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Between History of Humanitarianism and Humanitarianization of History. A Discussion on Ottoman Help for the Victims of the Great Irish Famine, 1845–1852

Introduction

Recent historical works critical toward the definition of humanitarianism as an activity of pure altruism tried to grasp the political in humanitarian discourses and activities. However, they reproduce the dichotomies that understate the complexity of humanitarian relationships, both for the past and for our present. In such studies, humanitarianism is confined to the macropolitical area of international relations and politics — usually constructing a world divided into regions defined by cultural proximity (read religious differences). Furthermore, this macropolitical area is constructed as being limited only to Europe and the Christian West. According to these accounts, humanitarian values first appeared in the Christian »West« in the eighteenth century and were applied to the non-Christian »rest« in the nineteenth century. The following statement by Michel Barnett summarizes the story perfectly: »[I]t is likely that just as Christianity is globalizing, so too is Christian-based humanitarianism.« Although we can easily comment on Christian-based humanitarianism, we are not as certain as to what has happened with the Islamic world, as all we know is that while modern humanitarianism was founded and institutionalized in Europe in the early nineteenth century,

»[...] there were organized charitable societies in the Muslim world centuries before then, though nearly all were immediately associated with religious institutions and were not quasi-independent agencies.²«

Contrary to Barnett's idea, which is intrinsic in his argument of the non-existence of humanitarianism in the Muslim world, one of his sources – Mamoun Abuarquh and Isabel Phillips – record the history of humanitarianism in Muslim societies as far as 1,400 years ago.³ Their point of departure is the Islamic doctrine, which considers saving one life as equal to saving the whole of humanity. Detaching humanitarianism from its historical context, their study gives an abstract idea about what an ideal Islamic humanitarian perspective would be. On the other hand, other studies focus on ideologies and relief work of twentieth-century Muslim humanitarian organiza-

- Jonathan Benthall, Cultural Proximity and the Conjuncture of Islam with Modern Humanitarianism, in: Michael Barnett/Janice Stein (eds.), Sacred Aid. Faith and Humanitarianism, New York 2012, pp. 69–84.
- Both quotations are from Michael Barnett, Introduction. The Secularization and Sanctification of Humanitarianism, in: idem/Stein, Sacred Aid, p. 6. The same perspective permeates in Barnett's other works too; see Michael Barnett/Thomas G. Weiss, Humanitarianism. A Brief History of the Present, in: idem (eds.), Humanitarianism in Question. Politics, Power, Ethics, Ithaca 2008, pp. 1–48; Michael Barnett, Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism, Ithaca 2011.
- 3 Mamoun Abuarqub/Isabel Phillips, A Brief History of Humanitarianism in the Muslim World, Birmingham 2009, p. 3.

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tions. Searching for the concept of a general humanity in Islam, Abdel-Rahman Ghandour establishes the connection between Islamic traditions of charity and philanthropy, and the foundation and activities of Islamic non-governmental humanitarian organizations in the 1940s. 4 Similarly, looking at the activities and perspectives of different organizations, Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan provide a picture of Islamic humanitarian agencies within the global scheme of the twentieth century without imposing categories of Western humanitarianism on the activities of Muslim humanitarian organizations. However, both accounts lack historical depth. While Ghandour's argument originates Islamic humanitarianism in the religious doctrines and institutions and their conflict with Western institutions,⁵ for Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan it were the Christian values and practices of humanitarianism that provided an example for Muslim societies in the nineteenth century. Only after getting into institutional dialogue with those values and practices either in the form of contention, competition, or imitation did the Muslims engage in humanitarian activities. In this context, the founding of the Red Crescent Society in 1877 marks the beginning of a Muslim humanitarian tradition for both lines of argument.⁶ Although such accounts fill an important gap in the newly-emerging field by putting non-Western humanitarianism on a global level, the categories they apply pose important problems. Especially concepts of Christian and Muslim charity/humanitarianism, on which most works are based, disregard the complexity of social and imperial networks in mid-nineteenth century.⁷ Furthermore, trying to write a »global history of humanitarianism,« such works provide a picture of a world of dichotomies based on religious divides.

In this article I intend to provide insights into how, in the middle of the nineteenth century, suffering and pain of others did stimulate a reaction in a non-Western context. The Ottoman aid for the victims of the Great Irish Famine of 1845–1852 provides an interesting case to start a fresh discussion about the place of humanitarian values and action in parts of the world other than the West. Although relatively undocumented, three cases, the financial support of the Ottoman sultan Abdulmecid to the *British Association for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland and Scotland*, the alleged sending of three cargo ships to the Irish port town Drogheda, and the collection of

- 4 Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, Jihad Humanitaire Enquête sur les ONG Islamiques, Paris 2002.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 311–318.
- 6 Jonathan Benthall/Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, The Charitable Crescent. Politics of Aid in the Muslim World, London 2003, pp. 3, p. 29–69; Ghandour, Jihad Humanitaire, pp. 176–177.
- 7 Barnett, Empire of Humanity, p. 82; Benthall/Bellion-Jourdan, The Charitable Crescent, pp. 45–68. The example of *Red Crescent* as the beginning of Muslim humanitarianism demonstrates this fact very well. Attempts at founding a society which would apply values of the Geneva conventions and help soldiers fighting at the front failed in 1868, when the Ottoman administration claimed that civilians should not intervene in military affairs. More than 40 of the 66 founders of the *Society of Aid for the Wounded Ottoman Soldiers (Mecruhin-i Asakir-i Osmaniyye'ye Muavenet Cemiyeti*), that later transformed into *The Red Crescent Society (Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti*), were either foreigners or non-Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Osmanlı Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti, Osmanlı Hilal-ı Ahmer Cemiyeti Salnamesi 1329–1331, Istanbul 1913, pp. 20–29.
- A variety of sources are used for this article. Due to the transnational character of the humanitarian action, the sources are located in different parts of Europe, and bring together important problems. Although within the post-*Tanzimat* reorganization of center-periphery and inter-imperial relations through the establishment of a large administrative and diplomatic network in and out of Ottoman territories, there was a considerable increase in the production of official documents. The documents related to the sultan's act can only be found either in files related to the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs or in documents related to the private spending of the sultan. This shows that the Ottoman administration perceived the aid as a private act that concerned only inter-imperial relations. It is true for the archival sources from

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donations by the Lazarist *Societé de Saint Vincent de Paul in Constantinople* (SSVP),⁹ demonstrate that concepts and categories by which we frame past humanitarianisms should be reconsidered. In addition to stretching the perspective geographically, I would like to reconstruct humanitarianism in its relationship to the emergence of public opinion. Even in a polity like that of the Ottoman Empire, where critical public opinion was feared and attempts were constantly made to control public opinion, the reactions to famine aid to Ireland and Northern Europe in certain parts of the empire forced the Ottoman elite to take decisions contradicting their own ideology.

