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LEGITIMACY STRUCTURES IN THE OTTOMAN STATE: THE REIGN OF ABDÛLHAMID II (1876–1909)

For those who have, or once had it, power holds a strange fascination. For that very reason it waxes men inventive. It is almost invariably surrounded by ideologies of legitimacy, which adduce tradition, divine grace, or the law in order to support the establishment of those at the top. These ideologies are, strictly speaking, instruments of mystification; yet they are permissible weapons as long as they do not prevent the other side from returning them in kind.

—Ralf Dahrendorf¹

All states have recourse to ideologies to justify their existence both to other states and toward their own subjects. These ideologies are usually promulgated by a state elite that depends on them for its *raison d'être*. The Ottoman state was no exception to this rule. This article will attempt to show how these legitimating ideologies were reflected in policy during the rule of Abdülhamid II, the ruler who represents the last true example of personal rule in the empire.

Despite the inaccurate and loose use of terms such as “Oriental despotism” or “Eastern tyranny,” the rule of this most “despotic” of sultans is by no means mysterious or unfathomable. The legitimating ideologies of the Hamidian era and of its elite were based on a set of clearly perceived policy aims, but especially on the preservation of the state. In the centuries when the Ottoman Empire had been powerful, its legitimating ideologies and propaganda had emphasized the strength and universal nature of the rule of the Ottoman Sultan. Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, for example, commissioned a ceremonial helmet to match in design and ostentation a similar helmet belonging to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.²

By the 19th century, however, the Ottoman ruling class found itself facing potentially fatal challenges both at home and abroad. As real power declined, symbolism and ritual acquired a new specificity. In the last quarter of the 19th century, European powers increased their emphasis on pomp to prop up the increasing demands they made on their subjects.³ Those whose material resources lagged behind, including the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, found themselves more and more on the defensive. As humorously expressed by John Elliot: “It is as if a form of ‘Avis principle’ operates in the world of political imagery and propaganda: those who are only second try harder.”⁴ It was this defensiveness that was to become the hallmark of later periods of Ottoman ideology. In

the Tanzimat era the Ottoman state made unprecedented demands on its subjects as the power of the state was reconstituted after some two centuries of disintegration, and in many spheres of life it was constituted for the first time. This enabled state authority to permeate levels of society that had hitherto been relatively autonomous, creating strains for the state in the form of what Jürgen Habermas has termed a “legitimation deficit.”⁵ Until then, the legitimation policies of the Ottoman sultans had been based on the religious justification for Ottoman rule, which was in turn founded on the claims of the house of Osman to the caliphate. However, by the late 19th century, the desire of the state to administer and regulate with hitherto unprecedented intensity had led to a situation in which the role of state power had constantly to be redefined.

LEGITIMATION POLICIES DIRECTED TOWARD OTTOMAN MUSLIM SUBJECTS

When dealing with his Muslim subjects, Abdülhamid emphasized his position as caliph of all Muslims, a title Ottoman sultans had claimed since the conquest of Egypt by Selim I in 1517. Although in the beginning somewhat tenuous, supported by an official myth that the last Abbasid caliph had bestowed his title on Selim I, the claim had by the 19th century acquired the historical weight that came from four centuries of rule.⁶ In the reign of Abdülhamid II the role of caliph gained new importance as, after the 1877–78 Russo-Ottoman war, the Ottoman Empire lost vast territories and most of its non-Muslim population in the Balkans, allowing the sultan to stress the Islamic religion as a new bid for unity against what he saw as an increasingly hostile Christian world.⁷ He also promoted his Arab subjects to important positions. None of the latter-day Ottoman sultans had employed Arabs in the uppermost ranks of the bureaucracy.⁸

In the heyday of the Ottoman Empire the title of sultan-caliph had been given less emphasis. The continuous, indeed almost monotonous, acclamation of the sultan’s caliphal title dates clearly to the period of decline, beginning at the end of the 18th century. Halil İnalcık has pointed out that there is no mention of the transfer of the caliphate to Selim I prior to the 18th century.⁹

Nonetheless, by the time of Abdülhamid II, Hagia Sophia came to receive renewed emphasis as the seat of the caliphate and the scene of the alleged transfer of power from al-Mutawakkil to Selim I.¹⁰ Ortaylı has drawn attention to the “caesaro-papist” titles emphasized by the sultan to increase the prestige of a shaky state in the international arena.¹¹ The practical basis for the sultan’s legitimating ideology was his position as defender of the holy places, the Haram al-Haramayn, in Mecca and Medina.¹²

The sultan took every opportunity to ensure that Ottoman officialdom understood the basis of its own rule. In a memorandum sent to his ministers in August 1901, the sultan reminded them of Reşid Paşa’s “four pillars of the state” (*dört rükn-ü devlet*). This “great statesman,” he said, had always considered these to be first, Islam; second, the maintenance of the house of Osman; third, the protection of the Haram al-Haramayn; and fourth, the maintenance of Istanbul as the capital city. These should be the basic principles in all decision-making.¹³ The circular

then went on at length about the sorry state of Islamic schools and madrasas compared to the much greater number and superior condition of Christian churches and schools.¹⁴ The decay of the madrasa system was seen as particularly serious by the sultan, as the propagation and maintenance of Islam depended on trained ulama, without which Islam “would be wounded in its essence.”¹⁵ The memorandum went on to order the reform of elementary school curricula, with religious instruction receiving primary emphasis. In rural areas, practical training in agricultural methods, and in towns and cities, artisanal skills, were to be taught. Contrary to popular wisdom, the sultan, despite his suspicion of the West, did not turn his back on the Tanzimat reforms but rather attempted to mold them to his advantage. He also appreciated the accomplishments of the mastermind of the Tanzimat: “[Reşid Paşa] had combined old administrative methods with our present civilization and given the state a new system of rule which produced many serious reforms.”¹⁶

