people was not high enough to be “corrupted” by such propaganda, which depended on a basic level of literacy.¹¹² Financially restrictive measures for the press introduced by the CUP regime, such as bonds, the stamp tax, and indefinite newspaper closings, attest to the Committee’s inclination to view the printed word as a more dangerous occupation for the lower classes, a distinction which was not equally significant during the Hamidian era.

¹¹²BBA, DH SYS 55-2/26.