Just for the Sake of »Feelings of Humanity and of Sincere Friendship«? Ottoman State's Reaction to the Irish Famine

In August 1845, a previously unknown type of potato blight hit the harvest of the year in northern parts of Europe. In northern Europe the potato blight coincided with a larger crisis of agricultural production and failures in grain harvests in the following years. However, its consequences were harsher in Ireland, creating a famine that would last for more than five years and leading to the loss of more than a million lives, as well as emigration of around two million people, mostly to the United States. ¹⁰ As potato constituted 20 percent of the whole agricultural production in Ireland and was the main subsistence crop for the Irish peasantry in the early nineteenth century, combined with dynamics of the capitalist market system, the blight caused one of the largest subsistence crises in modern European history. The effects of famine reached a peak in 1847, creating an international mobilization of sympathy and aid for the victims of the famine. At the same time, the *British Association for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland and Scotland* was founded in order to coordinate national and international relief efforts. ¹¹

- the National Archives in London, too. Contributing to a »fantasy of empire,« the predominant discourse found in these documents ignored the complicated power relations behind the stories they told. This article in some way aims to go beyond the image of empire created on paper during the first half of the nineteenth century and to deconstruct the imperial image based on singular, complete, and universal knowledge that would be the basis of the »fantasy of empire.« For the latter concept, see Thomas Richards, The Imperial Archive. Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire, London 1993, pp. 5–7.
- 9 Unfortunately, due to a lack of documentation on the subject, the case will be discussed only briefly. Although the documents related to the SSVP in Constantinople can be found in various archives in Paris (in the *Archives Diplomatiques* and in the *Council Generale de SSVP*), no detailed account on the collection of the donation how it was collected and who the donors were could be located. I have to express my gratitude to Dr. Efi Kanner of the University of Athens, and Anne Wintenberger of the *Confederation Internationalé de la Societé de Saint Vincent de Paul* for their valuable help.
- 10 Christine Kinealy, The Great Irish Famine. Impact, Ideology and Rebellion, New York 2002, pp. 20–22. The decade was labeled as "he Hungry Forties" in Europe. For a comparative analysis of famine in Europe, see Cormac Ó Gráda/Eric Vanhaute/Richard Paping, The European Subsistence Crisis of 1845–1850. A Comparative Perspective, University College Dublin, School of Economics, Working Paper, 2006–10.
- 11 According to a decision taken by the association, one sixth of the donations were to be sent to Scotland. Christine Kinealy, Potatoes, Providence and Philanthropy. The Role of Private Charity during the Irish Famine, in: Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), The Meaning of Famine, London 1997, pp. 140–172. According to Cormac Ó Grada, the Great Famine of 1845–1852 is as important for modern history of Ireland as the French Revolution for France and the Industrial Revolution for England. Cormac Ó Grada, Ireland. A New Economic History 1780–1939, Oxford 1994, p. 78. Despite the still visible structural effects of, and the social memory around the Great Famine, its place in Irish historiography has developed only recently. For overviews of the »underdeveloped« historiography of famine in Ireland, see Graham Davis,

Meanwhile, at the other end of Europe, the Ottoman Empire was experiencing the results of a rapid socio-political and economic change. Trying to adapt to the century-long changes in production, exchange and consumption, as well as to the changes in the international state system which started in the eighteenth century, the Ottoman state had to align its economic, legal and administrative structures accordingly. The rise of a new class of bureaucrats that challenged the Ottoman sultan's authority since the first half of the eighteenth century manifested itself in extensive reforms at the turn of the following century.¹² From the 1820s onwards, the Ottoman state attempted to control the emergent public sphere which was composed of a positivist elite educated in the imperial academies established at the end of the previous century, and of non-Muslim citizens of the empire, who had access to modern technologies of communication earlier than their Muslim neighbors. These attempts included further opening up of public schools and academies, the establishment of an official Turkish-language newspaper and the permission for a semi-private paper later on, as well as the establishment of a spy network all around the capital city and the empire.¹³ Such measures did not prove successful in keeping the empire united. Therefore, in 1839 the Tanzimat edict was issued to announce and guarantee equality to all Ottoman citizens regardless of ethno-religious origins. Furthermore, the edict included a plan for the establishment of more liberal economic structures and a more just legal system. 14 Therefore, Tanzimat marked the emergence of a new imperial ideology and a new public sphere, where previous understandings of empire and identity were negotiated and challenged.