Another reflection of the Ottoman use of religion as a unifying force is seen in a report by the vali of the Hijaz, Osman Nuri Paşa. The pasha stated that the bedouins, who “still live in a state of nomadism and savagery,” had to be “civilized” by making them obey the laws of the shari‘a and obliging them to have their disputes settled in religious courts rather than resorting to tribal justice. This was to be done by gradually settling the nomads and by instructing them in Ottoman schools.¹⁷ The official use of religion was, however, somewhat ambivalent. Sunni orthodoxy was stressed, but the sultan used Sufi shaykhs for propaganda purposes: since Sufism was neither orthodox nor mainstream, it was useful for acquiring grass-roots support and reinforcing legitimacy.¹⁸ Shaykhs like Abulhuda al-Sayyadi became the sultan’s official ideologues. Abulhuda, who belonged to the Rifa‘i order, produced a steady stream of literature confirming the position of Abdülhamid as caliph and enjoining all Muslims to obey him as their God-given duty.¹⁹

Abulhuda’s particular target was the Arabic nationalism in Syria, but Iraq presented another major challenge because Shi‘ism was spreading there and the Shi‘ite Iranian monarchy challenged in principle the claim of the Ottoman state to universal Muslim dominion.²⁰

The Ottoman archives yield many documents proposing measures to counter the spread of these rival ideologies, an unprecedented concern in a polity that had always been tolerant of religious diversity. Shi‘ism was singled out as particularly dangerous because much of the population of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul was Shi‘ite.

A report from the Porte’s ambassador to Tehran, Ali Galip Bey, in response to instructions asking him to determine measures to stop the spread of Shi‘ism from Iran to Iraq, pointed to the key role played by the *muctehidin*. He stressed that it would be in the Ottoman interest to “turn” the influence exercised by these men in Iran. This could be done by offering them honors and flattering them. The report gives a colorful account of how this was done in the Tehran embassy, and how the *muctehid* in question prayed for the long life and rule of the sultan, “after having freshened the palate of his loyalty” with “à la Turca” stuffed lamb and Iranian *çilav*, finished off with halva.²¹

Some of the nonculinary methods the ambassador proposed were, first, to restrict the mobility of Shi‘is (particularly men of religion) from Iran to Mecca and

Medina and to curtail their circulation, particularly in villages and among nomads where they could spread sedition among the populace. Second, he proposed gradually preventing Iranians of religious learning from coming and a ban on religious teaching by non-Ottomans. Third, he recommended the expulsion as “religious traitors” (*hain-i din*) of Shi‘a elements found propounding “religious separatism.” Finally, he urged the appointment from Istanbul of trained Sunni teachers who would instill the virtues of obedience to the caliph.²² An order dated four years later provides for the payment of salaries to “five teachers assigned to Iraq to stop the spread of Shi‘ism.”²³

Another assessment of the strategic importance enjoyed by the *muctehidin* occurs in an undated and unsigned report, which deals at length with the influence of Twelver Shi‘ism. The writer declared that the *muctehidin*, who professed to be the sole interpreters of the teachings of the Twelve Imams, “have a thousand times more influence than the Shah among the population” because they functioned independently of the state, unlike most Sunni ulama. However, because most *muctehidin* were Ottoman subjects and Arabs, it would be possible for the Sublime Porte to turn them to account, as they “can make the Iranian government do anything they want by causing the people to rise up in 24 hours, and at their merest gesture.”

The writer of the report recommended that the Ottoman government should reconcile Shi‘i and Sunni ulama because “now it is time for all Islamic peoples to perform their religious duty by uniting against the Christian powers.”²⁴ Russia, the author of the report continued, had had to appease them because of the Shi‘i population of Georgia. The Ottoman state had a far larger Shi‘i population in Iraq, so the danger from these elements was even greater. “But if the *muctehidin* are taken in hand we will have avoided the greater danger of our Shi‘i subjects inclining towards Iran.”²⁵

Iraq was a particular problem for Ottoman legitimacy because of its multiethnic nature. A very interesting report compiled by Süleyman Hüsni Paşa, who had been sent into exile by the sultan and was living in Baghdad, expounded at length on the need to achieve religious uniformity. Among the twenty sects in Iraq found in the Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, and Jewish populations, most were opposed to the Ottoman state. The pasha pointed out further that the practices found in Europe to encourage national and linguistic uniformity were not permitted by the shari‘a, and in any case the time was not yet ripe for them.²⁶ The pasha regarded nationality and religion as equally important for purposes of unification, but chose to emphasize religious uniformity:

In order to bring the true Islamic belief to bear on the various sects it will be necessary to form a society of religious study comprising learned ulama from Istanbul, under the Shaikh-ul-Islam’s protection, whose first duty would be to write a book correcting the beliefs of the heretical sects (*fırak-ı dalle*). To prepare this book it will be necessary first to undertake study of these unsound beliefs in order to refute them.²⁷

These “heretical sects” of Islam are then defined as Twelver Shi‘ism, the Ahbari, Bektasi, Ali-ul-Allahi, Nuseyri, Zeyyidi, Ismaili, Babi, Vahabi, Abaziye, Durzi, Avdeti, and the Sufis. In addition, the writer warned against “a small group of her-

etics who have fallen under the influence of skeptical European philosophy and positivism" (*felsefe-i cedide*). A representative of the late-Ottoman worldview, he was already nervous about the growing influence of Western positivism and saw salvation in an "official version" of Islam. This official version of Islam, the pasha suggested, would take the form of a book called the "Book of Beliefs" (*Kitab ul-Akaid*), and would be somewhat along the lines of national ideology tracts of a later age. It was to consist of fifteen chapters, each dealing with a sect. The pasha then made the surprising suggestion that it would be used to train "missionaries": "men of sound belief speaking the Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish languages who, after three years training, will be given the title "*Dai ul-hak-misyoner*" and employed to correct the beliefs of deviant Islamic sects."²⁸ The efforts of this missionary society would be primarily directed toward Iraq and against the Shi'ite *muctehidin* who constituted the most serious threat to the Ottoman order.

The "Book of Beliefs" was to be very comprehensive: "If we create such a missionary society, the second part of the Book of Beliefs will deal with the Jewish and Christian faiths and the third with the idolatrous practices of Japan, China, Africa, Madagascar, Indo-China, and India."²⁹ This missionary society was to derive its legal basis by adapting the relevant regulations from the Ottoman codes dealing with European and American missionary societies. It was to be financed in part by donations from the faithful. This clearly suggests that it was being considered as a counterweight to Christian proselytizing as well as to the spread of Shi'ism.

The measures proposed by the Ottoman government to halt the spread of Shi'ism stressed education as being as important as, if not more important than, police measures. A report by Alusizade Ahmed Şakir, a member of the Higher Education Council, the state's highest authority on educational matters, illustrates the Ottoman tendency to use state-sponsored education to enforce uniformity. Alusizade also pointed out that the matter had a foreign dimension, as the British were using Shi'ite religious scholars to undermine the sultan's influence.³⁰

The writer proposed the following measures. First should be the institution of traveling madrasas staffed by specially trained Sunni ulama who would live with the nomads and report periodically to the Ottoman authorities. Second, he proposed choosing by examination the brightest Sunni pupils from among the local population and assigning them to madrasas located in major Shi'i centers like Najaf and Karbala. Third, he recommended instituting a three-year program to train these "official pupils" to refute Shi'ism, and then sending them in the summer months to dwell among the sedentary tribes and nomads where they would preach according to official instructions. Finally, he proposed examining these pupils annually using a commission composed of the highest local officials, and the granting of scholarships to those showing competence and promise: "The protection and sponsoring of religious learning in this fashion will strengthen the ties and increase the obedience of the local population to the caliphate. This will in turn put a stop to foreign intrigues and evoke the prayers and admiration of all Muslims in neighboring states."³¹ Alusizade concluded by urging that the Shi'i religious rites, particularly those performed on the Āshura (the 10th of Muharram), were also to be forbidden as they "spread excitement among the population."³²

Inspired by the “pan” movements in Europe in the late 19th century, such as pan-Slavism, pan-Hellenism, and pan-Germanism, the Ottoman sultans tried to devise their own “pan” ideology, pan-Islamism. This study does not pretend to present any detailed analysis of the vexing question as to what exactly pan-Islamism was. What will be attempted here is more an empirical sampling of how Abdülhamid II used his position as caliph as a defensive bargaining lever in the international arena, as a policy of destabilization against rival Christian powers who had Muslim subjects.

The use by Ottoman sultans of the claim to be the protector of Muslims outside Ottoman dominions gained currency after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, which for the first time caused the abandonment of a large Muslim population to Russian rule.³³ Although the Ottoman claim to being the supreme authority in the Islamic world was by no means universally acknowledged among Muslims, the status of the Ottoman Empire as the only independent Islamic power of any consequence endowed it with undeniable prestige.³⁴ Historical conditions also worked in favor of the Ottoman claim as more and more Islamic peoples fell under the rule of Western imperialism. The French invasion of Algeria beginning in 1830, the Russian subjugation of the khanates of Central Asia in the last quarter of the 19th century, the apparent invincibility of the British Raj after the Indian Mutiny, and the increased penetration of the Dutch into Indonesia and Malaysia in the 1890s meant that Islamic peoples looked to Istanbul for moral and, where possible, material assistance.³⁵

The extent of Abdülhamid's own involvement with pan-Islam is a matter of some debate, in which views range from those who attribute no major importance to pan-Islamism to those who see it as the mainspring of his foreign policy.³⁶ It is unlikely that he actually plotted to organize a worldwide Islamic upheaval under his leadership.³⁷ However, it is inaccurate to say that pan-Islamism occupied no more than a peripheral place in his conception of the empire's external relations.³⁸ Although the extent of his pan-Islamist activity will only become known when the full collection of consular reports is made available, even the piecemeal evidence suggests that he devoted more effort to the movement than has hitherto been supposed.

In a circular proposal sent to the grand vizier, the Imperial Secretariat, and the Shaikh-ul-Islam, the Ottoman high commissioner to Bulgaria, Ali Ferruh Bey, suggested nothing less than the convening of an Islamic conference of rulers or the representatives from Islamic countries, declaring that the Christian powers were all in league to destroy the caliphate and prevent the union of all Muslims. He proposed that the 400th anniversary of the passing of the caliphate from Abbasid to Ottoman hands be made into something of an international event: “We seem to have somehow missed this sacred occasion three times, and if we let it go by again a hundred years will elapse before we get another chance. It must be celebrated with the greatest pomp and splendour.”³⁹ The high commissioner suggested the invitation of “the Indian Nizams, the Islamic leaders of Asia, Australia, and Africa, the Shah of Iran, and the ruler of Morocco.”⁴⁰ Obviously, since the

Ottomans had not marked the earlier centennials, they had hitherto not felt the need for symbolic celebrations on those occasions.