- The Historiography of the Irish Famine, in: O'Sullivan, The Meaning of Famine, pp. 15–39; Kinealy, The Great Irish Famine, pp. 1–31.
- 12 Baki Tezcan, Second Ottoman Empire, New York 2010; Fatma Müge Göçek, Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire. Ottoman Westernization and Social Change, New York 1996.
- The official newspaper Takvim-i Vekayi was established in 1831 and targeted a wider circle of readers than the traditional literati. It had the aim of making the activities and the image of the sultan public. Simplifying and clarifying the language, the newspaper also aimed at educating and controlling the Ottoman public. Apart from Ottoman Turkish, it was published in Armenian, Greek, Arabic, Persian and French. In 1840, Ceride-i Havadis was published as the first »private« Turkish-language newspaper in the Ottoman territories. Even though it was a private enterprise, the financial support and expertise provided by the state made it a semi-official newspaper; furthermore, it was expected to publish articles in favour of the interests of the Ottoman state. Both newspapers were sent to all local administrations. Serif Mardin, Some Notes on an Early Phase of Modernization of Communications in Turkey, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 3 (1961) 3, p. 266. According to a letter written by the owner of Ceride-i Havadis, William Churchill, the number of individual submissions to the paper in Istanbul did not exceed 250 in 1845. See, »Copy of a letter from M. Churchill to sir Stratford Canning, September 1845«, The National Archives (TNA), FO 198/78, fol. 69. Although the number of the submissions was low, the dissemination of knowledge in the Ottoman capital and in the empire was based more on informal networks. According to Cengiz Kırlı, coffeehouses played an important role for the emergence of a public opinion in Ottoman Constantinople, as they were the primary place where news, information and opinion were exchanged. Cengiz Kırlı, Coffeehouses. Public Opinion in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire, in: Armando Salvatore/Dale F. Eickelman (eds.), Public Islam and the Common Good, Leiden, 2006, pp. 75–98, here pp. 75–77. For controls through spying, see Kırlı, Surveillance and Constituting the Public in the Ottoman Empire, in: Seteney Shami (ed.), Publics, Politics and Participation. Locating the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa, New York 2009, pp. 177-205.
- 14 For a general analysis of the *Tanzimat* reforms, see Donald Quataert, The Age of Reforms 1812–1914, in: Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (eds.), An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire vol. 2, Cambridge 1994, pp. 759–935. For reforms in education and the relationship between Ottoman citizen-making in the *Tanzimat* period, see Emine Önhan Evered, Empire and Education under the Ottomans. Politics, Reform and Resistance from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks, London 2012, pp. 1–9.

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Two societies that were geographically and culturally distant became aware of each other as a result of Ottoman sultan's aid of £1000 to the *British Association* in the first week of April 1847. Newspapers published in England and Ireland celebrated the »generous« contribution of the sultan, and the story was taken further as it was claimed that the sultan actually wanted to donate £10.000 for the relief of the hunger. However, the agents of British consulate in Istanbul begged him to lower the amount since even Queen Victoria herself contributed only £2000. Furthermore, they claimed that the Ottoman sultan proposed to send ships full of food to Ireland, which was further rejected by the queen. 15

However, the Ottoman public was already informed about the famine in Ireland long before the Sultan's act. The hunger, suffering and pain of Irish society were brought to the attention of Ottoman society through newspaper articles. Since autumn 1845, both the official weekly newspaper Takvim-i Vekayi and the semi-private Ceride-i Havadis provided information regarding the Irish famine each week. The sufferings of the Irish poor were expressed in detail, accompanied by informations on the climatic conditions, the attitude of the British government, and the political consequences of famine. The immigration schemes to the United States and stories of sinking ships became topics that occupied important space in the newspapers. That the Irish were »deprived of their means of making a living,« or that they were »starving without access to the basic nutrients,« or simply that they "die due to hunger" (açlıktan telef oldukları) was expressed repeatedly in both newspapers. Especially Ceride gave detailed accounts on the problems created by malnutrition and reported excessive death cases. Although both newspapers did not give up the diplomatic language they used, as the effects of the famine intensified, they started to explain how it had reached an unbearable level which was impossible to express with words (kaht u gala tarif olunmayacak derceye resa oduğundan). It was often expressed in the newspapers that, despite efforts from the British government, the large number of the starving population needed outside support. 16

Compared to *Ceride*, the official newspaper *Takvim-i Vekayi* was silent until 1847, which was the year the effects of famine reached to a level where international sensitivity was in its highest. Unlike *Ceride*'s interest in the general condition of the victims of famine, *Takvim* was more interested in how the British government and international society responded to the calamity. One of the first articles on the famine was written about the establishment of the *British Association for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland and Scotland*, followed by the amounts of donations made by Queen Victoria, members of the royal family, various administrators, and British nobility to the Association.¹⁷

The editors of both newspapers did not use the concept humanitarianism. Nevertheless, the discourse taken up in the articles about famine demonstrates a humanitarian sensitivity towards

- Rev. Henry Christmas, The Sultan of Turkey, Abdul Medjid Khan. A Brief Memoir of his Life and Reign with Notices of The Country, Its Army, Navy & Present Prospects, London 1854, pp. 20–21; Alice Ismene O'Neill Daunt (ed.), A Life Spent for Ireland. Being Selections from the Journals of the Late W. J. O'Neill Daunt, London 1896, p. 98; Christine Kinealy, Private Charity to Ireland during the Great Hunger. The Kindness of Strangers, London 2013, p. 115.
- 16 Iztırab, which implies both physical and spiritual pain, and müzayaka, expressing economic deprivation, were the most common words used to express the suffering of the Irish. For examples of how misery of the Irish society was expressed, see Ceride-i Havadis, no. 316, 01.02.1263/19.01.1847, p.1; no. 317, 07.02.1263/25.01.1847 p. 2; no. 321, 04.03.1263/20.02.1847, p. 2 and following issues; Takvim-i Vekayi, no. 317, 28.01.1263/16.01.1847, p. 4; no. 321, 27.02.1263/14.02.1847, p. 4 and following issues. For emigration schemes, see Ceride-i Havadis, no. 335, 15.061263/31.05.1847, p. 3; no. 343, 13.08.1263/27.07.1847, p. 3 and others; Takvim-i Vekayi, no. 323, 11.03.1263/27.02.1847, p. 3; no. 328, 15.04.1263/02.04.1847 p. 4; no. 329, 22.04.1263/09.04.1847 p. 3.
- 17 Takvim-i Vekayi, no. 317, p. 4; no. 320, 20.02.1263/07.02.1847, p.4; no. 323, p. 4 and others.