The first half of a detailed report dated 24 June 1886, and written by Ali Galip Bey, the Ottoman consul in the Dutch East Indies, reviewed Dutch colonial penetration into the islands of Java, Borneo, the Celebes, Molucca, Sumatra, and Papua.⁴¹ In its second half, he dealt with Islam in the Dutch possessions. Approximately 8,000 East Indians were said to go on the hajj every year, he reported, but the Dutch keep close watch on Islamic activity and forbid the entry of Arab ulama into their dominions. Then he recounted how, when he was appointed consul to Batavia in the month of Ramazan of the year 1300 (1883), on the first Friday prayer he read a *hutba* to his holiness the caliph and afterward some of the congregation approached him and asked that they be made Ottoman subjects.⁴² Ali Galip told them, "According to internationally accepted rules and regulations it is not possible for anyone to switch his allegiance at will."⁴³ Instead, he counseled them to go on the hajj and remain in the holy places for five years, which would make them eligible for consideration. Ali Galip also read the *hutba* in several other mosques, and pointed out that this was the first time it had been done: "The congregation broke out in tears when they heard the Holy Name of the Caliph."⁴⁴

The Javanese connection appears in other documents as well. In 1898–99 a group of Javanese boys was brought to Istanbul to study at leading imperial schools. A document dated 11 June 1898 gave a list of the boys and described them as "children of leading notables of Java and Singapore."⁴⁵ About a year later, on 18 May 1899, the Ottoman consul at Batavia, M. Kâmil Efendi, described how this policy of welcoming the children of Muslim notables had created "an excellent impression" among the leading Muslims of the area. These people, he said, were severely persecuted by the Dutch authorities and were prevented from sending their children to Dutch schools and even from "dressing them in a European manner." Kâmil relayed details of how a wealthy Javanese merchant, one Sayyid Ali Şehab, had managed to enroll his children in a Dutch school only to be ridiculed in the local press for "forgetting himself" and "thinking he was European." The Ottoman consul wrote that the munificence of the sultan had been heard far and wide, and that some thirty notable families "from the Celebes, Singapore and Sumatra" were anxious to send their children to Istanbul.⁴⁶ The policy seems to have yielded dividends. On finishing their education, the boys returned home speaking fluent Turkish, sporting Turkish passports, and claiming the right to be treated as Europeans in Dutch possessions.⁴⁷

The strategic importance of the hajj as an opportunity to reconfirm Ottoman legitimacy figures very prominently in Ottoman documentation. A memorandum dated 23 November 1895 and prepared by the Council of State discussed at length the issue of the new passport regulations the administration had promulgated.⁴⁸ The British and Dutch embassies had complained that the fee charged for hajj visas for Indian and Dutch pilgrims was exorbitant. The British government of India had complained that the imposition of a passport on Indian Muslims "would enflame their fanaticism" and that therefore the measure should be introduced gradually. The Ottoman government seems eventually to have reduced the fee but kept the requirement of visas because "the main reason for the imposition of visas

on Indian Muslims and pilgrims who come from other eastern lands is the political one of ensuring that they come into contact with the officials of the Exalted Caliphate.” The Ottoman consulate at Bombay reported that the number of Indians making the pilgrimage every year was no less than 14,000, not counting Central Asian pilgrims who also came through Bombay.⁴⁹

Another critical issue was the acquisition of land and property in the Hijaz by non-Ottoman Muslims. On 7 April 1882 the Council of State prepared a memorandum in which it reiterated the ban on the acquisition of property by Indian, Algerian, and Russian Muslims. The reason stated was fear of potential fifth-column activities.⁵⁰ The issue can also be traced through the archives of the government of India. The British consul at Jeddah wrote on 7 May 1882 that the Ottoman ban was causing considerable discomfort among Britain’s Indian subjects. The consul noted that this new state of affairs might well cause poorer Indians to take up Ottoman nationality, although “the better to do will probably be unwilling to sacrifice British protection, and considerable annoyance is caused among them.”⁵¹ The report of the consul specified the novel character of the exclusivist policy put into force by Abdülhamid II:

It is only since the accession of Abdul Hamid that ecclesiastical matters are invariably referred to the Sultan and the exclusiveness that His Majesty shows meets with no sympathy from Mussulmans in Mecca of any shade of orthodoxy on religious grounds; but as regards non-acquisition of property by foreigners they have some natural worldly satisfaction in being free from competition with the more wealthy Indians.⁵²

Even in the matter of charitable gifts to the holy places the sultan showed the same jealousy. The British consul at Jeddah further reported that a silver ladder for the door of the Ka^cba “worth 45,000 rupees” and sent by the Nawab of Rampur as well as 40,000 rupees in cash sent by another British Indian Muslim had been turned down because “the Sultan in this case objected to a foreign subject, and sent orders that no such a one should have the privilege.”⁵³ The reflection of the issue in the Ottoman documentation leaves no doubt about the basis for the sultan’s exclusivism: “All such gifts can only be made by the Exalted Personage of the Caliph who alone holds the august title of Protector of the Holy Places. No foreign ruler has the right to partake of this glory.”⁵⁴

It must, however, be remembered at this juncture that the sultan was not averse to seeking material help from non-Ottomans for one of the major touchstones of his pan-Islamic policy, the construction of the Hijaz Railway. This project was deliberately financed exclusively with Muslim capital, a large proportion of which was solicited abroad as pious donations through the efforts of Ottoman envoys and consuls.⁵⁵