the famine-stricken societies of Ireland and Northern Europe. Therefore, not only the sultan himself, but also the Ottoman public was aware of what was happening in Ireland. On the other hand, these articles were not a mere reflection of the editors' interest. They were written in accordance with the imperial ideology of the period. The idea of being part of a European state system not only necessitated more focus on the politics of European powers but also increased the interest in social and economic aspects of European societies. Especially in a context where European powers were interested in humanitarian issues in the Ottoman territories, ¹⁸ Ottoman administrators' interest in the suffering of European societies should not be surprising. Although the intellectual history of the development of humanitarian ideas in the Ottoman Empire is beyond the scope of this analysis, it can be claimed that Ottoman ideas about humanitarian values and practices were developed more or less simultaneously with European ones. Therefore, the Ottoman reaction to a humanitarian crisis was not »copied« from the »West«, but had already been developed in contact with Western traditions of humanitarian support, together with local traditions of charity and philanthropy. The following quotation from a letter sent to British and French embassies by the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs in July 1845 demonstrates that the idea of humanitarianism in its abstract form existed prior to the famine:¹⁹

»[W]e acknowledge that it is among the most necessary humanitarian values to help ease the misery and absolute scarcity in a [foreign] country, where basic needs cannot be met [...].«

The reference to an abstract notion of »humanitarian values« (*muavenet-i lazime-i insaniyet*) in a diplomatic text clarifies that the Ottoman understanding of humanitarian relief at that time went beyond short-term and practical needs of diplomacy.²⁰

In this context, the amount of £1000 sent by the Ottoman sultan for the Irish poor²¹ seems to be motivated by the humanitarian ideas already established in the imperial ideology, together with a diplomatic interest in being part of an international/inter-imperial order. The Ottoman administration defined the act as the »will of the compassionate sultan« that was the »world leader« (cihanın müsellimi), at the same time emphasizing the friendly nature of the relations with Britain.²² Therefore, although the choice of sending aid to the Irish was a private act of the Ottoman sultan, the claim of leading the whole humanity assigned to him the responsibility of »protecting« those who were in pain. His donation thus became a public act. This is why on April 4, 1847, the *Ceride* felt the need to let its readers know about the »generous« act of the sultan.²³

- 18 The interests of European powers were concentrated on the issue of slave trade in Ottoman territories and on the suffering of non-Muslims under the »suppressive« Ottoman government. Davide Rodogno, Against Massacre. Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914, Princeton 2011; Ehud R. Toledano, The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression, Princeton 1982.
- 19 »Prohibition of Export of Grain from Anatolia, 26.07.1261/31.07.1845, «TNA, FO. 198/78, fol. 49.
- 20 A similar discourse can be found in another letter sent to the French embassy in March 1847, where selling cereals for a minimum price was considered as the command of humanity (*l'humanité commande que*). "Traduction d'un mémorandum de la Porte, March 1847,« Archives Diplomatiques de France, Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale Constantinople, tome 91, fol. 393.
- 21 The terms "Irish poor" (*irlanda fukaras*ı) and more generic terms to refer to the victims of famine are interchangeably used in the newspaper articles and in official documents related to the Irish famine.
- 22 [No title], 14.05.1263/20.03.1847, Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (PMO), I.HR. 39/1847.
- 23 Ceride-i Havadis, no. 327, 10.05.1263/28.03.1847, p. 1.

Similarly, on the other side of the humanitarian relationship, Henry Wellesley²⁴ thought that the act of the sultan was a spontaneous demonstration of friendship and, more importantly,

»it shows that the hatred towards the whole christian race which once darkened every mussulman heart is fast passing away, and that christian suffering can awaken sympathy among those who not very long back would have heard of them without pity, or concern.«²⁵

While for Wellesley, the sultan's act was a »great progress in civilization,«²⁶ the foreign secretary of the United Kingdom, Viscount Palmerston, emphasized the diplomatic aspect of the aid as a sign of strengthening the connection between United Kingdom and Ottoman Empire, a connection which went beyond a purely political and commercial character but stood on a permanent basis of »mutual good will and of friendly offices.«²⁷

The public nature made the humanitarian relationship longer than the act of giving itself. The »responsibility« of the sultan to take care of »subjects« who did not live under his sovereignty continued until the 1850s. It is reported that in May 1849, in a totally unrelated meeting with British agents in Constantinople, the sultan expressed that he wished constant prosperity to the British Empire by sending the £1000, an act which was only based on »feelings of humanity and of sincere friendship.«²⁸ In another meeting, the sultan expressed his happiness and enthusiasm upon hearing about the visit of Queen Victoria to Ireland, which he hoped would bring nothing but prosperity to the whole empire but especially to the Irish population.²⁹

Humanitarian action in the case of the Ottoman sultan had multiple functions. It provided an individual satisfaction on the basis of humanitarian values, together with a public legitimacy on the international level.³⁰ On the one hand, the humanitarian act strengthened the idea of being part of the same human civilization, on the other, it aimed at recreating international, inter-imperial hierarchies again and again.³¹ In other words, although the »generous« act of the sultan might have made him more a member of the human race, at the same time it aimed at making the Ottoman Empire stronger in the realm of international relations that were continuously reestablished in accordance with, and against, the foreign policies of other empires. Therefore, although the predominant narratives in accounts in our reach suggest that it was the result

- 24 Henry Richard Charles Wellesley, the First Earl Cowley, was resident in the British embassy in Constantinople during the 1840s for various diplomatic appointments. Geoff R. Berridge, British Diplomacy in Turkey. 1538 to the Present. A Study in the Evolution of the Resident Embassy, Leiden 2009, pp. 19–20.
- 25 »Letter from Constantinople, 31.03.1847, «TNA, FO. 519/142, no. 357.
- 26 »Letter to the Viscount Palmerston, 03.04.1847, «TNA, FO. 519/141.
- 27 »Letter to Mr. Wellesley (Lord Cowley), 27.04.1847, «TNA, FO. 78/674, fol. 123.
- 28 »Letter to Foreign Office, 26.05.1849, «TNA, FO 196/31, fol. 49. The sultan used similar expressions in his response to the letter of gratitude of the *British Association for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland and Scotland*. Compare with Kinealy, Charity and the Great Hunger, p. 117.
- 29 »Letter to Foreign Office, 04.04.1849,« TNA, FO 78/809, no. 262.
- 30 It was not only the British administration who appreciated the effort of Abdulmecid and therefore the Ottoman state. The positive reaction to the donation was celebrated in Irish, British, Indian and Australian newspapers. Kinealy, Charity and the Great Hunger, pp. 115–119.
- 31 Naomi J. Andrews, The Universal Alliance of All Peoples. Romantic Socialists, the Human Family, and the Defense of the Empire during the July Monarchy, 1830–1848, in: French Historical Studies 34 (2011) 3, pp. 473–502, here pp. 474–475.

of the charitable character of the sultan himself, his act was in line with the imperial ideology of the period.³²

Written sources are silent about the myth around the Ottoman sultan proposing to donate £10.000 to the Association, but even more so about the story of the three ships sent to the port of an Irish town, Drogheda. Although our knowledge about the possibility of such an aid is highly limited at the moment, 33 tracing the bits of information might give interesting insights into the different nature of the humanitarian relationship for which historians did not pay enough attention. As Thomas L. Haskell argued in 1985, the history of humanitarianism has been written from a perspective that gives emotions the main agency, together with diplomatic or religious motives. What he said back then is valid for today's historians too. Without totally neglecting the role of emotions, Haskell argues that the feelings of sympathy would not have emerged when they did, or indeed taken the form they did, or produced the same results as they did, unless certain structural developments had taken place that triggered the shift in perception and meaning.³⁴ Therefore, it is important to take note of the changes in inter-imperial relations during the first half of the nineteenth century. Similarly, changes in market relations as a global market emerged played an important role in the globalization of pain and reactions to it. The concept of a responsibility to feed populations in one sovereign territory was replaced by notions of trade relations on a global market. The problems created by free trade policies of the nineteenth century – as in the case of the Irish famine, where the British government did not stop the exportation of grain from the country for the sake of free trade, while the Irish people were starving to death³⁵ - were supposed to be solved with humanitarian action.

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Let us go back to the newspapers again. Apart from expressing pain and suffering, and celebrating the contribution of the sultan and of others to the Association, a different set of articles heralded yet another »positive« achievement. As an article from the *Takvim* reads,

»[A]s by the will of god, in many parts of Europe, and especially in the territories of England and France there has been heavy drought and famine, and thanks to god, as the harvests of the lands of our country proved to be of great abundance, considerable amount of grain from each port of the empire has been exported [to Europe] and the farmers of the empire have earned millions of akce; therefore [the famine] has been of great profit and benefaction [...].³⁶«

The changing trade relations due to the emergence of different production patterns since the seventeenth century – from subsistence agriculture to a commercial one – and their institutionalization through free trade created a dynamic of commercialization of even suffering and misery, as

- 32 Contemporary accounts refer to Abdulmecid as a »generous« and »charitable« person. See Christmas, The Sultan of Turkey, 1854, pp. 18–38; Charles MacFarlane, Turkey and its Destiny The Results of Journeys Made in 1847 and 1848 to Examine into the State of that Country Vol. II, London 1850, p. 300.
- 33 Brendan Matthews, a local historian from Drogheda, has written a book on the subject. Unfortunately, the book was not published prior to the completion of this article. Brendan Matthews, Drogheda & The Ottoman Ships of 1847. Unravelling the Tale of the Social Conditions in Drogheda during the Great Famine Year of 1847 and the Supposed Food-aid Delivered to the Port of that Town by the Ottoman Empire, forthcoming.
- 34 Thomas L. Haskell, Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility. Part 1, in: The American Historical Review 90 (1985) 2, pp. 339–361, here p. 343.
- 35 See Kinealy, The Great Irish Famine, pp. 102–116; Cormac Ó Grada, Ireland Before and After the Famine. Explorations in Economic History, 1800–1925, Manchester 1988, p. 57.
- 36 Takvim-i Vekayi, no. 325, 25.03.1263/13.03.1847, p. 2.

we can read from the quotation above. Therefore, the growth in the volume of Ottoman foreign trade increased rapidly after the 1840s due to further incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the capitalist world-economy, ³⁷ while discourses of sympathy for others provided the Ottoman state with legitimacy for the export of provisions.³⁸

As Brendan Matthews has suggested, the only evidence to the existence of three ships bringing corn or grain to the dock of Drogheda during the famine are articles published in *Drogheda Argus* and *Drogheda Conservative* in the second week of May 1847, where the loading of the cargoes of three foreign ships, two coming from Thessalonica and one from the docks of Stettin, was mentioned.³⁹ A list from early April 1847 that can be found in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives confirms that two merchant ships loaded with foodstuff were sent to Ireland. As the list was issued just before Ottoman authorities banned exports from ports of Thessalonica for the following four months, it is most likely that the ships in the list were those mentioned in the Irish newspapers.

However, a report attached to the list makes one discussion redundant, the question whether the myth of the Ottoman sultan sending the ships to Drogheda to ease the pain of the victims is true or not. The report reads in a similar vein to the article in *Takvim* as follows:

»[D]ue to the scarcity prevailing in Europe, and the abundance in the harvests of territories under the protection of your highness, large amounts of grain have been exported from the docks of Thessalonica [...] resulting in great profit, which demonstrates the level of prosperity of countries under your sovereignty [...].⁴⁰«

The discourse of »humanitarianism« that prevails in some of the articles referenced before and in the documents from both the Ottoman and British side does not exist in the reports related to the »profits« made out of a humanitarian crisis, in which more than a million people died and even more had to leave their homeland. Humanitarianism in the minds and hands of the Ottoman administrators was an instrument for increasing profits, both economically and politically.