It would seem that a brief of Hamidian men on the spot was to gather information about Muslims around the world. One such special envoy (*memur-u mahsus*) sent to Africa was Muhammad Başala, a notable of Ottoman Tripoli who, having been “sent on several secret missions to Morocco and Bornu [Chad] had full knowledge of the area and of the nature of the population.” He presented the ruler of each major tribe with a flag of the Ottoman Empire and gave information “on the power and glory of his Imperial Highness the Caliph.” Başala ranged as far

afield as Sokoto (modern-day northern Nigeria), which he described as “a very vast land harbouring millions of Muslims of the Maliki sect.” Everywhere he went, Başala said he met with Muslims who had great reverence for the caliph. In fact one tribe of “Tuvareks” (Touareg) recounted how they had killed a group of French officials who had failed to produce a ferman from Istanbul allowing them to travel in what the tribe considered to be the sultan’s dominions. Başala concluded his report:

As can be seen from the above, the population of most of the Sudan is Muslim and has a religious attachment and love for our Master, Allah’s Shadow on Earth. Thus it is necessary for these lands to be incorporated into the imperial domains by the sending of special missions to advise and guide the local rulers.⁵⁶

Başala also recommended that each ruler be awarded an Ottoman flag, robes of honor, an imperial ferman, and a specially decorated copy of the Qur’an. In return, the rulers would have the *hutba* read in the sultan’s name during Friday prayer. All these gifts were manifestations of the Ottomans’ expression of sovereignty and expressed Central Asian Turkish as well as Islamic motifs. In fact, the standard of honor was a steppe custom and the robe of honor (*hil’at*) recalls the girding with ceremonial belts by the Central Asian Turks. On the other hand, the copy of the Holy Book and the reading of the *hutba* were Islamic symbols of hegemony.⁵⁷ Ottoman consuls in India closely monitored the local Muslim press and often published officially inspired articles ensuring the visibility of the caliph.⁵⁸

It would seem that as real power declines in pre-modern states, the needs of modernization make imperative the increase of central power because a “legitimacy crisis” is created as the state moves into areas it did not inhabit before.⁵⁹ Pomp and symbolism are employed with renewed vigor to legitimate new demands that can no longer be justified through the old matrix of power relations. This is all part of the effort “to mobilize formerly passive objects of history into citizens [which] requires a new attitude to power.”⁶⁰ The Ottoman elite’s efforts to project their legitimacy through their policies toward their own Islamic subjects and the Muslim world at large involved overlapping policies and strategies. Increased prestige abroad could be turned to good account at home. Victories near home could mean enhanced standing abroad, as was shown in the case of the Ottoman victory against the Greeks in 1897 and the resulting “stirrings and outbreaks among Muslims in India and the East Indies, Turkestan, Madagascar and Algeria.”⁶¹

However, as in all political systems that depend on something more than brute force to ensure their continuity, Ottoman legitimacy seems to have had uneven success. In a time when the world was changing rapidly, the Ottomans adjusted their state ideology to what they believed to be the new rules of the game in the spirit of what Hobsbawm has called “a tacit modification of the system of beliefs by ‘stretching’ the framework.”⁶² The Ottoman experience can be seen in this light. As Europe progressed in Ottoman eyes from the despised infidel to a legal and political equal and finally to the incontestable determinant of world trends, the “framework” of Ottoman legitimating ideology had to be “stretched” accordingly. The Ottoman dilemma was perhaps best expressed in the cynical words of Said Paşa, who served

nine times as grand vizier: “As the Sublime State finds itself stuck among Christian powers, even the most accomplished diplomacy will not be sufficient for our defense. All relations among states are based on animosity and mutual self-interest” (*Düvel ve Emaret-i Hiristiyanê içine çakılıb kalmış olduğundan*).⁶³

As far as legitimation toward its own Islamic subjects was concerned, by the time of Abdülhamid II’s reign, Ottoman policy was clearly a case of “a tacit modification of a system of belief.” The classic Islamic concept of election of the caliph from among the elders of the Quraysh tribe had been abandoned well before Ottoman times. However, Islamic jurists had long recognized the need for a strong ruler, an imam who would be the holder of coercive power and the defender of the shari‘a and the holy places of Islam. The imam or caliph was necessary because human society was basically anarchic: “Since the power of lust and passion stimulates men to violence and discord, there must be a just man who will abate violence. There is need of a person singled out by divine support with power and authority and who will protect the laws of the Shari‘a.”⁶⁴ That was precisely the doctrine Abdülhamid propagated among his Islamic subjects through ideologues like Abulhuda.⁶⁵ However, legitimacy had to be projected through the prism of international power politics. It was here that what Hobsbawm refers to as a “form of mythologized and perhaps ritualized history” came into its own.⁶⁶ The novel usage of the caliphate as a quasi-papal office with sway over the entire Islamic world must be seen in this context. For Ezra Suleiman, myths are the necessary apparatus with which the elite maintains its power as long as society accepts it: “An elite securely anchors itself in the society when the elements, mythical or not, that underline its power become the generally accepted norms of society.”⁶⁷

The primary task, therefore, of Abdülhamid’s propagandists was to assert that the way things stood was the way they had always been, the natural order of things. Seen in these terms, Hamidian policy was modestly successful in its pan-Islamic, and considerably more successful in its domestic, mold.⁶⁸ It kept what remained of the empire together for 30-odd years. Indeed, in the Hijaz, the heart of Ottoman legitimation, the legitimacy of the state was never seriously questioned. The long years of Ottoman rule, the quasi-autonomous position of the sharifs of Mecca, the financial support provided for religious authorities, and the military protection of the hajj routes all combined to the advantage of the Sublime State. Sheer historical experience also carried weight. As the centuries passed, it seemed inconceivable to the Hijazis that they could ever operate outside the Ottoman system of government.⁶⁹