- 37 Growth rates of Ottoman foreign trade during the period 1840–1873 exceeded the growth rates of world trade. Şevket Pamuk, The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913, Cambridge 1987, pp. 29–30.
- At the turn of the nineteenth century, export of grain with a minimum price to famine-stricken Britain was ordered, mentioning that Britain was a »friend« of the Ottoman Empire. However, it was not applied in order to protect the Ottoman producers and consumers, since there was an ongoing famine in Ottoman territories as well. See [No title], 21.12.1215/05.05.1801, PMO. C.HR. 541. [No title], 24.10.1210/02.05.1796, PMO. C.BLD. 841 provides a similar example from 1796. In both of the cases, although humanitarian reasoning was visible, profiting from trade was not a priority contrary to the cases examined in this paper. For the famines in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, see Richard Raping/Eric VanHaute/Cormac Ó Grada (eds.), When Potato Failed. Causes and Effects of the Last European Subsistence Crisis, 1845–1850, Turnhout 2007.
- 39 For Matthews' comments, see Ottoman Ships on the Boyne New Evidence for the Myth, http://www.independent.ie/regionals/droghedaindependent/news/ottoman-ships-on-the-boyne-27166980.html (last accessed 28.04.2014).
- 40 [No title], 18.03.1263/06.03.1847, PMO. I.DH. 139/7162.

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Many accounts consider the Irish famine as the first »natural disaster« to have created international sympathy on such a grand scale, reaching beyond the borders of the British Empire. Aid from different parts of the world included five continents and help from all ranks of society. The Ottoman sultan was not the only leader to donate money for the relief of the Irish society. The British royal family, Pope Pious and the Vice President of the United States, George Dallas, are the best-known examples among political figures of the period. Their contribution to the relief of the Irish famine is attributed importance not only due to their humanitarian nature but also for the »encouragement« they gave to the others involved. Christine Kinealy explains that the support of leaders created an »example« for those who followed them in their non-political humanitarian ventures. 41 Although it can be argued that because of their easier access to means of communication and logistics, political leaders and elites had a more advantageous position in comparison to common men and women, networks of merchants, students and professionals worked as effective as official communication networks for commoners. If we consider that contributions came from a wide range of social groups to the British Association for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland and Scotland, from Native Americans in America and Canada, the Choctaw people of Oklahoma, or the laborers from British West Indies, the importance of such networks becomes more visible. Cutting across cultural, religious and national borders, these networks provided necessary motivation and know-how for different publics from all around the world. 42 One such example is the case of the Societé de Saint Vincent de Paul 43 of Constantinople that collected more than £730 to be donated to the British Association for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland and Scotland from the inhabitants of Constantinople in a period of five months. 44

On the week of 14 March 1847, the readers of *Ceride-i Havadis* came across with a rather unusual and long announcement in the pages of the newspaper:

»[The members of the Societé de Saint Vincent de Paul] have received the news about the suffering of the population of Ireland due to the famine with great sorrow. Although their sovereign state tried to ease the pain, it is a fact that such a large population cannot be assisted in the long run. We acknowledge that supporting other members of humanity — which we all are part of — means supporting ourselves and at the same time it is obeying the human nature and humanitarian law [...].«

Having stressed the importance of supporting »other« members of humanity, the *Societé* announced that they were looking for citizens of the empire who feel the same grief as they did (*ahali-i merkume ahvalinden müteessir olan zatlar bulunur ise*), and who might want to contribute by

- 41 Kinealy, Potatoes, Providence and Philanthropy, pp. 150–151.
- 42 An important part of Thomas Haskell's argument is that the emergence of humanitarian values and practices during the eighteenth century was due to the dissemination of the know-how or »recipes« of easing the pain of others. See Haskell, Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, pp. 359–361.
- 43 See Albert Foucault, La Societé de Saint-Vincent de Paul Histoire de Cent Ans, Paris 1933, pp. 119–120 for an account on the views of the general council of the *Societé* on the Irish Famine.
- 44 £570 were sent on May 7 1847. See »Letter to Mr. Wellesley (Lord Cowley), 07.05.1847, «TNA, FO. 78/674. Another £50.11 were received in London on June 14 1847, while a sum of £113.19.2 was sent on August 3 1847. »Letter to Mr. Wellesley (Lord Cowley), 03.08.1847, «TNA, FO. 78/675, no. 457.

donating money to ease the pain of the Irish and for further progress in industry and education of that country. 45

Support provided by the members of the Ottoman society, to whom the questions where Ireland is and who the Irish are (*irlandız* is the word used in the text) were probably a mystery, had surely and primarily to do with different levels of politics and identity formation of their own home country. The *Societé* promoted their campaign as different from that of the British citizens living in Istanbul and those of the other countries (*bilad-ı baide ve ecnebiyeden müretteb olan ianeye ilave olarak*). It therefore emphasized not only the importance of being distinct as citizens of the Ottoman Empire (*devlet-i aliyye tebaası*) but also of being a member of the larger human race as "the sons of Adam" (*beni' adem*).

This kind of political motivation for humanitarian support at an everyday level was foreign to the British consulate members through whom the material and psychological support was sent and transmitted. Thus, Henry Wellesley needed to emphasize his enthusiasm and surprise due to the support of »the names of persons varying in nation, languages and religion [...],« which was, in comparison to the donation of British citizens living in Constantinople, »unnatural.« 46

Although further studies are needed, the example of the *Societé* demonstrates that by confining the history of humanitarianism on concepts of »Christian« nature of humanitarianism or the »Islamic« mode of humanitarianism, which applies to categories of »East« and »West,« historians miss the complexity of how inter-religious networks of cooperation worked and how politics of imperial identity formation played a role in humanitarian practices. Within this context, the Ottoman sultan's donation might serve as an example of »Islamic« humanitarianism; the case of the *Societé* provides insights into how such cultural/religious categories cannot be applied easily to early nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. ⁴⁷

Following Jean Quataert, it can be stated that acts and ritual processes of voluntary philanthropy did not come solely from above, but were rather mediated »in between« in the specific institutional and associational milieu of each public, contributing to the evolution of a patriotic civil network, especially in the nineteenth century. Humanitarianism in mid-nineteenth century Ottoman context was both a reason for, and a consequence of, the identity formation processes and emergence of different publics since the previous century. Since the collection of donations was advertised almost a month prior to the sultan's donation, 49 the *Societé* can be said to have created a network which negotiated values of being part of one human(itarian) community and imperial identity at the same time. Newspaper articles and the announcement in *Ceride* by the *Societé* have aroused empathy toward the Irish poor and contributed to a sense of solidarity among the citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore labeling the humanitarian act of the *Societé* as a Christian act, since it was a Catholic institution, or as a Muslim act, since the dynastic culture of the empire in which the donors lived was based on Islam, proves historically problematic.

- 45 Ceride-i Havadis, no. 324, 26.03.1263/14.03.1847, p. 2.
- 46 »Letter from Constantinople, 31.03.1847, «TNA, FO. 519/142, no. 357.
- 47 A similar perspective is expressed in Kinealy, Charity and the Great Hunger, p. 196.
- 48 Jean H. Quataert, Staging Philanthropy. Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813–1916, Ann Arbor 2001, pp. 5–6.
- 49 Around the time the sultan donated £1000, the donations collected by the *Societé* reached almost £400. See Ceride-i Havadis, no. 326, 10.04.1263/28 March 1847, p. 2.
- 50 For the role of newspapers in contributing to a feeling of empathy between members of »imagined communities« by creating a coeval and homogenous time and therefore an imaginary space, see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London 2006, pp. 31–35.

On February 9, 1847, more than a thousand people took to the streets and marched towards the granaries of the city in urban Thessalonica. Most of those gathered were Jewish, and a considerable amount of »Gypsies« were reported to be there.⁵¹ They demanded wheat and threatened to break down the doors of the granaries, if they were not provided with the amount of wheat they asked for. Before they were dispersed by the artillerymen sent there by the local governor of the city, they plundered the granaries and some shops, gathering large amounts of grain in their hands. The local governor of Thessalonica interpreted the riots as the attempt of the Jewish merchants to increase the price of wheat and flour for their own profit. However, later on the same day, Turkish women took to the streets, threatening to plunder the flour market where, due to the threat of riots, all the shops were closed. While the riots went on for four days in the city, they spread into the vicinity – such as Ustrumca and Yenice – where those in the streets shouted that »no grain should leave the town!«⁵²

It is not a coincidence that the riots in question took place in Thessalonica and its environs from where large amounts of grain and foodstuff were exported to famine-stricken Europe. The rioters were organized against the export of grain from their towns, since the prices were getting higher and it was not easy to find flour in the market any longer. This was not only due to the large amount of exports from the nearby docks, but was directly related to a reality that we have not touched upon so far in this paper.

As criticized in the introduction, humanitarianism and humanitarian practices are generally analyzed as acts taking place at international/inter-imperial levels. Most of the time, this causes a neglect of the local socio-political and economic conditions of the donor society at the moment of the humanitarian action. What has been totally ignored, not only by modern historians but also by the Ottoman sultan, media, and elites, is the famine which had already been going on in the Ottoman territories for two years by 1847.⁵³ Due to the dry summer and autumn in 1845, the grain harvest failed mostly in central and western Anatolia. Consequently, by the middle of the next year the casualties from hunger reached tens of thousands as the price of bread almost tripled and sickness from malnutrition was growing more and more common. Although prices decreased at the end of 1846, they were still double the normal price. In the meantime, Ottoman administrators carefully ignored the famine until they were warned by the British consul in Bursa about the graveness of the situation in Anatolia, where thousands had already perished, and many more died on their way to feed themselves.⁵⁴

What I am suggesting is that the humanitarian nature of aid to ease the pain of others does not necessarily demonstrate the »generosity« or humanitarian character of the donors. Therefore,

- 51 The categories of Jew and Gypsy were part of Ottoman classification of ethno-religious identities in the empire and were particularly pronounced in the diplomatic correspondence between Charles Blunt the British consul to Thessalonica and the British Foreign Office. For Ottoman administrative categories of ethno-religious identities, with a particular focus on the »Gypsies«, see Eyal Ginio, Neither Muslims nor Zimmis. The Gypsies in the Ottoman State, in: Romani Studies 14, 2, pp. 117–144.
- 52 »Diplomatic Correspondence from Salonica, 10.02.1847, «TNA, FO. 195/293, no. 9; »Diplomatic Correspondence from Salonica, 17.02.1847, «TNA, FO 195/293, no. 10; [No title], 25.02.1263/12.02.1847, PMO, A.MKT. 66–68.
- 53 For a brief analysis of the famine of 1845 in the Ottoman territories, see Mehmet Yavuz Erler, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kuraklık ve Kıtlık Olayları (1800–1880), Istanbul 2010.
- 54 [No title], 23.02.1262/20.02.1846, PMO, I.MVL. 78-1519.

while conducting research on the nineteenth century, together with focusing on the humanitarian practice itself and the feelings of pity, compassion and sympathy to others, we should take the public aspect of humanitarianism into account – public opinion at its core. It is no coincidence that so many newspaper articles are quoted in this paper, as the dissemination of humanitarian ideas and practices corresponds to the dissemination of mass media. ⁵⁵ The emergence of public opinions throughout different parts of the world, around imperial, national, regional and local identities, together with the construction of ethno-religious or class identities, was one of the most crucial moments for the history of humanitarianism. The success or legitimacy of the humanitarian practice is therefore based on the extent that different public opinions had been convinced.