As long as arbitration was needed between various parties or concrete interests were served, Hamidian legitimating policies seem to have been received at face value. The Hijaz was a bewildering and motley array of nomads and townsmen, locals and pilgrims, whose interests had to be reconciled. Even so, Hijazis tried to avoid sending their children to Ottoman schools and shunned service in the official Ottoman administration, suggesting that only part of the Ottoman mythology was accepted.⁷⁰

In the case of Ottoman Syria, however, the local elite of Damascus largely identified with the Ottoman system, and in the 1860–1908 period acquired a vested interest in its continuation. Its children attended Ottoman schools and leading Damascene families bought posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy. As argued by

Khoury, the policy of Ottomanism, comprising both Turk and Arab, was widely accepted in Damascus.⁷¹

The Damascene merchants came to be closely identified with the Ottoman order. When the local bedouins of Karak “selectively” destroyed symbols of Ottoman sovereignty in the uprising of 1911, they deliberately sacked and pillaged the quarter of the Damascene merchants, leaving more obvious targets such as the Christian quarter unharmed.⁷²

Particularly after the Ottoman withdrawal from Syria and the establishment of the French mandate, the difference between the two regimes became apparent. No matter how hard the French tried, they could not present themselves as legitimate rulers: “There was a significant difference in the nature of the new imperial authority; it was illegitimate and thus unstable; France was not recognized to be a legitimate overlord as the sultan-caliph of the Ottoman Empire had been.”⁷³

Recent research has shown that the relationship between Arab nationalism and Ottomanism as well as its successor ideology, “Turkism,” was not as straightforward as had once been supposed. The hitherto accepted wisdom that intensive “Turkification” occurred under the Young Turks has since been questioned: “At the end of 1913 the Unionist government was committed to Islam as the pillar of its ideology. Arabs wishing the continuation of the Islamic empire under the Ottoman caliph embraced the idea enthusiastically.”⁷⁴ Only under war conditions would the Islamist policy begin to come apart. However, here again interest seems to have been more operative than ideological. Izzat al-Abd, one of the Arabs who had been one of Abdülhamid’s closest followers, fell out with the Young Turk regime, settled in Egypt, and went on the hajj together with the Arab nationalist Rashid Rida to show solidarity with the rebel Sharif Husayn in 1916.⁷⁵

Even leading Islamic modernists such as Muhammad Abduh, although seriously disillusioned by the Ottoman order, felt that “the Ottoman Empire was what was left of the political independence of the *umma*, and if it vanished Muslims would lose everything and become as powerless as Jews.”⁷⁶

Between 1901 and 1907, 167 Arabs studied in the Imperial Public Service School (Mekteb-i Mülkiye-i Şahane).⁷⁷ Many of the leading cadres who were later to make up the intelligentsia of emerging Arab states were the product of Hamidian educational policies. What seems to have happened was that the Hamidian regime ultimately became the victim of its own rhetoric by falling into what would today be called the “credibility gap.” Abdülhamid, by his removal of the intermediary bodies such as parliament and ministers from responsibility, his grand claims of universal caliphate, and his extreme centralization of power around his person, left himself open to the direct odium of the politically aware. The choice of support or opposition was put before the subject population who were increasingly being asked to perform as citizens even while they were still called and treated as subjects. Through the press and other publications, such as the circulating of ideological tracts, the Ottoman state was reduced to the human scale for the first time. This was the forum that was ably exploited by the Young Turk opposition in satirical cartoons and broadsheets.⁷⁸

At the level of the international credibility of the caliphate, we can see clearly that the India Office kept close watch over any contacts between the sultan’s

emissaries and Indian rulers. On at least one occasion when the Ottoman consul in Bombay attempted personally to deliver a decoration sent by Abdülhamid to the Nawab of Rampur, “apparently an acknowledgement of the pecuniary aid afforded during the war with Russia,” he was prevented from so doing. The British authorities told him they would deliver it.⁷⁹ Even after Abdülhamid, the Young Turks were supported in the Muslim world during the Balkan Wars: an Indian medical mission arrived in Istanbul in December 1912 as a gesture of solidarity.⁸⁰ Pan-Islamic agitation was a real concern for the Allies during World War I. In the little-known episode of the Singapore Mutiny in 1915, Muslim Indian troops rebelled when the rumor spread that they would be sent to the Turkish front. The Indians created considerable panic by responding to the Ottoman call for jihad by attacking the British population.⁸¹

The clutching by Ottoman statesmen of such seemingly flimsy supports as the “power of the caliphate in Batavia” or the sending of a decoration to the Nawab of Rampur may appear futile viewed with the benefit of hindsight. To ask that Arab subjects support a universalistic state on the basis of religious solidarity in the age of nationalism might appear unrealistic at best or despotic at worst. However, seen in context, these developments do furnish clues as to the thinking of late Ottoman policymakers. As put by Mary Wright in her study of similar problems in a Chinese context:

For the study of these problems of loyalty, dissidence and social cohesion, what men say is as important as what they do. A doctrine in which belief is widely and consistently professed is usually a surer key to the ethos of an age than a list of lapses from that doctrine.⁸²

Seen in this light, Ottoman legitimating policies did reflect the “ethos of an age.” These policies were not hopelessly anachronistic applications of traditional patterns. In the world of late 19th-century “pan” movements, one might evince equal skepticism as to the feasibility of the union of all Slavs or all Germans as of all Muslims. In terms of the dosage of romanticism, one was as valid as the other.

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NOTES

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¹Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York, 1967), pp. 218–19.

²Gülru Necipoğlu, “Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg Rivalry,” *Art Bulletin*, 71 (1989), pp. 409–19.

³Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1–14.