The riots in Thessalonica serve as an interesting example as to what could happen if the public opinion was not convinced of the humanitarian nature of the action. Regardless of what historians of the past and present would say about the sending of three ships to Ireland, for the rioters in Thessalonica, Ustrumca, or Yenice, what happened there had nothing to do with humanitarian reason. As the petition submitted by the chief-rabbi of the Jewish community of Thessalonica four days before the riots started suggests, the large population of Jews had suffered from the high wheat prices. It also shows people's worries that they could potentially suffer even worse from hunger if the merchants kept exporting the wheat the way they were doing.⁵⁶ As they were ignored by Ottoman authorities, they resorted to violence and riots in which about 20 people died fighting with the artilleries.⁵⁷

After four days of rioting, the Ottoman administrators decided to negotiate. A series of meetings with Ottoman and European merchants led to the decision that exports from the docks around Thessalonica would be prohibited until the prices returned to a normal level, and the new harvest was done.⁵⁸

While the Ottoman sultan »enjoyed« more legitimacy on the inter-imperial level and while the inhabitants of Istanbul negotiated the new *Tanzimat* ideology and Ottoman identity through their contribution to easing hunger in Ireland, peasants of Thessalonica challenged the new political economy created by the same mechanisms of ideology and legitimacy. Totally ignored by authorities in the midst of a famine, the moral economy⁵⁹ and the subsistence ethic of the peasants⁶⁰ from different ethno-religious origins in Thessalonica were in conflict with the Ottoman humanitarianism blended with the interests of an emerging capitalist free trade economy.

- 55 James Vernon, Hunger. A Modern History, Cambridge 2007, pp. 17–30; Thomas W. Laqueur, Bodies, Details and the Humanitarian Narrative, in: Lynn Hunt (ed.), The New Cultural History, Berkeley 1989, pp. 176–204. For a more general discussion on the aspect of humanitarianism as an outcome of "observation" and display of suffering, see Luc Boltanski, Distant Suffering. Morality, Media and Politics, Cambridge 1999, pp. 5–6.
- 56 [No title], 18.02.1263/05.02.1847, PMO, A.MKT. 66-43.
- 57 For the political functions of petitioning and popular protest in the Ottoman Empire, see Eleni Gara/ Christoph K. Neumann/M. Erdem Kabadayı, Introduction. Ottoman Subjects as Political Actors. Historiographical Representations, in: idem. (eds.), Popular Protest and Political Participation in the Ottoman Empire. Studies in Honor of Suraiya Faroqhi, pp. 2–37; M. Erdem Kabadayı, Petitioning as Political Action. Petitioning Practices of Workers in Ottoman Factories, in: ibid., pp. 57–74; Eleni Gara, Popular Protest and the Limitations of Sultanic Justice, in: ibid., pp. 89–104.
- 58 [No title], 27.02.1263/14.02.1847, PMO, İ.MVL. 89–1820.
- 59 Edward P. Thompson, The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century, in: Past and Present 50, (Feb. 1971), pp. 76–136.
- 60 James C. Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia, London 1976.

Therefore, it is important to note that the story of Ottoman aid for the Irish famine is not only a story of sympathy toward the suffering of the Irish but also one of ignorance and blindness to the suffering of the Ottoman peasants. It has to be noted that one cannot grasp the historical picture in its entirety without taking into account the dialectic relationship between Ottoman attitudes to hunger in Ireland during the Great Famine and to hunger in the Ottoman Empire during the same period.

Conclusion: Our Historical Ties

In late March 2010, the president of Ireland, Mary McAleese, became the first-ever Irish president to visit Turkey. Her visit did not only represent a new beginning for the relations between the two countries at opposite corners of Europe but also popularized the long-forgotten story and myth we have told in the first part of this paper. According to her, the contacts between the two countries were not limited to recently developing tourism but had a long history. In her speech, she mentioned the strong ties that were established with the sending of three cargo ships full of provisions by the Ottoman sultan Abdulmecid to the port town Drogheda during the Great Famine of 1845-1852. She pointed to a common memory created around the symbol of crescent and star, which was chosen as the coat of arms of Drogheda to show gratitude to the Ottoman Empire.⁶¹ Following her visit, the increase in bilateral trade volume, the number of Irish companies with Irish capital in Turkey, direct investments to Turkey, and the number of Irish tourists coincided with the increase in articles and discussions about the story mentioned during her speech. Newspaper articles and semi-academic works celebrated the long tradition of »Turkish/Muslim generosity« that reached until today. The celebration of the generosity of the Ottoman ancestors of Turkish society did not stop with newspaper articles and internet blogs, but found its zenith in a film project which is already being advertised three years prior to its production.⁶²

The popularity of the myths around Ottoman help to the Irish famine in Turkey is not merely related to McAleese's speech. It is a result of the emergence of a new ground for political legitimacy not only in Turkey but also in the whole globalized world. We are living in an age of what Didier Fassin calls "humanitarian government" that developed in the last decades of the twentieth century. The humanitarian government is born into a new moral economy, whereby a humanitarian language redefined and legitimized realities of our present: "Inequality is replaced by exclusion, domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering, violence is expressed in terms of trauma." To that end, and to conclude, I argue that history is "humanitarianized" in two senses: first, by attributing pure humanitarian value to past events, thus hiding power relations and conflicts behind them; and second, by making history itself a humanitarian aid, called for when needed in order to justify discourses and practices of the "humanitarian governments." A history of humanitarianism based on religious divides, and one that is confined to an inter-imperial, international level, aids today's governments by reproducing the thesis of a "clash"

- 61 Her comment on the crescent-star was later on contradicted by her own spokesperson Sheila Clark. See What Mary McAleese Actually Said in Turkey, http://www.independent.ie/regionals/droghedaindepen dent/news/what-mary-mcaleese-actually-said-in-turkey-27144268.html (last accessed 28.04. 2014); Irish President Sparks History Debate During Turkey Visit, http://todayszaman.com/news-205564-irish-president-sparks-history-debate-during-turkey-visit.html (last accessed 28.04.2014).
- 62 For the content of and technical details about the famine movie, see Ottoman Aid to the Irish Hit the Big Screen, http://www.todayszaman.com/news-269871-.html (last accessed 28.04.2014).
- 63 Didier Fassin, Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present, London 2012, pp. 6–8.

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of civilizations⁶⁴ and by helping them carefully ignore the »suffering of others« in territories under their sovereignty. The dialectic relationship mentioned above, between ideologies, religions, identities, and publics, is an important key in developing a better understanding of humanitarianism, both in our present and in the past.