⁴John Elliot, “Power and Propaganda in the Spain of Philip IV,” in *Rites of Rulers* (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 151.

⁵Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, 1973), p. 71.

⁶On the debate concerning the Ottoman Caliphate, see T. W. Arnold, *The Caliphate* (London, 1965), pp. 129–58. For a more recent appraisal of this claim and its ramifications, see Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, N.J., 1986), pp. 283–86.

⁷Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 9 (1973), pp. 139–55.

⁸Butrus Abu Manneh, "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyadi," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), pp. 131–53.

⁹Halil İnalçık, "Osmanlı Padişahı," *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 12, 4 (1958), p. 70. Recent research, however, does point in the direction of a more self-conscious caliphate than İnalçık would seem to admit; see Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, p. 284. See also Necdet Sakaoğlu, "Padişahlık ve Sadrazamlık Kurumu," in *Tanzimat'dan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1985), p. 1279.

¹⁰Gülru Necipoğlu, "The Ottoman Hagia Sophia," paper delivered at the "Structure of Hagia Sophia" colloquium, 19 May 1990, Princeton University.

¹¹İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Alman Nüfuzu* (Istanbul, 1983), p. 54. The titles are Halife-i Muslimin, Zî'llullah fî'larz, and Zat-i Kudsiyet Tacidari respectively.

¹²William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman Control, 1840–1908* (Columbus, Ohio, 1984), p. 4.

¹³Başbakanlık Arşivi (Prime Ministry Archives, Istanbul; hereafter BBA); Yıldız Esas Evrakı (Yıldız Palace Collection; hereafter YEE), 11/1419/120/5. The date is given as 1319 Cemaziyelevvel (August 1901).

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷BBA; YEE, 14/292/126/8, 8 Temmuz 1301 (18 July 1895).

¹⁸Butrus Abu Manneh, "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda al-Sayyadi," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), p. 138.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 140: Abu Manneh states that between 1880 and 1909, some 212 pamphlets and books attributed to Abulhuda circulated in the empire.

²⁰Kamal Salibi, "Middle Eastern Parallels: Syria-Iraq-Arabia in Ottoman Times," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), p. 72.

²¹YEE, 14/1623/126/10, 11 Safer 1312 (15 August 1894), Ali Galip Bey to Imperial Chamberlain Mehmet Arif Bey.

²²Ibid.

²³BBA, Bab-i Ali Evrak Odası (BEO), no. 81245, 5 Şevval 1315 (28 February 1898). The order was duly communicated to the Ministry of the Interior and the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam. I owe thanks for this reference to Dr. Idris Bostan.

²⁴YEE, 14/88–116/88/12.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶YEE, 14/1188/126/9, 9 Ramazan 1309 (8 April 1892). Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa was something of an illustrious exile. He had been instrumental in the deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876; wrote a well-known tract proposing reform, the *His-i İnkilab*; and is representative of the soldier-intellectual cadres that ran the empire. He was exiled to Baghdad by a suspicious Sultan Abdülhamid, who made a point of eliminating all the statesmen involved in the deposition affair. On Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, see *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1943), p. 360.

²⁷Ibid. The dictionary definition of "*fırak-ı dalle*" is given as "religious sects which have strayed from the true path"; see Ferit Develioğlu, *Osmanlıca-Türkçe Ansiklopedik Lügat* (Ankara, 1982), p. 196.

²⁸Ibid. I have found no indication that the book was ever written.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰YEE, 14/257/126/8. Although the report itself is undated, it was prepared in accordance with imperial instructions sent on 26 August 1907.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid. In addition, Shi'ite pilgrims often had to pay a discriminatory higher rate for camel rental and "special fees as protection money" (Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State*, pp. 63–64).

³³Bernard Lewis, "The Ottoman Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (April 1965), p. 291; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, 1973), pp. 317–19.

³⁴For a critical appraisal of the Ottoman caliphate, see Arnold, *The Caliphate*, pp. 139–55. This is a standard work which is now somewhat outdated. For more recent views on the subject, see Carter

Findley, "The Advent of Ideology in the Islamic Middle East," *Studia Islamica*, 55 (1982), p. 155.

³⁵İnalcık, "Osmanlı Padişahı," p. 71; see also İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (İstanbul, 1983), p. 32; Nikki Keddie, "The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdulhamid II," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 3 (October 1966), p. 48.

³⁶For the most extreme view that pan-Islamism was a figment of the Western powers' imagination, see Orhan Koloğlu, *Abdülhamit Gerçeği* (Ankara, 1987). For the opposite extreme, which argues that he actively promulgated pan-Islamism in the Muslim world, see Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Ulu Hakan Abdülhamid Han* (İstanbul, 1981); and Mustafa Müftüoğlu, *Her Yönüyle Sultan İkinci Abdülhamid* (İstanbul, 1985).

³⁷Engin Akarlı, "The Problems of External Pressures, Power Struggles, and Budgetary Deficits in Ottoman Politics under Abdulhamid II, 1876–1909: Origins and Solutions," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976, pp. 60–61.

³⁸Feroze Yasamee, "The Ottoman Empire and the European Great Powers, 1884–1887," Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, 1984, p. 29.

³⁹YEE, C, 1/27–28/53/136, 12 Ramazan 1321 (3 December 1903).

⁴⁰Ibid. It is unclear what Ali Ferruh meant by the "Islamic leaders of Australia" ("*Avustralya ruisayi İslamiyesi*"). He could have meant Oceania, and the reference may have been to the leaders of Islamic Indonesia.

⁴¹YEE, 14 253/126/8, 21 Ramazan 1303 (24 June 1886), "Report on the Dutch East Indian Colonies" (*Felemenk Devleti Müstemlekâtından Cezayir-i Hindiye Hakkındadır*).

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid. All such reports, however, have to be taken with a grain of salt as they were invariably written to please. Many Javanese did, however, stay in Mecca and Medina for extended periods (see Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State*, p. 41: "The Javanese . . . constituted a large part of the Meccan population").

⁴⁵BBA, Bab-ı Ali Evrak Odası (BEO), 87419 396/9/7, Maarif Giden, 18 Muharrem 1316 (11 June 1898).

⁴⁶BBA, BEO 5 Mayıs 1315 (18 May 1899), Consul M. Kâmil to the Foreign Ministry.

⁴⁷Anthony Reid, "Nineteenth-Century Pan Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 26 (1967), pp. 267–83.

⁴⁸BBA, İrade Dahiliye 30, 24, Cemaziyelevvel 1313 (23 November 1895), Şurayi Devlet no. 2317.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰BBA, Yıldız Resmi Marazat 15/38, 17 Cemaziyelevvel 1299 (7 April 1882), Şurayi Devlet no. 72.

⁵¹India Office Political and Secret Home Correspondence, L/P&S/3/239, vol. 52, p. 937, Acting Consul Moncrieff to Lord Granville.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴BBA, İrade Dahiliye 68044, 15 Rebiulahir 1299 (3 March 1882).

⁵⁵William Ochsenwald, *The Hicaz Railroad* (Charlottesville, Va., 1980), pp. 60–74.

⁵⁶YEE, 39/2128/129/118, 7 Sevvâl 1311 (14 April 1894). Assessment by Imperial ADC Mirliva Derviş of the person of Başala and the presentation of the latter's report.

⁵⁷Ibid.; see also Halil İnalcık, "Osmanlılarda Saltanat Veraset Usulü ve Türk Hakimiyet telakkisiyle ilgisi," *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 13, 1 (1959), pp. 69–94.

⁵⁸BBA, Yıldız Hususi Maruzat 214/63, 16 May 1888. Telegram from the Ottoman consul in Bombay to the Foreign Ministry. The Ottoman official, İbrahim Efendi, gave details of a recent article unfavorable to the Ottoman caliphate, which was published in the *Punjab Times*. He promptly wrote a rebuttal and published it in the *Advocate of India*.

⁵⁹Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, p. 72.

⁶⁰Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (Oxford, 1986), p. 156.

⁶¹Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, p. 337.

⁶²E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Social Function of the Past," *Past and Present*, 55 (May 1972), p. 5.

⁶³YEE, 31/1950 Mukerrer/45/83, 22 Zilkade 1299 (6 October 1882).

⁶⁴Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: The Jurists*, ch. 11, "The Imam/ Sultan: Fadl Allah b. Ruzbihan Khunji" (Oxford, 1985). The quotation is from Fadl Allah's *Suluk al-Muluk* as quoted in Lambton, p. 182.

⁶⁵In his major work, *Dai al-Rashad*, Abulhuda stated:

In time the Caliphate was transmitted to the Ottomans and reached Abdulhamid II. Already known for his virtue and devotion the Sultan after his ascendancy showed religious zeal, upheld the shari'ca and worked for the protection of the *umma*. As demanded by their faith, Muslims ought to be obedient to him.

Abu Manneh, "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda al-Sayyadi," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), p. 141.

⁶⁶Hobsbawm, "The Social Function of the Past," p. 6.

⁶⁷Ezra Suleiman, "Self-Image, Legitimacy, and the Stability of Elites: The Case of France," *British Journal of Political Science*, 7 (1977), p. 197.

⁶⁸Even the avowed enemies of Abdülhamid, the Young Turks, often capitulated and returned to the sultan's service. For a very striking example of the ambivalent attitude of the Young Turks towards Abdülhamid, see *Ubeydullah Efendi'nin Amerika Hatıraları* (Istanbul, 1989), pp. 56–60.

⁶⁹Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State*, p. 6; on the sometimes uneasy relationship between the sharifs and the Porte, see Butrus Abu Manneh, "Sultan Abdulhamid II and the Sharifs of Mecca (1880–1900)," *African and Asian Studies*, 9 (1973), pp. 1–21.

⁷⁰Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State*, p. 78.

⁷¹Philip S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 60.

⁷²Eugene Rogan, "The al-Karak Revolt of 1910: Ottoman Order at Odds with Local Order," paper presented in the panel, "New Order and Local Order: Continuity and Crisis in Everyday Life" at the annual MESA meeting, Toronto, November 16, 1989 (cited with permission of the author).

⁷³Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), p. 4.

⁷⁴Hasan Kayalı, "Arabs and Young Turks: Turkish-Arab Relations in the Second Constitutional Period 1908–1918," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1988, p. 139.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁷⁶Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 269.

⁷⁷İlber Ortaylı, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Arap Milliyetçiliği," *Tanzimat'dan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1985), pp. 1032–36.

⁷⁸On the issue of the "credibility gap," see Elliot, "Power and Propaganda," p. 171. The picture that Elliot paints of late 17th-century Spain, when the state attempted to shore up its domestic prestige with universal religious pretensions, is an apt comparison in this context.

⁷⁹India Office L/P&S/3/229, vol. 42, p. 197; India Office Memorandum, 23 September 1880.

⁸⁰Türkkaya Ataöv, "Mevlana Azad ve Türkiye," *Tarih ve Toplum*, 14 (1990), pp. 31–34.

⁸¹William Harper and Harry Miller, *Singapore Mutiny* (Singapore, 1984), pp. 1–25.

⁸²Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism* (Stanford, Calif., 1957), p. 204.